

**Human and NonHuman in Anglo-Saxon and British  
Postwar Poetry:  
Reshaping Literary Ecology**

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The candidate confirms that work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given when reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the interaction between human and nonhuman from an ecologically oriented perspective. It reads Anglo-Saxon poetic texts, particularly the Anglo-Latin and Exeter Book riddles, the Old English elegies, and *Beowulf* alongside a selection of British postwar poetry. Reading these bodies of work in dialogue with one another reveals models of knowledge encoded by these poetic texts, which challenges how we think about human and nonhuman interaction, regarding both Anglo-Saxon culture and our culture today.

Beginning with an examination of technology in the thinking of Martin Heidegger and in Anglo-Saxon culture (ch. 1), I examine the process of writing, considering how poems engage with the materiality of the writing process and how interactions between human and nonhuman are explored both within poetic texts and through poetry itself, with reference to Anglo-Saxon riddles (ch. 2); the rhizomatic assemblages that constitute the ground both in riddles and in the work of Seamus Heaney, Basil Bunting, and Geoffrey Hill (ch. 3); *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Simon Armitage's translation, alongside Hill's *Mercian Hymns* (ch. 4); and the use of inscribed stones by Armitage, alongside the Exeter Book elegies (ch. 5). This thesis demonstrates that Anglo-Saxon poetry engages with environment more dynamically than has previously been suggested, creating its own series of literary ecologies. It also argues that the style and form of Anglo-Saxon poetry can influence the poetic construction of human and nonhuman interaction today.

Engaging with ecomaterialism, including ideas of Actor-Network Theory, object-oriented ontology, and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model, I interrogate the philosophies of Martin Heidegger, which have held a

problematic place in ecocritical thinking and discussion. The interactions within and between Old English and British postwar poetry can provide alternative models of human and nonhuman interaction which speak *with* rather than *for* nonhumans, opening insights into the place of poetry in a time of anthropogenic crisis.

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## Abbreviations

<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>DOE</i>	<i>Dictionary of Old English</i>
<i>MED</i>	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
<i>DSL-DOST</i>	<i>Dictionary of Scots Language – Dictionary of Older Scots Tongue</i>
<i>HTE</i>	<i>Historical Thesaurus of English</i>
<i>ANT</i>	Actor-Network Theory
<i>OOO</i>	Object-Oriented Ontology
<i>ISLE</i>	<i>Journal for Interdisciplinary Study in Literature and Environment</i>
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History Journal</i>
<i>TOE</i>	<i>Thesaurus of Old English</i>

## Introduction



**Figure 1.** Solar System Portrait – Earth as ‘Pale Blue Dot’<sup>1</sup>

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1 Image obtained from NASA Visible Earth Catalog <<http://visibleearth.nasa.gov/view.php?id=52392>>, 17-08-2013.



From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of any particular interest. But for us, it's different. Consider again that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar", every "supreme leader", every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

- Carl Sagan *The Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, p. 6

Carl Sagan's description of the earth as it appears from more than four billion miles away encapsulates the (seemingly paradoxical) simultaneous vastness and minuteness of the planet that we call Earth. Living entities (human and nonhuman) and nonliving entities both past and present are drawn together in that seemingly tiny object, the 'pale blue dot'. Sagan reminds us that the world is as much about what has been before and what is still to come as it is about what is here and now. The world is more than just a rock, it is 'a dynamic mess of jiggling things' (Feynman, 1983). This dynamism connects the things we see and experience today with those of the past and the future. As human beings, we tend to conceptualize our own existence and the experiences of the world as a whole in a linear form; to a certain extent this follows the entropic process of the second law of thermodynamics, whereby energy always flows in the direction of

order to disorder. While entropy moves in a one-way direction and thus, to some extent, so do our experiences of the world around us, the crafting of objects in the creation of new objects is one medium through which human beings establish new and alternative connections with the physical world. Poetry, as a specific example of crafting, establishes connections and interactions with the physical world which have the potential to cross both time and space. This thesis explores the multifaceted conversation between past and present, human and nonhuman, time and space, which is created in and by poetry. It considers poetry's place in shaping the way in which we interact with the world around us in the present and on timescales much greater than those of our own lives.

The above passage from Sagan's *The Pale Blue Dot* invokes the various potentialities of human beings, but what of nonhuman entities? What of other living beings? What of other nonliving beings? This thesis engages with things in their material and poetic forms. It thinks about how the human mind and the physical world interact through not only the intellectual creativity of poetry, but also through the physical processes of writing and reading.

### **The Materiality of the Reading and Writing Experience**

Anglo-Saxon England saw the shift from a culture more or less of solely oral poetry to one which also engaged with the written word.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this development of a combined oral and literary culture, the practice of reading in Anglo-Saxon England was often considered a public, social, and communal activity. Texts would be read aloud, forging a 'textual community' between texts, interpreters, readers and listeners.<sup>3</sup> The creation of this network of interactions

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2 See Orchard (1997); Ong (1982); O'Brien O'Keefe (1990).

3 For further details and discussion see Howe (1993: 58-59).

surrounding and connecting the text (both the physical written document and its intellectual content) with other actors draws attention to the material aspects of the process of writing. Anglo-Saxon poetic texts often display a self-conscious awareness of the physical processes of writing. This is evidenced, for example, in the Old English and Anglo-Latin riddle corpus, where objects of the scriptorium describe their involvement in the process of writing, an idea explored in detail in Chapter Two. The first-person accounts of these objects, written from the point of view of the object itself, offer important insights into the conceptualisation of poetry, and written texts more generally, in Anglo-Saxon culture. The voices of these riddles reach out beyond the objects which are used in the processes of writing to the materials used to craft these objects and the intellectual processes at work throughout this crafting. In this way, writing can be read as an activity which initiates further interactions and exchanges between actors, both human and nonhuman. The network of reading and writing expands beyond the scriptorium to the wider physical world, and the intellectual creativity of writing is bound with the materiality of the physical objects and processes required in its production.

The process of writing is one which engages with intellectual and material creativity. The invention of the printing press had a dramatic impact on the materiality of the written word, as mass production allowed for multiple copies of a text to be created quickly and easily. While on the one hand this meant that texts could exist more widely in 'the public domain' (Fischer 2004: 206) it also correlated with reading becoming a more solitary practice. The Romantic period saw this solitary practice of reading and writing emphasised in its poetry. A separation – at least in poets' self-perception – between the intellectual and material processes of writing occurred, and poetry began to

become associated with externalising the internal feelings of the individual. The network of actors involved in the writing process was replaced by the figure of the lone author. This was also representative of a more general shift in the way that human beings in the West conceptualised and engaged with the rest of the world. Nonhuman entities (both living/nonliving) became sources of poetic inspiration and exploration of the human self, rather than being acknowledged and explored as direct participants in the writing process. While Romanticism embraces the interaction between mind and ‘nature’,<sup>4</sup> this interaction is expressed mainly in the form of the cerebral and intellectual, rather than through an exploration of the material interaction and processes of writing. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen, in parts, a shifting interest towards the materiality of writing and the exploration of the interaction between poetry and materiality. This has been displayed in the contemplation of the physicality of the writing processes in poetry, explored, for example, in the pen-as-spade metaphor of Heaney’s ‘Digging’ (part of the 1966 *Death of a Naturalist* collection) and the association with the action and art of the stone mason in Bunting’s *Briggflatts*, as are discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Writers have also started to engage more physically with the materiality of writing, through work which merges poetry and visual/sensual art, as is evidenced in work such as the recent Yorkshire *Stanza Stones* project, discussed in Chapter Five. The interaction between poetry and the physical processes of writing throughout history is not limited to these two concepts, but also tells of a dynamic wider relationship between poetry and the material.

### Human and Nonhuman

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4 See Greaves (2005: 65).

This thesis makes use of the terms ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’: this distinction was clearly a culturally salient one in Anglo-Saxon culture, and so is important for understanding Anglo-Saxon texts. But this thesis also probes the meaning behind these words and their connotations and denotations in terms of both Anglo-Saxon and modern contexts. A good example of these issues is the creation of the world: Anglo-Saxon poetry forges strong connections between the idea of the human and the process of creation. The creation of the world appears as a trope across Old English poetry, in *Cædmon’s Hymn*, *The Order of the World*, Exeter Book *Riddle 40* and *Riddle 60*, *Genesis A*, *Beowulf*, and *Widsiþ*, as well as parts of *Elene*, *Guthlac A*, *Andreas*, *Juliana*, *The Fates of the Apostles*.<sup>5</sup> In many ways, the idea of Creation in Anglo-Saxon contexts suggests a sense of unity between what may be termed the ‘human’ and the ‘nonhuman’. Neville (1999: 1-2) observes that Old English does not contain a specific term for what she refers to as ‘our own conception of the natural world’, one that excludes ‘1) supernatural elements, 2) human elements’ (Neville 1999:2). Instead, the vocabulary of Old English appears to suggest that human and nonhuman were conceived as a whole in the form of Creation.<sup>6</sup> Old English does have specific terms to convey the concept of a nonhuman animal, namely *deor* and *neat*, though these occur infrequently within the poetic corpus (29 times for *deor*, and only 10 for *neat*), with *deor* usually being preceded by *wildu* (wild) as a distinction from domesticated animals. The most common terms for human beings in Old English are *mancynn* (mankind) or just *mann*. These occur widely and frequently throughout the Old English, although *mancynn* often occurs in

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5 See Michelet (2006: 37).

6 This is further supported by evidence provided by the *Thesaurus of Old English (TOE)* relating to these terms.

the forms ‘fæder mancynnes’ (father of mankind) or ‘metod mancynnes’ (maker of mankind), referring to God. The word *gesceaft* denotes ‘the creation, a created being or thing, creature, and element’ (Bosworth and Toller 1882: s.v.), and appears frequently (71 times) across the poetic corpus. Occurrences of *gesceaft* in poetry are often preceded by *eall* (all), emphasising the all-encompassing nature of this term, as is perhaps most famously conveyed in the line from *The Dream of the Rood* ‘weop eal gesceaft, cwiðdon cyninges fyll’ (Krapp 1932: 61-65) (all creation wept, lamented the King’s fall), referring to the death of Christ on the cross. This line not only suggests a unified concept of human and nonhuman beings, in the form of ‘creation’, but also attributes an emotional response to those objects to which this term (*gesceaft*) refers.

The concept and theme of creation in Old English poetry is both diverse and multifaceted. The idea of creation is often linked to the composition of poetry as a creative action, as is particularly emphasised in the case of *Cædmon’s Hymn*. Bede writes in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* the story of Cædmon as ‘the first Anglo-Saxon poet to compose religious verse in the vernacular’ (Michelet 2006: 37). Cædmon’s poetic creativity, particularly in light of its religious nature, becomes a mirror for God’s own creative power.<sup>7</sup> While Anglo-Saxon literary culture appears not to elevate the identity of the author and the concept of authorship in the same way as later Western literary traditions, the repeated occurrence of this theme of creativity across the corpus emphasises the self-consciousness of Old English poetic creativity. This mirroring of God’s Creation with the process and skill of creating poetry is marked out as a particularly human ability, seemingly implying a separation and definition between the human and nonhuman. Michelet (2006: 42) comments on the

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<sup>7</sup> On this point see Clarke (2006: 10).

didactic nature of poems such as *Cædmon's Hymn*, suggesting that by teaching his audience about the origins of the world, Cædmon demonstrates the notion that 'verse is composed to benefit the public'. Michelet goes on to suggest that if the composition of verse has such benefits for the public, then, in a similar way, 'the shaping of the world profits mankind' (2006: 42). Michelet supports these suggestions by drawing on the following line from *Cædmon's Hymn* whereby Cædmon states that heaven is constructed as a roof for the children of mankind, and 'tha middungeard moncynnæs Uard, | eci Dryctin, æfter tiadæ / firum foldu' (Dobbie 1942: 195-96) (then afterwards the Guardian of mankind, the eternal Lord, arranged the earth for men),<sup>8</sup> suggesting an anthropocentric perspective on God's Creation as one specifically brought into being for human beings.

The idea of the creative potential of poetry and its exclusivity to human beings in some ways mirrors Martin Heidegger's philosophies on the nature of being and dwelling in the world, and the role of poetry in this process. Heidegger's philosophies have had significant influence on what has come to be known as ecopoetics.<sup>9</sup> While the theme of creation in Old English poetry often seems to lend itself to anthropocentric readings, the interaction between poetic, material, and divine creativity at times also challenges and problematises the exclusivity of poetic creativity as a human trait. This thesis explores these moments, particularly in reference to the Anglo-Saxon riddles (see Chapter One).

## **Ecocriticism and the Environmental Humanities**

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8 For further discussion of the notion of heaven as a roof in *Cædmon's Hymn* see p. 108.

9 The idea of an ecopoetics and its connections to Heidegger's philosophies are discussed in greater detail on p. 117 and throughout this thesis more generally.

The interaction between poetry and the physical world has been explored most broadly by the field of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism encourages a movement away from the notion of ‘nature’, to promote more subtle and varied approaches to the interaction between human beings and other entities of the Earth. In its early days, ecocriticism defined itself as taking ‘an earth-centred approach to literary studies’ (Glotfelty 1996: xix). Ecocriticism scrutinises the way in which interactions between human beings and the environment are constructed in texts and wider culture. While this has remained the primary tenet of ecocriticism, many different perspectives and areas have developed both within and connected to ecocriticism itself; the wider term ‘environmental humanities’ (also known as the ‘ecological humanities’) has, therefore, been coined in order to try to bring together these related fields. The environmental humanities also encourage interdisciplinary study, which seeks to bridge ‘the academic division between the arts and sciences’ (Rose and Robin 2004: n.p.). Areas of study within the environmental humanities include, but are not limited to: animal studies, ecopoetics, nature writing, deep ecology, ecofeminism, ecomarxism, and ecomaterialism, as well as environmental politics, histories, philosophies, anthropology and economics.<sup>10</sup> Each of these fields is developing further insights into the interactions between humans and nonhumans through their own specific approaches and from varying perspectives. While such diversity within the field provides rich and fertile potential for developing further insights into the interaction between human beings, other entities, and the environment more

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10 For a useful overview of several of these positions see Garrard (2004: 16-32). See also Rose and Robin (2004). For significant work in animal studies see Huggan and Tiffin (2010); Cary Wolfe (2003a; 2003b). For work in ecopoetics see Bate (2000) and Knickerbocker (2012). Plumwood (1993) presents a useful and important discussion of ecofeminism. For work outlining the concept of deep ecology see Næss (1989).



broadly, it has also been an area of significant criticism, with claims being made that ecocriticism lacks definitive goals and targets or a consensus on terminology. Phillips (2013: 457) suggests that one of the major problems of ecocriticism is that there is no consensus of opinion regarding the concept of environment amongst ecocritics, environmentalists, and/or ecologists. This lack of consensus is surely a large stumbling block in terms of the potential which ecocriticism has to offer. If ecocritics cannot decide on how their field classifies environment (supposedly the primary subject matter), then what hope is there for being able to provide some kind of productive offering towards debate regarding the current state of environmental crisis? While this is a justified and genuine concern, the lack of consensus over some issues has not prevented ecocriticism and the environmental humanities more generally from making significant contributions in thinking which considers the way in which human beings conceptualise their being *in* and *with* the world, and to the important role that literature and the arts more generally play in our interactions with the world, from intimate connections between single entities to our actions on a global scale. It is, therefore, important not to let the challenges which the field faces become obstructions and barriers to important research. It is the constant internal debates within the general field of ecocriticism which, to some extent, drive forward this research and challenge those working in the environmental humanities to find new points of convergence or divergence across their work.

Within the variety of theoretical and philosophical approaches with which ecocriticism is associated, two prominent directions have emerged. The first is ecocriticism as an area of study which engages with literature that is consciously exploring the aesthetics of environment. The second is ecocriticism as an approach which reads any text or artwork from an ecologically-oriented

perspective. In this line of thinking, ecocriticism can be utilised as a critical tool for analysing works which do not consciously or explicitly explore the concept of 'nature'. Ecologically-oriented reading takes note of the interactions and relationships between things which constitute a particular environment, rather than reading environment as a homogeneous whole. This thesis engages with both aspects of ecocriticism, bringing an ecologically-oriented approach to texts which are both consciously exploring the aesthetics of environment and to those which are less obviously directly engaged with this idea.

### **Ecomaterialism**

The discussion of *nature* as a concept has been a prominent area of discussion within ecological thinking in recent years. Kate Soper's monograph *What is Nature?* (1995) posed the questions of how we conceptualise 'nature', and to what extent it is a useful term and construct. The significance of this area of discussion is evidenced by the arrival of dedicated journals such as *Thinking Nature* (first issue 2011). Among the most significant work in the field are Morton's recent works *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (2010a). These works collectively raise, develop and seek to answer the following questions: what is 'Nature'? To what extent is it a useful construct? How might we begin to think more ecologically outside the confines of the term 'Nature'?

A movement away from the construct of nature allows us to think in terms of interactions and connections rather than landscapes and groups. The problem with *nature*, and ecocriticism which examines specifically the concept of nature in literature, is twofold. Firstly, thinking in terms of nature promotes the tendency to categorise objects and experiences into either 'Nature' or 'culture'. Nature becomes something which is not *us*, not human; thus an othering takes

place which distances everything nonhuman from everything supposedly human. But where is the Nature/culture line drawn and how productive is this distinction? When an Anglo-Saxon riddle describes the bird-like movements of a quill pen across a page, is this Nature or culture? Much ecological writing attempts to prevent this othering of nature by promoting the notion of the human being as embedded *in* Nature; Nature is that which is all around us. While this rhetoric attempts to avoid the othering imposed by the nature/culture divide, it still fails to connect the human being with the machine of the world in Deleuze and Guattari's sense;<sup>11</sup> rather than nature being what is over there, it becomes what is there or around us. That *there*, however, is still not *here*, and thus that divide is still maintained.

Secondly, this distancing places Nature 'on a pedestal' (Morton 2007: 4), creating a sense of reverence. Morton (2007: 4) compares this distant admiration and elevation of Nature with the actions of patriarchy towards the figure of the woman, an action he refers to as 'paradoxical act of sadistic admiration' (Morton 2007: 5). The rhetoric of respect which develops from such admiration for 'nature' has its origins in Romanticism, and aligns with many of the ideologies of Green politics such as the condemnation of destruction and pollution of the so called 'natural world' (Huggan 2009: 5).<sup>12</sup> Morton's use of the phrase 'sadistic admiration' seems a step too far in its critique of the elevation of Nature. The sense of reverence for nonhumans produced by specific works of nature writing and non-literary critiques which encourage the reader to reevaluate the

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11 See Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 1-9).

12 Huggan (2005) also discusses and evaluates the idea of 'Green Romanticism' in relation to ecocritical and postcolonial studies. For further discussion of the interaction between Romanticism and ecocriticism see Rigby (2006: n.p.).

nonhuman play an important part in shaping positive connections and interactions between our human selves and other nonhuman entities. Further to this, Kate Rigby urges a reconsideration of the interaction between writing and world, and a movement away from the idea of ‘Nature’ in its capital ‘N’ form.<sup>13</sup> Rigby documents the movement towards the use of the term *environment* in ecologically-oriented literary and cultural studies. The term ‘environment’ is itself problematic, in that it ‘presupposes a topological centre and surroundings that implicitly prioritise human agency and interests’ (Rigby 2006: no pages given). While an awareness of the pitfalls of such terminology is vital in the shaping rhetoric of ecologically oriented literary and cultural studies, it should also be considered as a means by which avenues of ideas and understanding may be opened up rather than shut down. I, therefore, make use of the term *environment* in order to refer to either the idea of physical objects outside of a text or, when appropriate, to indicate a collection of entities interacting together.

While work in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies has begun to engage with ecocritical lines of thinking,<sup>14</sup> Anglo-Saxon literary studies are still largely dominated by thinking from the perspective of a rigid Nature/culture divide. This thesis challenges homogenising notions and rhetorics of Nature, and develops a dynamic concept of literary ecology, through an understanding of the way in which human crafting processes engage with the fluidity of constant interactions between objects. At the same time, it remains open to lines and modes of enquiry which differ in their rhetorical choices and conceptual ideas, engaging with and evaluating such perspectives in dialogue with its own

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13 Morton (2012a) also capitalises ‘Nature’ in order to draw attention to its lack of material existence.

14 For a review of this work see pp. 28-32.

approach and methodology.

In order to mobilise the potential of ecologically-oriented literary study without being restricted to the human construct of Nature, it is necessary to interrogate with much greater rigour the dynamic ways in which entities interact with one another. As part of this exploration, and as part of a more general movement away from the idea of Nature, we need to reconsider the way we look at objects. While we are used to thinking of objects in association with subjects, readjusting this perspective to think of everything as objects, from what we might term ‘solid matter’ to more abstract concepts, opens up the potential for analysing the intricate interactions between things, and to producing more ecologically-oriented literary studies.<sup>15</sup> I develop this line of thinking, in part, from the movement of object oriented ontology (OOO), pioneered by Graham Harman in a series of works of the last decade, which has been developed further by the recent work of Bryant, Bogost, and Morton.<sup>16</sup>

The developing movement of OOO promotes the view that ‘nothing has special status, but that everything exists equally—plumbers, cotton, bonobos, DVD players, and sandstone for example’ (Bogost 2009: n. p).<sup>17</sup> OOO in some ways follows a similar trajectory to that that of animal studies. Early work in the field of animal studies, such as Singer’s (1995 [first published 1975]) *Animal Liberation*, effectively opposed what Singer termed ‘speciesism’. Singer’s central argument is that we should consider the treatment of animals, not because of

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15 Morton (2012a: 165) discusses the notion of understanding that there are only objects, as opposed to various subject/object relationships.

16 See Harman (2002; 2005; 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2012); Bogost (2012); Morton (2012a; 2012b; 2013); Bryant (2011).

17 For further work specifically under the banner of OOO see Timothy Morton’s blog, *Ecology Without Nature*, which contains a specific section on OOO; Bryant (2011); Harman (2002).

issues of 'rights', but because they have the ability to suffer. Singer makes the important distinction that each species is different to our own, and to each other. Each species, therefore, does not necessarily need the same rights, but should not be subjected to suffering at human hands. The acknowledgement of differences between various species (including between ourselves and other species) is crucial to changing the way in which we interact with both humans and nonhumans. Extensive work has, therefore, been conducted in the field of animal philosophy, and more general areas of animal studies in literature and culture.<sup>18</sup> But what of other nonhuman entities?

OOO is not the sole area of study dedicated to promoting and exploring things as objects. Other related fields of study, loosely collected under the title New Materialism, are also working to actively engage with objects. Actor-Network Theory (ANT), pioneered by Latour (2005) and Law and Hassard (1999), connects with OOO through its promotion of the agency of objects. It argues that objects are a product of cross-material and social interaction. Unlike OOO, however, ANT posits that things are determined by their alliances, whereas OOO suggests that a thing can only be determined 'in isolation from its alliances' (Harman 2010a). Bill Brown's (2001) 'Thing Theory' differs again from both ANT and OOO in that it focuses on the distinction between objects and *things*. Thing Theory thinks about the moment when an object in literature or culture is made to stand out; this often relies on the action of a human subject to promote and facilitate that transition from object to thing. Thing Theory posits that objects become *things* when they exert their own power, an action which often takes place when the object no longer complies in the expected way with

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18 Huggan and Tiffin (2010); Simons (2002); Brown (2001); Leist and Singer (2010); McHugh (2011).

human usage. Finally, Jane Bennett's (2010) *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* also seeks to promote the agency of objects. Bennett argues that an awareness of the agency of things can encourage a more ecologically-oriented politics. This work encourages the reader to consider how all things influence the world through their vibrancy and animation.<sup>19</sup>

### **Literary Ecology**

This thesis does not directly adopt any one of these New Materialist methodologies; rather, it enters into conversation with each of those discussed above. Understanding and acknowledging current trends in materialist thinking and study is crucial to pushing the boundaries of ecologically-oriented literary studies further. But where does the textual and the poetic fit into this material agenda? This thesis arises from the merging of materialist and literary studies. While the work of Morton and others has a base in literary study (particularly, in the case of Morton, in Romantic literature), the literary often seems to be subordinate to the philosophical in this work. Jonathan Bate's (2000) *Song of the Earth* carefully considers the place of poetry in addressing and responding to the current environmental crisis. Bate coins the term *ecopoetics*, connecting his notion with the Heideggerian concept that it is through poetry that human beings can reconnect with the world. Bate's *ecopoetics* provides a medium through which

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19 For other similar work see Plumwood's (2007) work 'Journey to the Heart of Stone', which explores the materiality of stone and rock but also challenges the idea of stone as inanimate, drawing our attention to the way that it speaks and calls to us in its own way. Hines (2004) explores the possibilities gained from approaching medieval history from both a literary and archaeological perspective; Cohen (2010) also focuses on the matter-energy of stone and examines how it challenges and transcends various boundaries and human centred expectations; see also Harman (2002).

poetry can engage with the physical world, with the agenda of promoting more positive ecological awareness to its audience, but the idea of eco-poetics also has its share of problems. Both Bate's notion of eco-poetics, and the Heideggerian philosophies from which it is drawn emphasise the need for poets to provide a voice for things which do not share our human language.<sup>20</sup> This emphasis on providing a 'voice' for those things which apparently cannot speak not only raises issues of anthropocentrism which remain a key difficulty and debate within ecocritical work, but also elevates human beings above all other entities, imposing a hierarchy on all things (both living and nonliving).<sup>21</sup> When it engages with this rhetoric of speaking for those who cannot speak, eco-poetry not only ends up falling into the homogenising trap of building the Nature/culture divide, but also unavoidably subordinates nonhuman entities in its attempts to celebrate and appreciate them.

Chisholm's (2011) notion of literary ecology provides one way in which the problems associated with eco-poetics, as defined by Bate, can be addressed. Chisholm argues that art engages with ecology to the same extent as the natural sciences, but suggests that literature think in terms of 'sensations and figures' rather than the 'functions' of science (Chisholm 2011: 571). Chisholm's concept of literary ecology is significant in its acknowledgement that literature can offer as much of an opportunity to think ecologically as science, though the methodologies of each discipline may be different. Building on Chisholm's ideas, this thesis constructs and develops its own sense of literary ecology. It engages

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20 See Rigby (2004a) for a more detailed discussion of this issue in relation to both Heidegger and Bate's *ecopoetics*.

21 For discussion of the debates surrounding the issue of anthropocentrism in ecocritical work see Glotfelty (2007).



with the notion of feeling which Chisholm highlights as literature's own way of thinking ecologically. This thesis reconstructs an Anglo-Saxon sense of literary ecologies, considering how models of knowledge, or ways of knowing, found in Anglo-Saxon poetry can also push us to conceptualise the art/science distinction differently. Chapter One explores this notion in relation to the Old English word *cræft* and its semantic relationship to Modern English *technology*, and this is developed further in Chapter Two in a study of poetic constructions of the craft of writing in the Anglo-Saxon riddle traditions. Texts such as the Old English elegies and *Beowulf* also demonstrate models of knowledge and ways of understanding existence which do not adhere to such a rigid art/science divide, and are explored in detail in Chapters Three and Five. Reading and appreciating these texts as Anglo-Saxon literary ecologies not only sheds new light on how Anglo-Saxon people conceptualised human and nonhuman interaction, but also allows us to re-read the work of twentieth – and twenty-first century writers – specifically, in the case of this thesis, Seamus Heaney, Geoffrey Hill, Basil Bunting, and Simon Armitage – without the blinkers of such disciplinary art/science distinctions (see Chapters Three, Four and Five). This thesis also pushes further to ask to what extent poetry can also engage with the physical materiality of the world? I argue that just as earlier ecocritical work has criticised the affirmation of a Nature/culture divide, there is also a blurring between the literary and intellectual creativity of poetry and the physicality of objects. Thinking about poetry in relation to its interaction with the material allows for the creation of new literary ecologies, ecologies which do not just engage with the here and the now, but that speak across time and often space. This thesis engages with the interaction between the material and intellectual processes of writing, the creativity of poetry, and the material world in three specific ways.

- 1) By examining the technology of writing as, at one and the same time, an intellectual and physical craft. This includes an exploration of the interaction between the human writer and writing tools, examining the way in which these interact to form the product of the written poetic text.
- 2) By considering how specific objects explored within poetic texts cross time and space.
- 3) By examining and interrogating ideas of how place is conceptualised and politicised today.

### **Environmental Studies and Medieval Literature**

While ecocriticism, in its many forms, developed and grew substantially during the eighties and nineties, particularly in relation to the study of Romantic and post-Romantic literature, medieval literary studies was somewhat slower to respond to this emerging critical field. This appears to be congruent with the wider history of the use of critical theory in medieval literary studies, a key example being the movement of postcolonial studies into medieval studies,<sup>22</sup> significantly later than its development as a critical field.<sup>23</sup> Prior to the arrival of ecocriticism in medieval literary studies, discussion of environment in early medieval literary texts was largely concerned with the representational value of nonhuman beings, specifically in the form of monsters, an approach particularly promoted by Tolkien's 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics' and Orchard's

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22 See Kabir and Williams (2005); Cohen (2001); Davis and Altschul (2009). This work is anticipated by Moore-Gilbert (1994).

23 See Frantzen (1990) for further discussion of the potential of critical theory for Anglo-Saxon studies.

(1995) *Pride and Prodigies*.<sup>24</sup> While work such as Neville's (1999) *Representations of the Natural World in Old English poetry* (still the only monograph-length work dedicated to the environment in Old English poetry) provides vital insights into how the worldviews of Anglo-Saxon people can be interpreted through the representational and allegorical meanings associated with nonhuman beings in these texts, these insights are often accompanied by a tendency to insist upon the homogenising term 'natural world'. Used in this context, the term 'the natural world' not only refers to nonhuman entities on a large scale, but also firmly constructs and reinforces a Nature/culture divide. Strong arguments are made in the work of Neville and others which support the presence of this Nature/culture divide within early medieval literary texts and Anglo-Saxon culture more generally, such as the relationship between human-built structures and the world external to these structures, discussed in detail in Chapter Five. However, early medieval poetry also demonstrates a strong engagement with the material world in ways that weigh against this categorisation. As I shall demonstrate, the Old English elegies take care to describe detailed ecosystems; the Old English and Anglo-Latin riddles engage with the interaction between human and nonhuman through processes of crafting; and poems such as *Beowulf* explore, in part, the interaction between humans and the environment through the subterranean hoarding of treasure. Even seemingly highly allegorical works such as *The Whale*, *The Panther*, and *The Phoenix* engage with the interaction between human and animal, the intermingling of behaviours and the materiality of these encounters

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24 Key work in the study of environment in Old English poetry also includes Hanscom (1905); Stanley (1955); Holton (1982); Sorrell (1994); Neville (1999); Jacobs (1999), Clarke (2006), Overing and Lees (2006).

and ecosystems.<sup>25</sup>

In the last decade, as medieval literary scholars have begun to engage with more ecologically-oriented study of environments in Anglo-Saxon literary texts, work has started to address not only the representational but also the material and ecological aspects of environment in early medieval poetry. Gillian Rudd's (2007) *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* and Alfred Siewers's (2009) *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Readings of Early Medieval Landscapes* firmly marked the arrival of ecocriticism and ecologically-oriented approaches to both early and late medieval literary studies. These ecocritical works engage primarily in insightful discussions of the active roles which elements of the environment have in a range of medieval literary texts; Rudd and Siewers argue that environment in medieval texts can and *does* act as more than just a 'back drop for human drama' (Armbruster and Wallace 2001: 4). As approaches to environment in medieval literary studies have become more varied over recent years, work has begun to engage with the way in which the human and the nonhuman interact in terms of the relationship between the poetic and the material aspects of medieval literary ecologies. Matt Low's exploration of the eco-poetics of the Old English elegies argues for more readings of early medieval poetry which 'explore the natural world beyond its function as setting or symbol' (2009: 1). While these works provide important ecocritical and eco-poetical readings of medieval literature, which enter into conversation and sometimes confrontation with more exclusively representationalist readings of these texts, the idea of the 'natural world' still remains a strong basis in both the

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25 See Ellard (2011) for an important discussion of the Old English *Phoenix*. Little ecocritical work has been conducted in reference to the *Panther* and the *Whale*, but Ellard's pioneering article opens doors for further engagement with these texts.

terminology and the conceptualisation of the nonhuman in this work. The recent shift towards New Materialisms has also had an influence on medieval literary studies, and it is in this field that most headway is arguably being made in terms of how we talk about medieval literary constructions of environment. Recent works such as the 2012 collection *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, edited by Jeffrey Cohen, explores the material agency of objects in medieval and early modern literatures and their material environments.<sup>26</sup> The 2013 'Ecomaterialism' special edition of *Postmedieval* adds support for the field of ecologically- and object-oriented readings in medieval studies. Kellie Robertson's 2010 'Medieval Materialism: A Manifesto' offers a challenge to previous arguments that, because of the existence of Christian doctrine, 'a medieval materialism would be an oxymoron' (Robertson, 2010: 104). Focusing her study on the later medieval period, Robertson suggests that medieval poets were simultaneously musing on the physics and metaphysics of depicting objects (2010: 115). She provides an analysis of late medieval scientific and philosophical conceptualisations of the material, while also engaging with poetry to suggest the important role that literature can play in reshaping the way in which materialism is viewed across time. This thesis continues on the ecomaterial trajectory which has been established within the field of medieval studies. It explores the concept of materiality in the earlier medieval period, addressing the importance of temporality, which is particularly well explored in Robertson's (2010) 'Manifesto'. Through both semantic field analysis and close literary analysis of Anglo-Saxon poetry (not only in Old English but also in Anglo-Latin), this thesis offers a new reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon literary ecologies. The thesis argues that Anglo-Saxon poetry explores in diverse ways, the intricate interactions between

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26 See also Cohen (2013).

human beings and nonhumans in everyday existence and in the crafting of new objects. Paying particularly close attention to how Anglo-Saxon poetry explores these intricate networks of interaction reveals insights into Anglo-Saxon models of knowledge suggesting ways in which Anglo-Saxon people may have conceptualised their existence as part of different environments and the world as a whole.

### **Time**

This thesis engages with a variety of ideas and notions of time and temporality, particularly focusing on the interaction between time, place, objects, and poetry. I consider time in a linear form, i.e. the sense of time moving in a line from the past to the present and into the future, a sense strongly in evidence in the Old English elegies (discussed in detail in Chapter Five). The thesis also, however, considers more diverse forms and conceptions of time. It engages with the notion of history (events occurring within one chronological interval or another) and chronology (a system of dated time intervals) (Ingold 1993: 157), but also engages with Ingold's notion of temporality as a merging of the two, whereby 'time is immanent in the passage of events' and the activities and objects of the present hold both 'retensions from the past and protensions for the future' (Ingold 1993: 157). By this, Ingold means that objects of the present carry significance from the past in terms of the interacts with which they have previously been a part, and hold the potential to play an active part in interacting with objects in current and future networks of interaction. While this makes sense in terms of our understanding of the physical world we inhabit, it also holds true for the environments created by the poetic texts with which this thesis engages. Chapter Three and Chapter Four consider the self-conscious

examination of temporality in the work of Seamus Heaney, Geoffrey Hill, Basil Bunting and Simon Armitage, scrutinising the way in which their poetic work negotiates and explores the relationship and interaction between temporality and environment. This thesis engages with Ingold's ideas of the sociability of temporality and its interactions with what he terms the 'landscape' – ideas which he develops in terms of anthropological and archaeological study – but extends this work into an ecocritical discourse which considers the interaction between poetry and environment. I engage Ingold's ideas of temporality with topics concerning the relationship between environment and time which are now being raised by those working in the field of ecocriticism or the environmental humanities more generally. I consider the ways in which the interaction between poetry, time, and environment can draw attention to the way in which nonhuman objects exist within our shared environment, yet may occupy timespans much greater than our own.

Much of the recent work on medieval ecomaterialisms has demonstrated an interest in cross-temporal conversations. The interaction between medieval studies, ecologically oriented theories and approaches, and New Materialisms has led to innovative and productive cross-disciplinary discourses; a recent example is Joy's (2013) exploration of the shared ideas of depression or 'blueness', examining the creation of these watery ecologies in both the Old English *Wanderer* and *Seafarer* and the late twentieth-century novel *Wittgenstein's Mistress* by David Markson.

The cross-temporal conversation which has been developing within ecomaterial medieval literary studies also connects with recent work in medievalism(s). In their introduction to the recent collection *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination*, Clark and Perkins (2010: 6) note that

throughout the volume ‘the material and the textual are inextricably bound’. Medievalism is concerned with the way in which the medieval is constructed and interpreted in cultural practices outside of the medieval period. The interaction between the textual and the material is key to this area of study due, in part, to the ways in which medieval culture has been transmitted, i.e. in both textual and artefactual forms. The nineteenth century saw significant interest in the medieval period, with the development of museum collections, an interest in medieval archaeology, and the shaping of the literary canon through anthologies such as Henry Sweet’s *Anglo-Saxon Reader*. This work, however, was ‘deeply entangled in the politics of racial, national and imperial identity’ (Clark and Perkins 2010: 4).<sup>27</sup> This, in itself, demonstrates the interaction between the past and the present. Understanding the medieval past is crucial to understanding the nineteenth-century past. Further than this, however, understanding the significance of how the medieval past was translated, manipulated and assimilated into nineteenth-century imperialist rhetoric and ideology is crucial in gaining an understanding of how the past more generally can be interpreted at any given time or as part of a specific cultural movement; these ideas are explored in detail in Chapter Four. The engagement with the medieval through the medium of poetry has formed a particularly fruitful area of study in recent years. Chris Jones’ 2006 monograph, *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century*

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27 For work on the significance and influence of nineteenth-century medieval scholarship see Lapidge (2002). See also Harris and Grigsby (2008); Chandler (1970). For imperialist narratives of the nineteenth century which invoked the medieval were not solely based on Anglo-Saxon culture, but also engaged with later medieval myths and narratives such as those of Robin Hood and the Arthurian tradition, see Barczewski (2000). The notion of the medieval ‘north’ more broadly was also adopted into this discourse; for work in this area see Wawn (2002).



*Poetry*, explores how a number of twentieth-century poets engage with the language, subject matter, form and metre of Old English poetry in their own work. Jones pays particular attention to the notion of Old English as carrying both a sense of the roots of the ‘English Poetic Tradition’, while also being in some way ‘Other’ (Jones 2006: 1). This sense of familiarity combined with difference or ‘strange likeness’ (to quote Jones’s title, which itself originates from Geoffrey Hill’s reflections on the figure of Offa in *Mercian Hymns*) allows poets to forge a dialogue with the past which is also attuned to its temporal difference. For those working the field of medievalism, understanding this combined sense of the familiar and the unfamiliar is crucial to examining the presence of the medieval within the cultures of today. Carolyn Dinshaw’s (2012) *How Soon Is Now?* considers the role and experiences of the amateur in exploring the connections between the medieval past and the present, and contemplates the idea of the ‘queerness’ of time, and the impossibility of ‘now’ ever being a real now.<sup>28</sup> This work pushes the medievalist thinking of time arguably further than has previously been explored. Inspired by Dinshaw’s notion of the ‘queerness’ of time, this thesis continues on this trajectory to consider the impact of time in relation to human and nonhuman interaction.

As Clark and Perkins’s introduction to *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination* indicates, the interaction between the material and the textual plays a crucial role in many current areas of research which examine the concept of medievalism. This thesis pushes further these interactions between the material and the textual across time. It begins by exploring the connections between the physical world and the process of writing, considering both linguistic evidence, and the literary exploration of writing in the Anglo-Latin

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<sup>28</sup> See Dinshaw (2012: 2-3).

and Exeter Book riddles. It then moves to think more about the importance of the connection between objects, their place in a wider ecosystem, and their connections to writing processes and literary texts, specifically in reference to the Exeter Book riddles and *Beowulf*, alongside the twentieth- and twenty-first-century work of Seamus Heaney, Geoffrey Hill, and Basil Bunting and Simon Armitage. Finally, it takes this work further to explore the idea of literary ecologies – connecting the materiality of the world with the art of poetry to suggest how these interactions can and do create new literary ecologies: medieval, modern, and cross-temporal. These ecologies extend beyond the page to create dynamic interactions between human beings, writing, and other nonhuman entities. This thesis thus addresses a gap in research of ecological thinking across time.

## Chapters

In order to establish a firm base examining the interaction between poetry and materiality across time, the opening chapter considers the modern term and concept of ‘technology’. It examines the impact which technology has on how human beings interact with nonhuman objects today. The writings of Martin Heidegger remain some of the dominant, and most extensive, work on the relationship between poetic language and technology. While Heidegger’s work may have previously dominated thinking on the interaction between language and technology, his philosophies are controversial and are far from unproblematic. By conducting a linguistic case study on the etymology of the word *technology* and its semantically related terms, in particular Old English *cræft*, this chapter offers an examination of how poetry and technology have interacted historically, and attempts to establish sounder etymological and semantic

parameters for the word *technology* as a critical term (both as applied to the past and to the present) than Heidegger's allusiveness. I argue that Old English *cræft* and Modern English *technology* share many connotations and are remarkably similar in the way in which they refer to both practical processes of production and the intellectual processes of knowledge production and transfer which accompany them. Establishing this linguistic connection between these concepts provides some sense of conceptual stability, but also dynamism. I argue that Anglo-Saxon poetic texts actively and self-consciously explore this interaction between intellectual creativity and material processes which Old English *cræft* and Modern English *technology* embody.

Taking the Anglo-Saxon riddles as my primary material, in the second chapter I examine how the writing process is constructed poetically within these texts. The chapter builds on the linguistic ground work of Chapter One to investigate the interaction between the material and intellectual process of writing, and how these processes are explored through the poetry of the riddles. Drawing into discussion Heidegger's notions of *being* and *dwelling* alongside, and in critical dialogue with, recent ecomaterial theoretical approaches to objects (human and nonhuman, living and nonliving), this chapter argues that the Anglo-Saxon riddles engage with the materiality of nonhuman objects as much they are interested in symbolism, representation, and allegory. This chapter also argues that the self-conscious exploration of the interaction between human and nonhuman, poetry and material objects, which takes place in the riddles can inform current debate and discussion of both the interaction between poetry and the material, and the creation of literary ecologies.

Chapter Three expands the idea of literary ecologies further by introducing the idea of time. It thinks about how objects in poetry have the

ability to speak across time, creating cross- and multi-temporal literary ecologies. Building on the exploration of the material and physical process of writing in the riddles of Chapter Two, this chapter examines the dialogue between Anglo-Saxon poetry and twentieth-/twenty-first-century poetry which consciously invokes Anglo-Saxon literature and culture through the medium of objects and their interactions, through an examination of a selection of twentieth-century poetry by Seamus Heaney, Geoffrey Hill, and Basil Bunting alongside passages from the Anglo-Saxon riddles and *Beowulf*.

Chapter Four thinks further about the interaction between medieval and modern poetic texts. It investigates a different form of engagement between medieval and modern poetic texts, that of translation. This chapter argues that the notion of translation is complex and fluid. Taking Simon Armitage's recent translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* as my case study, I explore how Armitage and Hill poetically construct literary ecologies which interact with their own bioregions and localities. These two works, through different approaches, appropriate history, literature, culture, and ecology to create their own literary ecologies which are intertwined with the physical environs of the writers' localities. Both works demonstrate the potential for literary ecologies to be politically charged, not only in terms of environmentalism but also in the construction and deconstruction of ideas of localism, nationalism and imperialism.

The final chapter lifts its eyes from the intricacies of how writing as a physical process, poetry, human beings, and nonhumans interact to examine wider, more radical and material literary ecologies, literary ecologies which are built off the page and encourage us to acknowledge these interactions which are taking place. I explore the recent work of Simon Armitage's *In Memory of Water*

(in its material context of the Yorkshire *Stanza Stones* project) in dialogue with the Old English elegies of the Exeter Book. I argue that the form of physical/environmental poetry created by the *Stanza Stones* project conveys a similar connection between emotional and physical interactions between human beings, land and water to the Old English elegies. Reading these texts in dialogue with one another sheds new light on how Anglo-Saxons thought about objects and assemblages such as water and stone and how these ideas speak to the interaction between human beings and these objects through the medium of poetry today.

This thesis emerges at an exciting time, where studies of medieval materialism and ecologically oriented work have developed into major research areas. Ecomaterialism has not only ‘arrived’ in medieval studies, but is being shaped and developed by its engagement with these medieval contexts. This thesis positions itself in conversation with recent cutting edge work on medieval texts, objects, and *things*. James Paz’s (2012) recent thesis on Anglo-Saxon things draws its methodological approach, in part, from developments in Thing Theory, making further important headway into new ways in which to engage with Anglo-Saxon objects. Key to this work is the dialogue it creates between Anglo-Saxon objects and texts; an approach also effectively executed by Robertson (2010). This thesis engages with material objects, and one future direction for further research stemming from its conclusions is certainly more extensive engagement with specific physical objects. My own MA research explored the voices of Anglo-Saxon objects, taking as source material both poetic texts such as the riddles, and first-person inscription on physical objects.<sup>29</sup> While the following chapters certainly suggest the scope and potential for future

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<sup>29</sup> See Price (2010).

developments in this line of study, this thesis deliberately chooses to focus on the idea of poetry, stemming from the belief that a reconsideration of the role and position of poetry in the construction of objects and their interaction with one another is long overdue. It is time to question Heidegger's ideas of the place and function of poetry, which have dominated discourses on both ecopoetics and on the agency of objects. In this way, I push forward a new understanding of the potentialities of poetry in forming and impacting on interactions between human beings and nonhumans. This thesis converses with current trends in studies of New Materialism and ecomaterialism while also working to reconsider long established and often under-challenged assumptions about the place and potential of poetry in engaging with environment. It ultimately argues that poetry is an important medium through which human beings can explore their existence as part of the world.

## Chapter One

### Literary Ecology, Technology, and Old English *Craeft*

As ecocriticism expands beyond its traditional lines of enquiry to begin to acknowledge the position of humans as objects *within* (rather than external to) a series of ecosystems and/or environments, and more object-oriented and ecomaterial lines of thinking develop within ecocritical theory, it is necessary to reconsider more thoroughly the way in which human beings interact with other objects.<sup>1</sup> In order to further understand the idea of ourselves *as* objects and our interactions with the other objects around us, it is necessary to reconsider the processes which shape these interactions. Technology plays a crucial part in the way that we conceptualise our interaction with objects today. When one thinks of technology, images of electronic devices, modern communication methods, and mechanised transportation systems often come to the fore. While these are the physical manifestations of technology, the concept itself is often overlooked in favour of its material products. Just as technology is often only contemplated in terms of its end products, it is also often perceived only in terms of the physical tools used in the manufacture of such products.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of technology has been a source of much debate within ecocritical studies for some time, causing a divide among different branches of ecocriticism as opinions vary on its role and function within human culture. A

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1 For an overview of current and previous work in the field of ecocriticism and an outline of its interaction with materialism, see Introduction pp. 20-25.

2 Gell (1988: 6) discusses this idea, noting that 'although it may be useful for certain classification purposes – especially in prehistory – to identify 'technology' with 'tools', from an explanatory point of view technology is much more than this.'

pertinent example of this is the divided opinions of those who work under the banner of deep ecology. Deep ecology demands a movement away from anthropocentrism and from the destructive reign to which humanity subjects the world.<sup>3</sup> While the majority of those who follow the philosophies of deep ecology seek a movement away from a dependence on, and indulgence in, technology, others see it as a force through which we can work to resolve our environmental crisis. Technology is also of primary importance to the debate regarding *biophilia* versus *biophobia* as articulated by Orr (1993).<sup>4</sup> Technology has the potential to both save and/or destroy the world. This demonstrates the ambivalent place which technology occupies within modern environmental debate. At the same time it also highlights the need for a review of technology and its position as a medium through which humans interact with other entities.

The *OED* lists the first (and now obsolete) definition of *technology* as ‘a discourse or treatise on an art or arts; *esp.* (in later use) a treatise on practical art or craft’; this is the earliest attested sense of the term (dating from 1612 with final attestation being 1860). A definition containing attestations from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries is given as ‘the terminology of a particular art

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3 The term *deep ecology* was coined by Arne Næss (1973), and its main tenets and basic principles are outlined in his later collaborative work with George Sessions. Næss and Sessions developed and summarised eight principles of deep ecology while camping in Death Valley (California) in April 1984. A good introduction to the work of Næss and the concept of deep ecology in relation to political policy making is provided by Cramer (1998). See also Tobias (1985); Sessions (1995).

4 For further critique on Orr’s work see Love (2003). In an article which examines the concepts of unbalanced nature, bodies and technology with specific reference to Karen Traviss’ *Wess’har* series, Sullivan (2010) explores the role of science and technology in relation to environment through the work of ecocritics Phillips (2003) and Heise (2008), and the ecophilosophical work of Plumwood (2002).



or subject; technical language or nomenclature', and the definition with the latest attestation is (a) 'the branch of knowledge dealing with the mechanical arts and applied sciences: the study of this' and (b) 'the application of such knowledge for practical purposes, esp. in industry, manufacturing, etc.; the sphere of activity concerned with this' and (c) 'the product of such application; technological know-how; a technological process, method or technique. Also machinery, equipment etc., developed from the practical application of scientific and technological knowledge'. While the precise definitions of *technology* have altered over time, each suggests the aggregation of several elements in order to produce an end product. Crucially, this is not limited to the physical tools needed to create a specific object. It extends from the raw materials from which a product is created, to the knowledge which provides the information regarding the technical process of changing the raw material into a manufactured object. It also extends further, to the knowledge of how to manufacture tools to enable this process, and further again to include the networks of interactions which 'allow for the transmission of technical knowledge' (Gell 1988: 6). Reacting against the conceptualisation of technology solely in terms of its end products, Inker (2000: 26) suggests that '*technology* refers to the system of operations and equipment by which a society provides its members with those things they need or desire, and as such is a socially embedded concept.' While it is certainly important to consider the role of human need and desire in fuelling the progress and continued presence of technology, arguably, Inker is too keen to move away from its material aspects in order to prioritise the social. In his outline of the concept of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Bruno Latour stresses the importance of not allowing the social to take on material connotations, noting that problems arise when

‘social’ begins to mean a type of material, as if the adjective was roughly comparable to other terms like ‘wooden’, ‘steely’, ‘biological’, ‘economical’, ‘mental’, ‘organizational’, or ‘linguistic’. At that point, the meaning of the word breaks down since it now designates two entirely different things: first, a movement during a process of assembling; and second, a different type of ingredient that is supposed to differ from other materials. (Latour 2005: 1)

The idea of the social must, therefore, be understood as an assemblage or network of interactions between various actors (or *actants*, as Latour has it). What is needed is an exploration of the concept of technology which engages with both the material and the human creative aspects of technology. This chapter, and (to a certain extent) this thesis as a whole, provides such a re-assessment of the concept of technology in terms of both the intellectual and material processes at work. In order to properly understand the part which technology plays in human interaction with other objects, one must look beyond one’s own lifetime and into the past. This provides not only important information regarding the way in which people, through technological processes, have previously engaged with their environments, but also new insights into how technology affects human interaction with other objects today.

The work of Martin Heidegger has intrigued some ecocritics since the early development of the field.<sup>5</sup> Although he is often said to occupy a ‘marginal’ position within ecocritical discourse (Garrard 2004: 30), Heidegger’s work has provoked much discussion amongst those working in the field, in particular ‘The

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5 See Bate (2000); Norris (2011); Ramapriya (2007: 229).

Origin of the Work of Art' [ 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes'] (1950), and 'The Question Concerning Technology' [ 'Die Frage nach der Technik'] (1953).

Heidegger proposed that poetic language acts as a form of creative *poiesis* (bringing forth) which draws things into being (through human understanding), rather than subjecting them to objectification or instrumentalisation at the hands of technology (Rigby 2004a: 6).<sup>6</sup> Chapter Two interrogates Heidegger's philosophies of technology and poetic language in greater depth but, with the rise of more object-oriented ecocritical perspectives, this chapter considers whether poetry and technology have historically ever engaged in the same kind of *poiesis*. Through a philological analysis of the word 'technology' and semantically related terms, this chapter suggests that human creativity (often expressed in the form of poetic language) and materialism are working together in both our current conception of technology and in earlier etymologically and semantically related terms. Establishing and unpacking these interactions provides a conceptual connection between the past and the present. By investigating the ideas which surround our modern understanding of the term 'technology' alongside semantically related terms in Old English this chapter provides a linguistic and conceptual basis on which the rest of this thesis builds.

### **Art, Science and Technology**

The tensions that exist between technology and science have also been the source of much scholarly debate and must be addressed when thinking about the interaction between technology and poetic creativity. Those engaged in the field of the philosophy of technology are continually working to explore and

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6 For further discussion of this aspect of Heidegger's philosophies see Gosetti-Ferencei (2004: 144-50).

conceptualise these tensions.<sup>7</sup> Sismondo (2010: 8) draws attention to the fact that technology has ‘tended to occupy a secondary role’ as it is often treated as the ‘straightforward application of science’. When viewed in this way technology lacks the component of active thought and instead essentially becomes applied science.<sup>8</sup> It is important to note, however, that the association between technology and science has not always existed but is largely a product of nineteenth-century thinking.<sup>9</sup> It is argued by White (1968: 162) that science owes more to technology than technology does to science.<sup>10</sup> There is an awareness that, historically, science and technology have not always been closely related,<sup>11</sup> but in our present culture it cannot be ignored that the two share a close association, affecting, and affected by, one another. While science and technology have seemingly merged to the point of inseparability during the last century, it appears simultaneously that a rift between the humanities and the sciences has been developing. This is perhaps most effectively articulated in C. P. Snow’s 1959 lecture ‘The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution’.

Technology acts as a third component in the relationship between science and art

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7 For major work in the field see Feenberg and Hannay (1995); Sismondo (2010).

8 See Layton Jr (1974: 31). Technology is often viewed as subordinate to science. It is often argued that this view is deeply ingrained in Western culture and relates to social and class divides and a divide between thinkers and artisans see Wilson (2002: 14–16).

9 See White (1968: 161–62). Sismondo (2010: 8) makes the suggestion that technology ‘combines scientific method with a practically minded creativity’, depicting a more harmonious and symbiotic relationship between science and technology. McClellan and Dorn (2006: 1) also identify the assumed dependence of technology on science as ‘an artifact of today’s cultural attitudes imposed without warrant on the historical record’.

10 This suggestion is cited and supported by Sismondo (2010: 94).

11 White (1968: 162) notes that historically technology has been more closely aligned with theology, geography, and the fine arts.

and can be used as a conceptual bridging element between this divide.<sup>12</sup> Ascot (2002: 88) draws attention to the historical innovations which ‘demonstrate that technology has fostered artistic and scientific practices in tandem’. Drawing on the history of technology is an idea with which White is particularly keen to engage, suggesting it as a method which promotes the contemplation of technology as well as its concrete execution (1968: 150–68).<sup>13</sup> By considering the historical relationship between art, science and technology a dialogue is constructed between the humanities and sciences, which promotes a movement away from such fixed disciplinary distinctions.

Studies in the philosophy of technology have been productive in their negotiation between the arts, sciences, and technology, yet there is greater scope to increase the breadth of insights which this line of thinking can provide. While the study of the philosophy of technology is one way in which the divide between the arts and sciences is being bridged, it is possible and necessary to move beyond simply bridging this gap and to develop areas of research which embrace and effectively utilise both ‘cultures’ in order to produce more rounded and dynamic findings. Ecocriticism has been an effectual force in the negotiation between the arts and sciences, not only in terms of its agenda to bring an ecological perspective to the reading of literature, but also in terms of its practical engagement with finding sustainable ways to encourage greater interaction

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12 Ascot (2002: 7) suggests a third culture which is that of ‘being “in between”’ and he aligns this with the concept of technology.

13 Sismondo (2010: 8) makes the suggestion that technology ‘combines scientific method with a practically minded creativity’ depicted a more harmonious and symbiotic relationship between science and technology. McClellan and Dorn (2006: 1) also identify the assumed dependence of technology on science as ‘an artifact of today’s cultural attitudes imposed without warrant on the historical record’.

between the sciences and arts.<sup>14</sup> Where this research seems to dwindle, however, is at the point where science meets technology. Ecocritics have worked to unite the sciences and humanities, and have begun to examine the ways in which technology impacts on the environment. However, so far, ecocriticism has failed to interrogate thoroughly the ways in which technology interacts with poetic creativity in the process of creating textual poetic products. This chapter attempts to address this issue through a linguistic analysis, demonstrating the semantic interconnections between materiality and human intellectual creativity in both the Modern English term ‘technology’ and the related Old English term ‘cræft’. Understanding the way in which these terms are referring not only to networks of material objects, but also exchanges of knowledge, and intellectual creativity provides the starting point for further investigation of the interaction between the poetic and the material in both Anglo-Saxon culture and our experiences today.

It is important to note that the interaction between science, technology, and literature is currently a developing and thriving area of study within medieval studies. Work in this field is beginning to consider the extent to which medieval

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14 An important and recent example of this being Walls’ (2007) chapter on integrating the sciences and humanities. Glen A. Love (1999: 561) acknowledges Snow’s idea of ‘the two cultures’, and promotes ecocriticism as one way in which scholars can respond to this problem. While ecocriticism remains a developing research field, Love acknowledges its beginnings in the works of the late 60s and early 70s, such as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival* (1974). Love not only suggests that ecocriticism can help to bridge the gap between the arts and sciences, but that it has, in fact, been ‘a constant and indispensable accompaniment to the rise of ecocriticism’ (1999: 565). Further mention of the importance of ecocriticism in bridging the divide of ‘the two cultures’ is made by Buell (1999: 74).

literature can be said to engage in a culture of science fiction which in some ways resembles or perhaps challenges our own ideas of this genre.<sup>15</sup> The connections this chapter draws between the relationship between science, technology, and poetry in both Old and Modern English may provide further theoretical support for this work.

### Heidegger and Technology

The philosophies of Martin Heidegger have provided one medium through which some ecocritics have begun to contemplate technology and its impact on the way that human beings exist in the world. Heidegger's work on technology provides an interesting framework for the ecocritic as it challenges the force of modern technological progress and places poetic language at the heart of saving the world. The *OED* defines *techne* as 'an art skill, or craft; a technique, principle, or method by which something is achieved or created. Also: a product of this, a work of art' and similarly Liddell and Scott (1940) provide the definition 'art, skill, cunning of hand'. Heidegger claims to have applied the supposed original Greek meaning to *techne*, associating it with *poiesis*, a bringing-forth or revealing.<sup>16</sup> In his essay 'The Question Concerning Technology' ['Die Frage nach der Technik'] (1953) he writes: 'bringing-forth brings out of concealment into unconcealment. Bringing-forth comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment. This coming rests and moves freely within what we call revealing [*das Entbergen*]' (Heidegger 1993 [1953]: 317-18). Heidegger notes that *techne* is the name not only for the activities and

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15 The growing significance of this area of study is evidenced by a collection of essays to be published in 2014 by King's College London and Boydell and Brewer.

16 For further connotations of this term see *OED* (s.v. *techne*).

skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. In this way the technical and the artistic are brought together in the process of bringing-forth. Heidegger argued that the essence of *being* was a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiesis*. He proposed that poetic language was one way in which humans could allow things to disclose themselves without being forced into meanings and identities that suit 'instrumental values' convenient to human purposes (Garrard 2004: 31).<sup>17</sup> According to Heidegger, technology forced revealing in this demanding way, leading to what he defined as *Ge-stell* [enframing]: 'we now name that challenging claim which gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve: Ge-stell' (Heidegger 1978 [1953]: 301).<sup>18</sup> The over-demand of this revealing leads to the degradation of things to the level where they exist only as potential resources or energy (standing-reserve) for the relentless consumption of human beings. Ramapriya (2007: 228) notes that 'Heidegger's criticism of modern man's domineering attitude toward Nature has paved the way to regard him as the intellectual forerunner of the deep ecology movement'. The notion that the environmental crisis results from the separation of man and Nature connects with Heidegger's idea that an over-use of the mechanical means that 'beings are reduced to what is presentable and makeable' (Ramapriya 2007: 229-30); this also shares many views with that of the deep ecology movement. At the same time Heideggerian philosophy has always remained on the fringes of the ecocritical movement. Heidegger's refusal to denounce the Nazi regime, and the suggestion by some that (in its early development) parts of the regime's philosophies were fuelled by environmentalist

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17 For further discussion of Heidegger and the role of the poet see Bate (2000: 205-84).

18 Heidegger includes the note in his work that *Ge-stell* in ordinary German usage refers to a frame or some sort of apparatus, as well as to the skeleton.



views, has meant Heidegger's philosophy will always draw controversy in its appearance in ecocritical work.<sup>19</sup>

While Heidegger, therefore, has played a significant role in the thinking on technology from an ecocritical perspective, work in this area has tended to accept rather than scrutinise Heidegger's arguments, specifically those built around supposed philological evidence.<sup>20</sup> This acceptance appears unusual considering the complex and problematic position which Heidegger's work holds in environmental thinking, but is potentially due to his merging of philosophical and (apparent) philological arguments. While scholars have tended to focus on the philosophical aspects of Heidegger's work, the evidence which he provides to support these ideas remains unchallenged. The study of language can provide a useful starting-point for understanding a specific concept such as technology, but etymologies alone cannot supply reliable and sufficient evidence for understanding the historical use of a term and its semantic development. A more comprehensive investigation of the historical development of the concept of technology is required in order to fully understand the impact which it has on society today. Linguistic analysis can provide an effective medium through which this investigation can take place, but it must be expanded beyond the word *technology* itself to include semantically related terms which may shed greater light on the conceptual development of what we now call *technology*.

### **The History of *Technology***

It is necessary to engage with the history of technology in order to engage fully

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19 See Garrard (2010 and 2004: 30-32) for further in-depth discussion of the place of

Heidegger in ecocriticism. For an opposing view to that of Garrard see Claborn (2012).

20 An exception is the work of Morton (2010a).

with technology as a concept. This is crucial to understanding how technology has affected humanity's relationship with the environment historically and in the present day. The rest of this chapter explores the semantic history of *technology* and compares the way that it overlaps semantically with that of Old English *cræft*. This analysis uses both the top-down approach of the *Historical Thesaurus of English (HTE)* and the bottom-up approach provided by evidence from Old English *cræft* glosses. A specific case study of the *cræft* glosses found in Aldhelm's prose *De laude Virginitatis* in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale MS 1650 provides further and more detailed evidence for the semantic overlapping of *technology* and *cræft*, before the discussion moves to consider the evidence provided by glosses more widely.

The concept of technology has a complex and dynamic relationship with social change which makes tracing its historical presence and influence a problematic process.<sup>21</sup> The etymology of *technology* can provide a starting point from which to examine the history of both the term and the concept which it denotes. The earliest sense of *technology* as 'a discourse or treatise on art or arts' is from post-classical Latin *technologia*, whose etymon is Hellenistic Greek *τεχνολογία*, denoting 'systematic treatment of grammar' (*OED*). There is uncertainty over the origin of its second sense, that of 'the terminology of a particular art or subject' (*OED*) with the possibility that it derives from French *technologie* (dating from 1656).<sup>22</sup> The fourth sense of *technology*, 'the branch of

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21 See Misa (2004: 7), who notes that Jacob Bigelow's (1831 [1839]) work 'is typically cited as introducing the term [*technology*] into popular English.'

22 The *OED* notes that the other senses of the English word *technology* are not paralleled in French until later, specifically 'discourse or treatise on arts' (1750), 'branch of knowledge dealing with the mechanical arts and applied sciences' (1803), and 'technical know how, machinery or equipment collectively' (mid twentieth century or earlier).

knowledge dealing with the mechanical arts and applied sciences; the study of this' (first attested 1787 and still in use today), is most likely after German *technologie*. Ormiston (1990: 109–11) discusses in detail the problems of trying to define the concept of *technology* by way of its etymology. He suggests that by attempting to offer a new translation for *technology*, we simply find a new definition which still differs from that which we are seeking to define. Ormiston argues that the nature of technology means that it is always 'an issue of itself, always present as and presented through images of itself' (1990: 108). In this way the concept of technology defies definition and this is perhaps why the question 'what is technology?' is such a persistent one. While Ormiston argues that this is the case, he does suggest that some useful insights can be gained from looking at the etymology of *technology* (109–111). This suggestion, however, is concluded with the idea that while etymological analysis of *technology* does not seek to provide a new translation for the concept, it does demonstrate 'the difficulty, if not impossibility, of defining "technology"' (Ormiston 1990: 111). It is, therefore, necessary to move beyond trying to define technology and towards analysing its semantics, engaging with how ideas which surround it and its physical applications have influenced society and the environment as a whole.

The *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (*HTE*) is a crucial resource for tracing semantically connected words and concepts throughout history. The *HTE* entry for *technology* places the concept of *the two cultures* at the most recent end of its timeline and the word *craft* (Old English *cræft*) at its earliest. This indicates that *craft* historically has semantic crossover with the concept that we now refer to as *technology*. *Craft* is a term which, despite undergoing some semantic changes in the last thousand years, is present in Old English (*cræft*). Its semantic connections with *technology* and its seemingly

equally diverse range of meanings indicates that it was likely associated with physical, mental, and social action and interaction and evolved dynamically with society in a similar way to the concept of *technology* today. This wide semantic range suggests that an analysis of *craft*, its contexts and its uses, provides important information regarding the way in which people may have conceptualised their ‘being’ in and ‘being’ with the environment over a thousand years ago. It also suggests that understanding more thoroughly how the concept of *craft* was working in the language and culture of Anglo-Saxon society may improve our understanding of how *technology* functions as a word and concept today. This analysis revitalises a linguistic approach to the philosophy of technology by producing more rigorous evidence than that provided by the likes of Heidegger. This allows for technology, crafting, and physical interaction with the environment through the process of making and transforming to be brought from the peripheries of ecocriticism to the centre while avoiding some of the problems which Heideggerian philosophy raises.

### **Old English *Craeft***

The *OED* provides several definitions for *craft*, the first of which is the Middle English sense of ‘strength, power, might, force’, then ‘intellectual power; skill; art’, ‘a skilful contrivance, a device, artifice, or expedient’, ‘skill or art applied to deceive or overreach’, ‘the learning of the schools, scholarship’, ‘an art trade or profession requiring a special skill and knowledge; *esp.* a manual art, a handicraft’, and others which are based around this latter denotation.<sup>23</sup> While the *Middle English Dictionary (MED)* mainly agrees with the *OED* in terms of Middle

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23 The *Middle English Dictionary* mainly agrees with the *OED* on the early definitions of *craft*, whereby *craft* is used as a term for strength or virtue, ingenuity, and an art of handicraft.

English definitions of *craft*, it also suggests that the term was used to denote ‘the theory of an art, a formal body of teachings, a science (applied)’, suggesting *craft* as being tied lexically to both the practical and the intellectual. The *Dictionary of Old English (DOE)* entry for Old English *cræft* expresses the difficulty of translating the term into Modern English due to its broad range of senses and ‘semantic richness’: it appears to share similar meanings to those of Middle English *craft*, yet its range is broader and contains more subtle variations. Evidence provided by the *Thesaurus of Old English (TOE)* also indicates the broad range of meanings carried by Old English *cræft*, listing the *cræft* under the following subject areas: understanding and intellect; knowledge, learning, erudition; fraud, deceit, trickery; Excellence, virtue, goodness; ability, capacity, power; power, might; trade, calling, craft, aptitude; a work/product of art; implements, tools etc.

The Modern English term *craft* originates in Old English as *cræft*, with cognates throughout the West Germanic languages. The *OED* suggests an ulterior etymology through Old Norse *kraptr* (‘might, strength, power; virtue; superhuman being’ [Zoëga 1910: s.v. *kraptr*]), Norwegian, Swedish and Danish *kraft*. This would connect with Modern English *crave* (Old English *craftian*), but its ulterior etymology is uncertain (cf. *OED*, s.v. *craft*, n., de Vries 1961, s.v. *Krapti*). The original meanings of *cræft* were diverse; the *Dictionary of Old English* notes at the beginning of its entry ‘the senses of the word reach out [. . .] in such a way that it is often not possible to assign an occurrence to one sense in Modern English without arbitrariness and the attendant loss of semantic richness’ (*DOE*). In its Modern English form, *craft* denotes an ‘intellectual power; skill; art’, ‘skill or art applied to deceive or overreach’, ‘an art trade or profession requiring special skill and knowledge’, it also denotes boats and ships

and, in later use, it appears in compounds of ‘*aircraft*’ and ‘*spacecraft*’ (*OED*). The *OED* notes that *art* and *craft* were previously synonymous, but they ‘diverge in their leading modern senses’. *Craft* still carries some sense of ‘intellectual power; skill, art’, but appears to be more closely associated with the practical application of knowledge, with its primary meaning being ‘skill; its display, application, or expression’ (*OED*).

While *craft* and *art*, in Modern English, differ in terms of the former being more closely associated with practical application of knowledge, the concepts of both intellectual knowledge/skill and practicality are combined within meanings of Old English *cræft*. The *DOE* offers the following extensive list of meanings for *cræft* ‘strength, power, might’, ‘medicine/medical recipe’, ‘resources’, ‘skill, ability, dexterity, facility (physical)’, ‘trade, work, livelihood, craft’ ‘an object constructed with ingenuity tool’, ‘world as ingeniously constructed object’, ‘strength, merit, excellence (mental or spiritual)’, ‘vice’, ‘the craft of teaching’, ‘wisdom, knowledge’, ‘prophecy’, ‘cunning, guile’, ‘art, an organised body of knowledge, discipline, one of seven liberal arts’. Such denotations encompass both intellectual and practical power, skill, and strength. The meaning of *cræft* as ‘strength’ or ‘power’ exists in Old English and is the original meaning, which is preserved in other West Germanic languages (*OED*). The meaning survives in the form of Middle English *craft* (also *craufte*, *creft*, *carft*, *craf*) but appears to fade during the sixteenth century. While this meaning survives in Middle English, it is not attested in Older Scots (*DSL-DOST* s.v. *craft*, *n.*).

Throughout its history *cræft-craft* is also consistently associated with practical skill. *Cræft* in its older, practical and physical sense is often associated with creativity and productivity; it is in Old English that *cræft* has its most

diverse forms of this meaning. While in Modern English it still appears in such senses as ‘a branch of skilled work’, or in the compound ‘handicraft’, which denotes ‘manual skill; skilled work with the hands’ (*OED*), its meanings, in this sense, in Old English stretch not only to manual craft but also creativity in the sense of ‘world as ingeniously constructed object’ and ‘God’s skill in the creating and maintaining the world’ (*DOE*). This association with divine creativity is not present within the Middle English form or the Scots. This is indicative of the gradual semantic narrowing of the term from all encompassing connotations of knowledge, creativity, and skill to a narrower sense of handiwork or intellectual craft.

According to the *OED* the chief sense of Modern English *craft* is the negative sense of the term which refers to a ‘skill or art applied to deceive or overreach’. This is a meaning which exists throughout the history of *craft-craft* in both English and Scots, and the *OED* notes that, in its early usage, this sense is only separable by context from that of ‘intellectual power; skill; art’. This meaning of *craft-craft* combines both the intellectual sense of knowledge and also its practical application in the processes of deception.<sup>24</sup> While not identical, these semantic overlappings which occur in the use of the term *craft-craft* are reminiscent of the ambivalence surrounding the concept of technology today, particularly in relation to ecological thinking, whereby the term *technology* becomes associated with a sense of over-use of resources and a dependence on specific manufactured products and the certain destructive processes used in their production. In its Old English form, *craft* and knowledge share a broader association than in Middle or Modern English. In Old English it can denote not only a specific knowledge itself, but also the imparting of knowledge through

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<sup>24</sup> The connotations of *craft* as deception, cunning, trickery are discussed further on pp. 75-78.

teaching, literally ‘the craft of teaching’ (*DOE*). This demonstrates the association between *cræft* and learning which is reflected in the term throughout its history, and particularly in Old English, where it was linked to grammar or rhetoric through the compound *boclīc cræft* (*DOE*).

### **Semantic Connection with Terms of Related Meaning**

The semantic breadth of *cræft-craft* is illustrated by its extensive presence in all three main semantic categories on which the *HTE* is based: the external world, the mind, and society. Within the category of the *external world*, *cræft* appears in the context of *the living world*, *abstract properties*, and the *supernatural*. In terms of the living world Old English *cræft* appears in the context of *abstract properties*, referring to ‘ability in planning or performing’ and ‘ingenuity in constructing’. The earliest attestation of *cræft* in this form appears in c. 888 in Alfred’s translation of Boethius’ *De Consolatio Philosophiae*. This meaning of *cræft-craft* overlaps semantically with Old English *list* and its Middle English descendent *liste*, which is defined in the *OED* as ‘art, craft, cunning’ and by Clark Hall (1987) as ‘art, cleverness, cunning, experience, skill, craft’. The Middle English form *lyste* is attested until the end of the fifteenth century in both the sense of physical skill and intellectual ingenuity or cunning. Both Middle English *craft* and *lyste* share semantic overlapping with *art*. *Art* enters Middle English as a Post-Conquest loan word and is defined in the *OED* as ‘skill in doing something, esp. as the result of knowledge or practice’. *Art* appears to be used contemporaneously with *lyste* and *craft* and by the end of the fifteenth century has entirely replaced *lyste* in this sense. This semantic overlapping of *craft* and *lyst* with *art* demonstrates a linguistic continuity of conveying both the intellectual and practical factors involved in the process of crafting in a single



term. The linguistic evidence, therefore, suggests a continuity of thought from at least the ninth century to the present with regard to the way in which English-speakers conceive the concept of craft. The evidence provided by the semantic relations of *cræft-craft* also suggests that historically the term had a similar depth of meaning as that of *technology* today.

*Cræft* also connects with the semantic field of *cunning* or *deception*. *Cræft* appears in this sense as early as the tenth century and is present all the way through to the end of the seventeenth century. Within this semantic field there does seem to be a shift in meaning from ‘an application of deceit or trickery’ to the act itself, overlapping in terms such as *catch* (dating from the mid-nineteenth century) and *trickeration* (dating from the 1940s). The *HTE* makes clear the overlapping of the semantic field of *cunning/deceit* with those of both *the occult* and *the faculty of knowing*. *Cræft* appears in both these semantic fields both as a simplex and as part of the compound *witchcraft* (OE *wiccecræft*), which in turn overlaps with the semantic field of *the faculty of knowing*, through the concept of magic as an art. The practice of magic required the practical application of a specific knowledge or skill. The *OED* provides one definition of *witchcraft* (*wiccecræft*) as ‘the exercise of supernatural power supposed to be possessed by persons in line with the devil or evil spirits’, indicating the negativity which can be associated with knowledge/power if it is exclusive to a particular group of people. The *HTE* indicates that the term *cunning* itself relates semantically to magic, as the *OED* defines it as a branch of knowledge which in early times was often equal to ‘occult art magic’.<sup>25</sup>

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25 For an interesting discussion of the connection between technology and magic see Gell (1988).

### The Evidence of Old English Glosses

The *HTE* has enabled us to identify *cræft* as the Anglo-Saxon word most closely corresponding in sense to Modern English *technology*, and to identify the semantics *cræft-craft* as a useful way into analysing the nature of technology itself. To understand further the meanings and contexts of *cræft* in Anglo-Saxon society it is necessary to engage in more detail with its presence and contexts in Anglo-Saxon literature. The *Historical Thesaurus of English* works on the basis of a top-down approach in that it begins with categories from Roget's *Thesaurus* and fits words into these categories. While it is a useful and important resource for gaining an understanding of semantic relations between words historically in terms of pre-defined categories, then, it also makes certain assumptions and potentially pigeon-holes some words into conceptual categories which do not acknowledge the full subtlety of meaning. For this reason, it is important to accompany an analysis of semantic relations provided by the *HTE* with a method of linguistic analysis which uses a bottom up approach; glosses provide one medium for this approach. By surveying the range and contexts of Latin words which OE *cræft* glosses it is possible to check the validity of the *HTE* for the Old English period and to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts which *cræft* conveyed by starting with the word itself. Glosses were primarily used as linguistic teaching aids and, therefore, provide significant evidence for analysing the interactions between Latin and Old English (Padel 2001: 209). An analysis of glosses can reveal and highlight the significance of specific senses of *cræft* and provide a clearer understanding of the contexts in which it was used. It is important to remember, however, that as glosses were primarily used to convey the contextual meaning of the Latin words they glossed: they do not work as dictionary definitions and should not, therefore, be treated as such (Hall 2004:

77).

***Cræft* Glosses on Aldhelm's Prose *De laude virginitatis* in Brussels,  
Bibliothèque Royale MS 1650**

A case study is a necessary tool for not only examining *cræft* glosses in a specific text, but also for providing further contextual information for the use of *cræft* as a gloss, which in turn provides more detailed insights into the concept(s) which *cræft* conveyed in Old English. Aldhelm's prose *De laude virginitatis* contains one of the largest collections of *cræft* glosses of any Anglo-Saxon text.<sup>26</sup> This makes it a particularly useful text on which to base a case study.

Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650 contains more glosses for Alhelm's prose *De laude virginitatis* than any other manuscript. While Aldhelm's prose *De laude virginitatis* dates from around the late seventh century, the heavily glossed manuscript Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650 dates from the beginning of the eleventh century. The dating of this manuscript is particularly pertinent to this study as it places the copying of Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650 around a similar time to the copying of the Exeter Book (late tenth century), specific poems from which the subsequent chapters will consider in detail. The copying of both the Exeter Book and Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650 occurs at a roughly similar time to the suggested dating of the Nowell Codex (early eleventh century) which is the only extant manuscript for *Beowulf*. The roughly contemporary dating for the copying of each of these manuscripts makes the *cræft* glosses of Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650 particularly important to building an understanding of the use of technical vocabulary in Anglo-Saxon writing at the time when Old English poetry came into the form in which it now survives and, for the purposes of this

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26 This data is obtained from the *DOE Corpus*.

thesis, specifically its occurrences in reference to the conceptualisation of human and nonhuman interaction.

The presence of such heavy glossing of Aldhelm's prose *De laude virginitatis* in manuscript Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650 indicates the difficulty which later readers potentially had in understanding Aldhelm's work, but also stands as testament to the significance placed on the work in educational practices several centuries after it was produced.<sup>27</sup> By examining the *cræft* glosses of a specific manuscript, it is possible to gain an insight into the extent to which these glosses occurred within a single version of the text. Meanwhile, the *De laude virginitatis* exploited a wide range of Latin vocabulary, rich with both Christian and Classical allusions, offering perhaps the most diverse range of contexts for *cræft* glosses of any surviving Anglo-Saxon glossed text. Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650 also provides a particularly interesting case study as its glosses are written by several different hands, drawing together and editing a wide range of textual traditions; there appear to be four hands in total. Goossens (1974: 45–50) labels these A, B, C, and D, but also uses the label CD as, in places, these two hands are difficult to distinguish from one another. There are a total of thirty two *cræft* glosses (including compounds) in the Brussels, MS 1650 version of the text. Several of the Old English *cræft* glosses are applied to lemmata which are also assigned Latin glosses. The table below shows the range of glosses, and also indicates to which hand they are assigned according to Goossens (1974). It is clear that hand CD is responsible for the largest number of the *cræft* glosses. It is in hands A and C, however, that the majority of Latin glosses appear. In most cases where a Latin gloss is provided, a second, Old English, gloss is also present and is usually in the form of a compound. This adds further weight to the broad

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<sup>27</sup> See Cramer (2010: 48).

semantic range of *cræft* and the sense that it was a widely understood term which glossators could use to convey a variety of meanings. It is also evident that there was not a comparable term in Latin; this is particularly evident from the extensive use of *cræft* as part of Old English compounds. While Latin *ars* (art), *disciplina* (discipline/instruction), *machina* (machine/device; contrivance), *ingenium* (talent, innate quality; invention, clever thought) are used to convey a range of meaning which all relate to one another, Aldhelm either lacked, or chose not to deploy, a universal term such as Old English *cræft* to convey these meanings. Old English is able to convey the same subtlety of meaning as Latin through its use of *cræft* compounds. However, the case of *cræft* in Old English may provide evidence of the closely entwined nature of language and perception of the world. The universal nature of *cræft*, which glosses Latin terms which often differentiate between physical and intellectual creativity, may suggest a more integrated view of creativity and productivity.

Lemma <sup>28</sup>	OE Gloss	H <sup>29</sup>	Latin Gloss	H	2 <sup>nd</sup> OE Gloss	H
<i>disciplina</i> (60)	<i>lareowlicum</i> <i>cræftum</i>	CD	<i>magisterialis</i>	A		
<i>disciplinas</i> (135)	<i>cræftas</i>	CD				
<i>machinam</i> (223)	<i>cræft</i>	CD	<i>ingenium</i>	CD		

28 With line references for gloss in Goossens (1974).

29 H= hand – referring to a particular scribe.

<i>artis</i> (227)	<i>tes &lt;cræftes&gt;</i>	CD				
<i>grammaticorum</i> (294)	<i>stæfcræftiga</i>	CD				
<i>remedium</i> (1010)	<i>læce&lt;cræft&gt;</i>	CD	<i>praemiun</i>	CD		
<i>machinas</i> (1655)	<i>seara cræftas</i>	A, C	<i>insidias</i>	A		
<i>machinas</i> (1667)	<i>cræftas</i>	CD	<i>insidias,</i> <i>structuras</i>	A C		
<i>grammaticorum</i> (2227)	<i>stæfcræftiera</i>	CD	<i>litteratorum</i>	C		
<i>argumentis</i> (2688)	<i>arecræftum</i>	CD				
<i>grammaticorum</i> (2756)	<i>stæfcræftira</i>	CD				
<i>mi[a]chinas</i> (2795)	<i>searacræftas</i>	CD				
<i>cum argumentis</i> (2918)	<i>mid</i> <i>searecræftum</i>	CD			<i>seareþancan</i>	CD
<i>litteraturę</i> (2931)	<i>stæfcræftas</i>				<i>stæfcyste</i>	
<i>machinamentis</i> (2976)	<i>serewungum</i>	CD			<i>searecræftum</i>	CD

<i>rethorica</i> (3014)			<i>locutio</i>	C	<i>þelcræft</i>	C
<i>dialectica</i> (3015)	<i>flitcræft</i>	C				
<i>arithmetica</i> (3016)	<i>getelcræft</i>	C	<i>arithmetica</i> <i>rethorica, locutio</i>	A C	<i>rimcræft,</i> <i>þelcræft</i>	C
<i>geometrica</i> (3017)	<i>eorðcræft</i>	A	<i>geometrica</i>	C	<i>eorþgemet</i>	C
<i>musica</i> (3018)	<i>sangcræft</i>	C	<i>musica disciplina</i>	A		
<i>astronomia</i> (3019)	<i>tungelcræft</i>	A	<i>astronomia</i>	C	<i>tungelcræft.</i>	C
<i>mechanica</i> (3021)	<i>getincgræft</i>	A	<i>mechanica</i>	C	<i>orþancscype</i>	C
<i>medicina</i> (3022)	<i>læcecræft</i>	A				
<i>hierophantarum</i> (3163)	<i>scincrefta</i>	A	<i>hierophantarum</i>	C	<i>scincrefta</i>	C
<i>Ad argumentum</i> (3273)	<i>searecræfte</i>	C	<i>ingenium</i> <i>machinamentum</i>	A C	<i>machinametum</i> (lm.) <i>searecræ</i>	CD
<i>machinę</i> (3334)	<i>searecræftes</i>	CD				

<i>necbroma[n]tia</i> (3941)			<i>mortuorum</i> <i>diuinatio,</i> <i>demonum</i> <i>inuocatio</i>	A  CD	<i>demonum</i> <i>inuocatio</i> (Im.) <i>wicce/cræft</i>	CD
<i>molimina</i> (3975)	<i>searw</i> <i>orþancscipes</i>	B, C CD	<i>ingenia</i>	C	<i>cræft</i>	C, D
<i>magica arte</i> (4682)	<i>te</i> <cræfte>, <i>licu</i> <drylicum>	CD				
<i>luparum</i> (5061)	<i>scræftena</i>	CD	<i>scortarum</i>	CD		
<i>Arithmetiam</i> (5315)	<i>rimcræft</i>	C	<i>causam</i> <i>numerorum</i>	C		
<i>grammaticorum</i> (5348)	<i>stæfcræftigera</i>	CD				

**Figure 2.** Table of *Cræft* Glosses for Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650

The lemmata which *cræft* glosses in Aldhelm's *De laude virginitatis* are representative of the wide semantic range which *cræft* covered. The majority of the glosses present *cræft* as part of a compound, the most common being *searocræft*. *Searocræft* can denote 'treachery' or 'wile' (Bosworth and Toller 1882: s.v.), as well as the more general meaning of 'an art' or 'skill', and the physical or instrumental meaning of 'a machine or engine'. It is used as a gloss for *argumentum* in relation to the enemies of God, and *machina*, in the context of 'the machinations of heretics' (Lapidge and Herren 1979: 93) performed against



Athanasius. In these cases, the sense of *searocraft* is that of wile and treachery, and the intellectual creativity of plotting. *Searocraft* also appears as a gloss for *argumentum* (Gwara 2001: 439) in the context of the emperor's attempts to deceive three young brothers who had been taken in by Babilas. In this instance 'argumentum' is also glossed by 'þancan' (thought) (Bosworth and Toller 1882: s.v.).<sup>30</sup> This further emphasises the sense of intellectual, rather than physical, creativity.

*Searocraft* does appear as a gloss for *machinamentum*, connoting a more physical and mechanical sense, it appears in the context of 'great instruments of punishment' (Lapidge and Herren 1979: 95).<sup>31</sup> *Searocraft* also appears as a gloss for *machinas* in the context of the action of a 'clibani globos' (oven) described as 'ambustas malleoli machinas' (Gwara 2001: 255) (the scorching engines of incineration) (Lapidge and Herren 1971: 78). Three youths are to be placed inside this oven as punishment for their refusal to worship the statue of the Chaldean tyrant. In this instance the sense of *searocraft* as a gloss for *machinas* is ambiguous as it can refer to the oven as a machine of incineration and destruction, but in a more abstract sense it can also refer to the treachery of the machine, attaching the human characteristics of wile and treachery to the machine as instrument of torture. This displaces some of the characteristics of the human perpetrator onto the instrument of torture, demonstrating a convergence between human and nonhuman. The machine of the oven becomes

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30 This case is interesting as the nominative singular *þanc* would be expected. In this case *þancan* must be a dative plural showing collapse of unstressed vowels and final -n rather than -m.

31 This is also closer to the etymological meaning as presented in Bosworth and Toller (1898), s.v. *searu*, *searo* 'Goth. sarwa; ... O. H. Ger. *saro* ; *gi-sarwi*, *-sarwa lorica*, *gi-sarwi*, *-sarwa lorica*, *armatura*, *arma*: Icel. *sörvi* a necklace; armour.'

an extension of the tyrant's character, as well as the means by which his desire for torture can be physically enacted.

While *searocræft* is the most common form of *cræft* gloss for Aldhelm's prose *De laude virginitatis*, *cræft* also appears as a gloss in several other compound forms. These most commonly refer to academic disciplines and learning; *stæfcræft* ('grammatica', grammar), *þelcræfte* ('rethorica', rhetoric), *flitcræfte* ('dialectica', dialectics/logic), *rimcræfte/getelcræft* ('arethemetica', arithmetic), *eorðcræft* ('geometrica', geometry), *sangcræft* ('musica', music), *tungelcræft* ('astronomia', astronomy), *getincgcræft* ('mechanica', mechanics) (Gwara 2001; 457). These compounds demonstrate the use of *cræft* as a generic term for a discipline or knowledge, while also carrying the sense of the practice of the discipline; this being the knowledge in action. It shows both the breadth of the semantic range of *cræft*, but also the extent to which it was closely associated with both the creativity of intellectual knowledge and that of physical action.

One of the most common *cræft* glosses in Aldhelm's text is the glossing of *grammatica* with the compound *stæfcræft*. These glosses appear in various manuscript versions of Aldhelm's text, and although the glosses must often be textually related, the frequency of their copying suggests that *stæfcræft* was a widely acknowledged term in the context of translating *grammatica*.<sup>32</sup> *Cræft* appears as part of compounds glossing the discipline of grammar, grammarians themselves, and the physical product of the written word.<sup>33</sup> The occurrences show an interesting relationship between lemma and gloss in some cases. An

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32 Specifically London, British Library MS Royal 7 D.xxiv, fols. 82–168: text s. x1 (ca. 930); London, British Library MS Royal 6 B. vii: text, gll. s. xi2 (ca. 1078) Exeter; Brussels, Bib. Roy. MS 1650 (*olim* 1580): text s. xiii; gll. s. xi1, Canterbury, Abingdon.

33 For specific *grammatica* glosses see Gwara (2001: 60, 334, 414, 456).

example of this is where *grammaticorum* appears as a substantive adjective in the phrase ‘grammaticorum regulas’ (the rules of the learned [men]), and is glossed by the adjectival form *stæfcræftigra* ‘skilled in letters’ (Bosworth and Toller 1882: s.v.). This shows how glosses were sometimes used to convey a very literal sense of the lemmas which they glossed, alongside other cases where clearly conveying a general meaning was given priority. *Grammaticus* comes from Greek *γράμμα* (letter), which indicates that its meaning in this context is ‘lettered/literate’. The glossator chose to retain this literal meaning of *grammaticus* in the use of *stæfcræftigra*. It is interesting to note that in this instance the Latin text uses *grammaticorum* rather than the more common construction *ars grammatica*. This suggests that in the Latin the quality of being skilled in letters could be expressed without an explicit term referring to skill or craft, such as *ars*, being used. The presence of *cræft* compounded with *stæf* in the Old English gloss suggests that it was necessary to specify the meaning of skill or ability. The glossing of *grammaticorum* with *stæfcræftigra* in this instance also demonstrates an equal level of emphasis placed on both the intellectual creativity of writing, and the physical action of forming letters. This adds further weight to the evidence that *cræft* was a term which encompassed both the intellectual and physical aspects of a particular creative process.

*Cræft* also appears as a simplex denoting physical creative production, for example in the context of the structure of honeycomb constructed by bees: ‘multiformem fauorum machinam angulosis et opertis cellulis construunt’ (Gwara 2001: 52–53) (they construct the multi-dimensional edifice of the honey-comb with angular and hidden cells) (trans. Lapidge 1979: 61). Lapidge translates ‘machinam’ here as ‘edifice’ (Lapidge 1979: 61), emphasising the physical structure to which *machinam* refers. The gloss of *cræft*, however, conveys both

the sense of the physical building processes of the structure and its intellectual ingenuity. Further weight is added to this by the context of this passage in which the bees' construction of honeycomb is likened to the dedication and strength of mind required to read and interpret scripture. This trope of linking physical construction processes to the concepts of interpretative reading and the production of written text is one which exists in a wider context than just the *crefti* glosses. Writing appears both as a technological phenomenon and as an intellectual skill in a wide range of Anglo-Saxon texts in both Old English and Anglo-Latin, and is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Aldhelm's use of technological vocabulary also extends to his discussion of virginity which forms the central theme of the text. Aldhelm contemplates the relationship between marriage and virginity through a series of metaphors which draw heavily on technological processes. He considers how Jerome observes that virginity itself is begotten through marriage.

Unde quidam catholicorum floridam virginitatis gloriam  
 explanans de iugalitatis stirpibus oriundam sub figura tropi ita  
 eleganter exorsus *lego*, iniquit, *de terra aurum, de spina rosum, de  
 conca margaritam*. (Gwara 2001: 93)

(Whence one of the Catholic fathers [i.e. Jerome], explaining  
 that the flowering glory of virginity arises from the root of  
 marriage, through the agency of a metaphor began elegantly as  
 follows: 'I select gold from the earth, the rose from the thorn,  
 the pearl from the shell) (Lapidge 1979: 65)

Aldhelm then goes on to list his own metaphors for the begetting of virginity

through marriage and the relationship between the two. These metaphors begin by drawing on raw materials and precious metals,

Non enim splendida meri argenti species turpiter deformatur,  
 quamuis obrizum rutilantis auri metallum praeferatur, neque  
 marmoris candidi uenustas detrimentum decoris patitur, cum  
 formosior rubentis gemmae pulchritudo praedicetur. (Gwara  
 2001: 96)

(For the radiant beauty of pure silver is not shamefully debased,  
 even though the refined metal of shining gold is preferred; nor  
 does the gloss of dazzling white marble suffer any loss of  
 splendour, though the loveliness of the red-glowing jewel is  
 praised as more beautiful.) (Lapidge 1979: 65)

Aldhelm then extends these metaphors to crafting processes, considering how woollen threads of fibres do not become objects of contempt, just because royal garments made from silk are considered more splendid. He also refers to the specific processes of crafting objects, stating that the utility ('*commoditas*') of the hammer or the holding power ('*tenacitas*') of rusty scissors are not scorned, just because the ornaments '*ex isdem praefatis ferri instrumentis confecta et fabricata*' (which are produced and forged by the aforementioned instruments of iron) (Lapidge 1979: 65) are preferred. Aldhelm's metaphors for the begetting of virginity and its relationship to marriage demonstrate his interest in the tools and processes required in the forging of beautiful and ornamental objects. What is particularly interesting about these examples is that they elide the involvement of human beings, while at the same time the objects involved in these crafting

processes and the crafted ornamental objects themselves imply the presence of human worker and users. The direct presence of human figures (e.g. the iron workers and the kings or queens) in these metaphors carry a hierarchical ordering maintained by their social statuses.

Aldhelm's references to technological vocabulary in his metaphors for marriage and virginity nonhuman objects do not carry these same markers of hierarchical structuring. Aldhelm's inclusion of technological processes is reminiscent of the poems which form his collection of *enigmata* discussed in the following chapter and which date from around 685 to 705, the same twenty year period that has been suggested as the most likely time of composition for his prose *De laude virginitatis*.<sup>34</sup> Through his *Enigmata*, Aldhelm explores the idea of Creation by way of contemplation of individual aspects of the created world and heavens. While Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, like other poems in the Anglo-Saxon riddle tradition, collectively contemplate divine Creation as a whole, they do so through exploration and manipulation of everyday technological processes, everyday interactions between humans and nonhumans which result in the production of another crafted object. Aldhelm's work, in both his *De Laude Virginitatis* and the *Enigmata*, demonstrates the notion that drawing attention to, and bringing to the fore in literary contemplation, the technological processes with which human beings engage in order to produce new crafted materials and objects (for ornamentation, necessity, or the improvement of daily living conditions) can help in the conceptualisation of more abstract concepts such as the divine creative ability of God or the notion of virginity. The idea of technological production, therefore, holds an important position in the conceptualisation of more abstract ideas in Anglo-Saxon literature, as is demonstrated by both the specific *craft*

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<sup>34</sup> See Lapidge and Herren (1979: 12-15).

glosses of the prose *De laude virginitatis*, and Aldhelm's wider use of technological vocabulary. The final section of this chapter examines wide occurrences of *cræft* glosses, considering further the way in which the term interacts within Old English lexis and how these associations affect the conceptualisation of human and nonhuman interaction.

### **Wider Occurrences of *Cræft* Glosses**

The lemma most commonly glossed by *cræft* is *ars*, suggesting support for the statement provided by the *OED* that *art* and *craft* were once extremely closely related. The *Thesaurus of Old English* (*TOE*) also supports this suggestion, listing *cræft* as the only term for a product or work of art. Evidence provided by the *TOE* (gained from a search for Modern English *art*) also indicates that almost all Old English terms which describe a specific type of art or ornamentation seem to be in the form of a *cræft* compound. In terms of glosses for *ars*, *cræft* appears to be used broadly to cover the wide semantic range of *ars*. When glossing *ars* specifically, *cræft* is rarely present in the form of a compound, this differs from other lemmata which *cræft* glosses which are frequently presented in compound forms. It occurs as a gloss for specific forms of art such as medical practice in the form of *ars medicus* (the art of the doctor/physician), and occurs several times in *Ælfric's Colloquy* (early eleventh century) as a gloss for *ars* in the sense of cooking and the preparation of food (specifically ll. 176, 188, 192) (Garmonsway 1947: 35-37). The lemma *medicina* is also glossed by *cræft*, but most frequently by the compounded form *læcecræft*, which translates into Modern English as the 'art of the physician' (Clark Hall 1984: s.v. *læcecræft*). In these senses *cræft* seems to carry the positive qualities that are associated with *ars* as both intellectual knowledge and practical skill. The presence of *cræft* (simplex) as a gloss for the

work of a certain skilled person (e.g. a cook or physician) and as a compounded form in the case of the thing produced by that skilled person (e.g. *læcecraft* for a remedy) could suggest that glossators were associating the term *cræft* (on its own) with people and their knowledge or skills, rather than with the results of those skills being exercised; these appear to be glossed more often by *cræft* as a compound, for instance in the case of *læcecræft*. While *ars* seems to be glossed by the simplex, compound forms of *cræft* gloss other Latin terms for specific disciplines. Sometimes the Latin terms are also based on *ars*: for example, the Latin *ars plumaria* (glossed by *uuyndecreft*) uses *ars* to indicate the skill of *plumaria*, literally *of/belonging to feathers*, but here in the sense of embroidery. (-)Cræft is also used to denote disciplines where *ars* is not used; however, the lemmata *arithmetica*, *geometrica*, *musica*, *dialectica*, *astronomia* are all glossed by compound forms of *cræft*: *rimcræft*, *eorðcræft/eorþgemet*, *sangcræft*, *flitcræft*, *tungelcræft*. Their Latin lemmata, however, are not *ars* compounds, suggesting that the glossators were specifically choosing *cræft* to convey the meaning ‘the skill/art/knowledge/discipline of ...’. The range and quantity of these compounds indicates that *cræft* was widely used and understood in this sense.<sup>35</sup> *Cræft* also glosses *ars* in lists of skilled workers, often as a generalised or collective term for such skills or people who possess these skills. There appear to be synonyms for *ars* in Latin, such as *talenta* and *disciplina*, both of which have several occurrences and are glossed by simplex *cræft*. This is evidence that Old English glossators felt that *cræft* was a suitable word to convey the meanings of several different, yet closely related, Latin lemmata, denoting both intellectual

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35 There are also adjectival forms which follow this pattern, for instance that *grammaticorum/litteratorum* are both glossed by *stæfcræftigra*, referring to the qualities of grammar or the concept of learning.



knowledge and practical skill.

For certain lemmata which appear to refer to manual labour or physical skill a variety of Old English glosses are used. *Artifex*, which occurs several times in the sense of ‘worker’ or ‘artist’ is glossed by *cræftiga*. It is also glossed by *wyrhta*, which means ‘worker’, ‘maker’, ‘creator’ ‘labourer’, ‘artist’ or ‘wright’ (Clark Hall 1984: s.v. *wyrhta*). *Opifex* is a variant of *artifex* and is also glossed by both *cræftiga* and *wyrhta*. While *artifex* can have the meaning ‘artist’, it also occurs in the sense of ‘deceiver’, but apparently not in the corpus studied: none of the glosses for *artifex* appear to connote ‘deceiver’. Glossators may have been keen to make a distinction between the physical and creative connotations of *artifex* and the intellectual creativity and skill connoted by lemmata such as *machina*, *ingenium*, and *argumentum*. These lemmata, which have more cerebral connotations of skill, knowledge, and creativity, were more frequently glossed by OE terms which connect semantically with the potential for deception and cunning.

*Machina* (translated by Lewis and Short [1879] as ‘a machine, i.e. any artificial contrivance for performing work; a device, plan contrivance’) is a particularly significant lemma because, like *cræft*, it is glossed by many other OE terms including: *dofung* (stupidity), *searocræftas* (skill, cleverness, cunning or deceit), *wlite* (brightness), *græft* (apparatus, frame).<sup>36</sup> It appears a couple of times glossed by the Latin *ingenium* in the glosses to Aldhelm’s *De laude virginatatis* in Brussels, Royal Library, MS 1650, and on these occasions it is also glossed by *cræft*. The *DOE* places these occurrences under the meaning of ‘an object constructed with ingenuity, a tool’, suggesting positive connotations for the application of intellectual skill in this case. *Machina* also appears in the line

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36 The *DOE*, however, suggests that this may be a scribal error for *cræft*.

‘factorque machine mundi’ in the seventh-century hymn *Summe Deus Clementie*, glossed by *wryhta cræftas middaneard*, referring to ‘the world as ingeniously created object’ (Gnues 1968: 29). This also associates *cræft* with the positive attributes of intellectual skill, creativity, and divine potency.

*Cræft* is also used as a gloss for terms associated with magic. *Magica arte* is glossed by *cræfte*, in the Brussels *De laude* manuscript but is accompanied by the adjective *drylicum*. The compound *gealdorcræftas* is also used as a gloss for lemmata referring to magic, specifically *veneficium*. While *gealdorcræft* usually refers to ‘the art of enchantment’ (*DOE* s.v. *gealdorcræft*), the *DOE* notes that it erroneously glosses the person performing such art, i.e. a sorcerer. This demonstrates the importance of treating the evidence of glosses within their own context. At the same time it may also be indicative of the frequent use of *cræft* in three different ways; as a term which denotes a particular art/skill/form of knowledge, the practical application of specific skills, and the people who apply or put into action those skills.

Although the Old English word *cræft* can have connotations of ‘cunning, guile’ and even ‘vice’ (*DOE*: s.v. *cræft*) it does not seem to be associated with *machina* in this sense. The Old English verb *sierwan* glosses the verb *machinor* several times in the Aldhelm’s prose *De laude virginitatis*. The verb *sierwan* is much more clearly semantically aligned with deceiving, plotting, and ambushing, than the more ambiguous noun *searo/u* which is found occasionally compounded with *cræft* as a gloss for *machina*. The Old English riddles of the Exeter Book demonstrate the use of *cræft* with both the associated meanings of cunning/deceit/guile as well as that of skill, technical process or ability. Like Aldhelm’s prose *De laude virginitatis* and his *Enigmata*, the Exeter Book riddles also explore ways in which everyday technological processes can be used in the

contemplation of more abstract ideas and vice versa. This is due, in part, to their ‘innate will to deceive’ (Niles 2006: 101) and their ability to simultaneously obscure and reveal the objects which they describe.<sup>37</sup> There are eleven occurrences of *cræft* (often as a compound) referring to a particular skill, ability, or technological process and four occurrences of *cræft* meaning cunning, deception or trickery. The uses of *cræft* in the Exeter Book riddles are themselves sometimes ambiguous or deceptive. Riddle 73 refers to a ‘þeofes cræfte’ (thief’s deception or skill) in the context of a lance/spear or battering ram which breaks forth ‘þæt ær frið hæfde’ (what before had peace). It is unclear whether it is the physical skill of a thief or a thief’s deception which is being invoked here. This example demonstrates how the Exeter Book riddles play with assumptions about the way in which humans interact with nonhumans through technological processes, playing off the ambiguous nature of this technical vocabulary which allows for such ambiguity of meaning, and drawing closer those meanings of practical skill and deceit. Neville (2011) makes a strong argument for what she calls ‘the implement trope’, i.e. the way in which the relationship between human user and a tool or implement is conveyed in the riddle texts, enables the challenging and undermining of human hierarchical relationships such as those between lord and thegn or master and servant, allowing the ‘unthinkable’ idea of mutual power sharing to be raised within the confines of metaphorical and paradoxical poetic phrasing. In Neville’s argument the deceptive nature of the riddles allows the technological processes described in the riddle texts to become metaphors for hierarchical relationships. The relationship between technological

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37 Niles (2006 101-140) discusses how the deceptive play of the riddle texts can be better understood if we accept that the riddles must be answered ‘in their own tongue’ rather than insisting on Modern English solutions.

craft and deception also manifests itself in the Exeter Book riddles through the theme of creation. Riddle 33 (usually solved as iceberg) states that the object speaks ‘searocræftig’ (with cunning skill) ‘ymb hyre sylfre gesceaft’ (about its creation), before delivering an internal riddle drawing on the process of icebergs being formed by water and water being produced by the melting of the same icebergs.

Is min modor    mægðā cynnes  
 þæs deorestan,    þæt is dohtor min  
 eacen up liden.<sup>38</sup> (ll. 9-11a)

(The dearest of womankind is my mother who is my daughter  
 grown upwards)

The ‘searocræft’ of the iceberg’s creation riddle derives from the way it describes the process by which it is created. The phrase *searocræftig* in the context of Riddle 33, therefore, conveys both the physical process by which the iceberg is formed and the nature of the riddle itself to both obscure and reveal the object in question.<sup>39</sup> Exeter Book Riddle 60 (often solved as reed pen) does not make use of the word *cræft* or any *cræft* compounds, but draws on the same interaction between intellectual skill/trickery and the physical crafting of an object, but in

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38 Old English version of both this riddle and all other quotations from Exeter Book riddle texts are from Krapp and Dobbie (1936). All further quotations from riddles of the Exeter Book will be referenced simply by line number. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

39 For further discussion of this riddle and particularly the riddle within a riddle section (ll. 9-11a) see Beechy (2010: 60-63). See also Lees and Overing (2001: 104).

the context of the production of a written text. Riddle 60, discussed in detail in the following chapter, expresses a sense of wonder regarding the physical and intellectual skill involved in the crafting of a writing implement and the subsequent written text it produces.

### **Conclusions**

This analysis of *cræft* glosses has suggested that the Old English term *cræft* carried connotations of both physical and intellectual production, creativity, and knowledge. The work of Heidegger outlined above centred upon his interpretation of technology as connected to the original Greek meaning of *techne* (bringing-forth), through which he claimed that the technical and the artistic are brought together in the act of bringing-forth. But he failed to provide substantive evidence of this concept in action. A close analysis of the Old English term *cræft* provides more rigorous evidence to suggest a connection between humans and nonhumans conveyed by the technical processes denoted by Old English *cræft*. The complexities and problematic nature of defining the modern concept of technology have also been outlined above. The case of Old English *cræft* seems to share some of the same complexities to those of the Modern English term *technology*. The semantic relations and gloss evidence suggest that *cræft* was a term with a broad semantic range. It is found in a variety of contexts and can denote a specific form of knowledge or art, the practical application of this knowledge or art, and also the person/people who apply and put into action that knowledge. In this way *cræft* appears to permeate into the English language in a very similar way to *technology* today, particularly as it is understood by Gell

(1988: 6).<sup>40</sup> Old English *cræft*, like *technology*, is not only a concept which connotes both the physical and intellectual aspects of a particular production process, but it is also embedded in social contexts.

The interrelation between physical and intellectual productivity conveyed by Old English *cræft* can perhaps more easily be understood when approached from an actor-network perspective. John Law (2009: 141) notes:

Actor-Network Theory is a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside of the enactment of those relations.

The crucial point here is that there are no divides between the social and technical; they are intertwined in such a way that they cannot be separated or fully distinguished. Old English *cræft* is a term which encompasses such mutual interaction between the social and technical. Understanding *cræft* as a term which conveys the interrelated state of these concepts provides an insight into the way that people conceptualised their interactions with the world, particularly through processes of production. In his outline of ANT, Latour (2005: 39) states

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40 That is the term *technology* refers to the tools needed to create an object, the raw materials from which it is produced, and the knowledge of the technical process of production. As well as extending further to the knowledge of how to produce the correct tools for production of an object, and the social networks which provide a medium for the transmission of the technical knowledge.

that actants are definable as mediators, rather than intermediaries. Latour defines an *intermediary* as anything which ‘transports meaning or force without transformation’, whereas *mediators* ‘transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of elements they are supposed to carry’ (2005: 39). In this way, Latour, and more widely the approach of ANT, promotes the idea that all actants involved in the construction and maintenance of any entity are equals as they each have a transformative effect, whether they are corporeal or noncorporeal. This transformative effect can be conceptualised as ‘agency’. ANT, therefore, states that all entities in any given network possess agency, rather than agency being attributed to only a select few. Both the denotations and connotations associated with *craft* convey this sense of agency and the interrelationship between the physical and intellectual carried by *craft* suggests a mediatory rather than intermediary conceptualisation of actors involved in processes defined as *craft*.

The connotations of knowledge conveyed by Old English *craft* and Modern English *technology* are also significant. The subsequent chapters in this thesis explore further the idea of knowledge and its connections to both poetry and material objects. Establishing these connections between intellectual knowledge and creativity and physical creativity and interactions which resonate between both Old English *craft* and Modern English *technology* suggests models of thinking about these concepts which can talk to one another across this temporal space. This indicates fundamental connections which human beings have been making between these concepts through language, for over a thousand years. Understanding these semantic connections provides a bridge between past and present, opening doors for further exploration.

The next chapter takes the craft of writing as a case study and examines

in greater detail the dynamic relationship between intellectual and physical creativity which is conveyed in this particular craft. Exploring the interaction between intellectual and physical creativity at work in the processes of writing provides insights into the interactions between human beings and nonhumans through the medium of poetry. This enables an interrogation of the role that poetry plays in such interactions, and establishes these ideas in relation to Anglo-Saxon poetic texts. Examining in closer detail how the technological process of writing is explored and expressed in Anglo-Saxon poetic texts facilitates further critique of Heidegger's ideas on the poetics of dwelling, enabling the development of less problematic ecocritical readings. Investigating the process of writing as it is self-consciously constructed in Anglo-Saxon poetic texts also provides a base from which to examine how these interactions have developed across time.



## Chapter Two

### The Cræft of Writing

Building on the evidence provided by *cræft* glosses, this chapter develops further insights into the interaction between human and nonhuman by investigating the creative and material processes of writing in Anglo-Saxon culture. A closer examination of the technological processes of writing and their wider contexts provides a detailed analysis of how this particular creative network mediated interactions between human and nonhuman. The evidence of *cræft* glosses provided by the previous chapter suggests that *cræft* was a term which carried connotations of both the physical and intellectual process of the production of an artefact, through interactions between both human and nonhuman entities. Examining the particular process (or *cræft*) of writing in detail provides further insights into the ways in which the interaction between human and nonhuman was poetically explored through the merging of material and intellectual creativity.

This chapter engages specifically with the Old English and Anglo-Latin riddle corpus, focusing on the riddles that engage with objects of the scriptorium or the processes of reading and writing. The self-conscious awareness of the process of writing and its tools has a significant presence within Anglo-Saxon poetry, and forms the subject matter of several Old English and Anglo-Latin riddles. The riddles engage with the integrated notions of intellectual and physical interaction which I explored in the previous chapter in relation to Old English *cræft* and the modern concept of technology. They provide one medium through which Anglo-Saxon people may have conceptualised and made sense of

the interactions taking place in the environments of which they were part. In this way, the riddles act as a model of knowledge. This chapter argues that the riddles offer alternatives to hierarchical and linear structuring of the interactions between objects. Instead, they focus on moments of exchange, engagement and interaction that often lack a definable beginning and end, but rather are ongoing and recurring. In this way the riddles can be as a rhizomatic ontology as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari in their 1980 work *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>1</sup>

Analysing the craft of writing as presented in Anglo-Saxon poetic texts also allows for further interrogation of Heidegger's ideas concerning the significance of poetic language as a medium through which humans can and *do* 'save the earth' (Bate 2000: 283). While Heidegger's philosophies have been both useful and controversial within the field of literary ecology, Anglo-Saxon literary culture provides one medium through which his work can be reassessed in terms of its relevance to the shaping of literary ecology. Little work in Anglo-Saxon literary studies has drawn on Heidegger, with the exception of Orton, Wood, Dailey and Lees (2007: 30-31) who consider Heidegger's ideas on building and dwelling in their discussion of the Bewcastle monument and Dailey (2006: 203-13) who considers ideas of dwelling in *Beowulf*, again in relation to Heidegger's ideas on building and dwelling. Recent interest in the use of modern critical theory as a means to approach medieval literature has also produced some research tracing modern theoretical approaches and philosophies (including those of Heidegger) back to models developed in the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> While this work is significant particularly in the way that it contemplates models of knowledge that speak across time – from the so called Middle Ages to today – it

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1 I discuss Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome in further detail on pp. 107-113.

2 See particularly Cole and Vance Smith (2010).

has tended to remain abstract. This chapter crosses the boundary between philosophy and literary studies to examine how theoretical models of knowledge are active in the poetic constructs of the riddles.

Recent years have seen a rise in work which crosses the various disciplinary boundaries within medieval studies. Such work has included explorations of the interaction between literature and archaeology, as is perhaps most extensively demonstrated in Hines (2004) *Voices in the Past: English Literature and Archaeology*, as well as the combined use of historical and literary sources as is the case in the methodology of Hooke's (2010) *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: Literature, Lore and Landscape*. These studies demonstrate the new insights which can be gained by putting both literary and non-literary sources into dialogue with one another. While the work of Hines and Hooke offers much in terms of both Anglo-Saxon landscape and material culture studies, there is also further scope for forwarding our understanding of Anglo-Saxon poetry through the use of such cross-disciplinary study. This chapter draws on literary, theoretical, and archaeological sources and insights in order to reconsider the way in which interactions between human beings and nonhumans are viewed in the riddles through the medium of the technology of writing and its surrounding material culture. This chapter also engages with the interaction between Old English and Anglo-Latin literatures in Anglo-Saxon England, an area suffering from a lack of research until fairly recently.<sup>3</sup> Failing to understand

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3 See Orchard (2005); Bitterli (2009). Neville (1999: 181) also discusses Old English riddles in the wider context of the Latin riddle tradition, arguing that many of the rhetorical features of the Anglo-Latin riddles can be found in Old English texts. Neville does, however, observe that while there is evidence of technical manuals for writing in Latin, there is no such comparable work in the vernacular (181); for further details on the differences between the production of texts in Latin and Old English see O'Brien O'Keeffe (1990: 3-5). For a further

and appreciate the interaction between these literatures has previously led to a fissure which partly aligns with the divides between the literary and historical, and the atheroetical and philosophical, which work such as that of Hines (2004), Hooke (2010), and Cole, Vance and Smith (2010) has begun to address. Orchard's (1995) *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* and Lockett's (2011) *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* are both important examples of the potential which exploring the interactions of Old English and Latin texts, as well as demonstrating the potential that breaking down divides between the philosophical/theological and the atheoretical can have for Anglo-Saxon studies. This chapter considers the interaction between both Old English and Anglo-Latin riddles. As a result, where the phrase 'Anglo-Saxon riddles' is used, this refers to riddles composed in both Old English and Anglo-Latin.

### **The Context of the Anglo-Saxon Riddles**

Symphosius' fourth- or fifth-century collection of 'enigmata' was an important influence on, and major source of inspiration for, the later Anglo-Latin riddle writers, propelling the continuation of the riddle tradition into Anglo-Saxon culture and later the sphere of the written vernacular language. The enigmata of Symphosius particularly influenced the composition of Aldhelm of Malmesbury's eighth-century collection of enigmata. While Aldhelm followed the one hundred riddle composition and hexameter structure of Symphosius, the tone of his collection differed significantly. Aldhelm acknowledges Symphosius in the preface to his work, but whereas Symphosius at least claimed to have composed

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brief discussion of the lack of comparative work between Anglo-Latin and Old English riddles see Igarashi (2002: 336-51).

his riddles spontaneously for the amusement of guests at parties, Aldhelm's collection is much more bookish in style. While Aldhelm states in his preface that his theme 'will be the entirety of creation visible and invisible' (Lapidge and Rosier 1985: 63), he also acknowledges in his prologue that the process of composing his enigmata will allow him the opportunity to master his poetic ability, so that he may later write of greater things (Lapidge and Rosier 1985: 70-71). The implication here is that Aldhelm feels that he must learn to write about the world before he can write about God. Aldhelm's work began to inspire his contemporaries as soon as it was produced. In the eighth century, Tatwine composed his own collection of enigmata emulating those of Aldhelm, but concluded this as forty rather than one hundred enigmata. Tatwine's riddles survive in two extant manuscripts.<sup>4</sup> In both these manuscripts Tatwine's collection was extended shortly after by another writer named Eusebius,<sup>5</sup> bringing the collection to one hundred. Both of the extant manuscripts containing the enigmata of Tatwine and Eusebius also contain the enigmata of both Aldhelm and Symphosius, suggesting a strong intertextuality within the Anglo-Latin riddling tradition.<sup>6</sup> Unlike their Latin sources, however, the riddles of the Exeter Book (eleventh century) are presented without their solutions and survive in only one extant manuscript.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Extant manuscripts containing Tatwine's enigmata are Cambridge University Library, MS Gg. 5. 35; London, British Library, MS Harley 12, see Gneuss (2001).

5 Thought to be the same Hwætberht the abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow (from 716 to around to middle of the eighth century) to whom Bede gave the name of 'Eusebius' (Lockett 2011: 261).

6 See Lockett (2011: 261).

7 It should not, however, be assumed that the number of manuscript copies of texts is evidence of the extent to which they circulated.

It is only in recent years that scholarly work has begun to thoroughly engage with the Anglo-Latin riddles and specifically their connections with those written in the vernacular. A result of this previous failure to recognise this intertextuality is that discussion of themes such as natural history are often reserved for the Latin riddles, which are more commonly associated with the ‘intellectual milieu of monastic literature and Latin book-learning’ (Bitterli 2009: 5).<sup>8</sup> A significant proportion of the work on the vernacular riddles is dedicated to viewing these texts in terms of other poetry genres in the vernacular tradition, most notably the so called ‘heroic’.<sup>9</sup> Previous work on Anglo-Saxon riddles collectively, particularly those concerning the tools of reading and writing, has firmly focused on the effect of the genre on human processes of learning and conceptualisation of the world.<sup>10</sup> Neville (1999: 190-96) discusses the riddle tradition in relation to human/nonhuman relationships, but suggests that the formal structure, particularly in the riddles of Aldhelm, acts as a restraining force against the terrors of the natural world. Neville argues that by locking the natural world in the bounds of such a rigid metrical structure, ‘enclosing it within rhetorical figures and literary illusions’ and limiting it to the one hundred riddle structure, Aldhelm ‘reduces the natural world to human scale and human terms’ (1999: 195). While this is an important reading of the function of the genre and the way that it mediates the interaction between human and nonhuman, a re-examination of this interaction from a perspective which does

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8 For work on the riddles of Aldhelm in the context of natural history see Cameron (1985). Orchard (1994) provides detailed discussion of Aldhelm’s work in the context of an Anglo-Latin learned tradition. See also O’Brien O’Keeffe (1990: 47-76).

9 Problems associated with the idea of genre in Old English poetry are discussed in greater detail below, see p. 94.

10 See Lapidge (1985: 62).

not prioritise a human-centred interpretation allows the riddles to be viewed as a genre which embrace interaction between human and nonhuman rather than seeking a form of restraint.

The Anglo-Latin enigmata of Aldhelm were often presented accompanied by their solution, whereas the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book do not carry obvious solutions in their manuscript context. Niles (2006) argues that This has obvious implications in terms of how the texts would have been read. Aldhelm's enigmata direct their reader to ponder known subjects in order to more fully understand their existence. The riddles of the Exeter Book on the one hand allow for this contemplation to take place, even without specific answers for each riddle, but may on the other hand have also served more as a form of entertainment. The Anglo-Latin and Old English riddles of the Exeter Book share a common technique of simultaneously hiding and disclosing the identity of various objects. The riddles convey the identity of these objects by describing and exploring the ways they interact with other objects with which they come into contact. Howe (1985) discusses the idea of naming in Aldhelm's enigmata, emphasising the difference between the riddle challenging the reader to name the thing described, as may be seen as the form of many of the Exeter Book riddles, and Aldhelm's provocation of the reader 'to consider why it bears its particular name' (1985: 38). These two techniques demonstrate different yet interrelated ways of thinking about the world and the interactions between objects.

The Anglo-Latin riddle collections of Aldhelm, Tatwine, and Eusebius each display distinctive spiritual content, focusing on the wonders of Creation (Bitterli 2009: 23). Within this content they include riddles on animal objects

(squirrel, cow, bullock, unicorn, bi-valve mollusc etc.),<sup>11</sup> mineral objects (salt, diamond) crafted objects (writing tools, crosses, armaments etc.) and more abstract objects (love, humility, pride). The enigmata collections place these objects alongside one another, and although each enigma is a separate, self-contained and autonomous entity, the collections function both as a literary anthology and as a construction of Creation. While in his preface Aldhelm invokes God to give him the poetic ability to do Creation justice, the figure of God is not a domineering presence over each individual text, but is rather implied in the exploration of the assemblage of Creation. The corporeal and the noncorporeal, therefore, appear as equal actants in the world constructed by the enigmata collections. The earlier collection of Symphosius shares an interest in animal, mineral, and crafted objects but does not on the surface appear to engage with the more abstract concepts as the later Christian work of Aldhelm, Tatwine, and Eusebius.<sup>12</sup> Symphosius does, however, draw extensively on mythology. Through this process, he constructs a collection of enigmata which explore the wonders of the world in terms of both their physical characteristics, but also the non-corporeal actants such as stories, emotions, and beliefs which are as influential in the construction and maintenance of the world which is explored as those more physical entities.

While the Anglo-Latin riddles ask us to start at the end (by providing a specific answer) and to work backwards to discover how the riddle describes this object, the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book provide no answers. As a

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11 Tatwine's collection contains only one animal enigma (the squirrel), but Eusebius' later contribution contains many more. Bitterli (2009: 23-24) notes that the style of Eusebius' enigmata are much closer to those of Symphosius than Tatwine.

12 See Bitterli (2009: 20). Bitterli also cites Pavlovski (1988: 220-22).



result, they throw us into the middle of a network of action; it is only by understanding and following the actions and interactions constructed by the riddle that we are able to suggest a response. In this way, the riddles of the Exeter Book appear to present a more rhizomatic model of human and nonhuman interaction, which can be viewed as a counterpoint to the more hierarchical models which are familiar from other Old English and Anglo-Latin literary sources and widely discussed in scholarly discourse.<sup>13</sup>

### Dwelling in an Original State

Exeter Book *Riddle 60* (usually solved as ‘reed pen’) is a key example of how the Exeter Book riddles construct and engage with these networks of interactions. The riddle appears to be presented from the viewpoint of the reed pen implement and describes its existence both before and after it is crafted into a tool for writing. Most striking from a literary ecological perspective is that the opening lines of the riddle depict the speaker as firmly rooted within a very specific ecosystem and describe it in terms of the encounters it experiences with other actants in this ecosystem:

Ic wæs be sonde,    sæwealle neah,  
æt merefaroþe,    minum gewunade  
frumstapole fæst;    fea ænig wæs  
monna cynnes    þæt minne þær

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13 See for example Neville (1999). Montfort (2005: 37-65, particularly 43) discusses in further detail the nature of riddle texts, particularly focusing on the creation and effect of a specific ‘riddle world’ constructed within each of these texts. See pp. 106-7 for discussion of more hierarchical models of knowledge in Anglo-Saxon literary texts.

on anæde eard beheolde,  
 ac mec uhtna gehwam yð sio brune  
 lagufæðme me beleolc. Lyt ic wende  
 þæt ic, ær oþþe sið, æfre sceolde  
 ofer meodubence muðleas sprecan,  
 wordum wrixlan. Ðæt is wundres dæl,  
 on sefan searolic þam þe swylc ne conn,  
 hu mec seaxes ord ond seo swiþre hond,  
 eorles ingeþonc ond ord somod,  
 þingum geþydan, þæt ic wiþ þe sceolde,  
 for unc anum twam ærendspræce  
 abeodan bealdlice, swa hit beorna ma  
 uncre wordcwidas widdor ne mænden.

(I was along the sand, near the seawall, beside the sea-surge; [I] dwelled firmly rooted in my original place. Few were any of the race of men that beheld my dwelling place in wilderness, for every dawn the dark sea surrounded me with its enveloping waves. Little did I expect that I, sooner or later, ever would speak mouthless over mead-benches, exchange words. It is somewhat a wonder, complex in the mind, for him who cannot understand such, how the point of the knife and the right hand, man's intention and the blade, worked me with purpose, so that I would boldly disclose a verbal message for us two alone, so that other men will not know the meaning of our conversation far and wide.)

The terms ‘sæwealle’ (sea wall, beach, or cliff) and ‘merefaroþe’ (water’s edge or surging of the waves) mark clearly that this ecosystem is created by the merging of land and water. Previous areas of debate concerning these opening lines have largely shaped the way in which the riddle has been interpreted. Most significant is the ambiguity surrounding where the text begins and ends in the manuscript, and whether it should be classed as a riddle in its own right or part of the preceding poem, *The Husband’s Message*.<sup>14</sup> My own reading of the above lines takes *Riddle 60* as a riddle in its own right. While it may share some similar subject matter to *The Husband’s Message*, being that of written communication, its opening and concluding lines bookend the poem, introducing the environment of the speaker before it became a crafted object and concluding with the secretive yet playful account of how written communication may be received and interpreted.

Meanwhile, Leslie (1967) provides an important account of the debate over the habitat depicted in the opening lines. The term *merefaroþe* is translated by Colgrave and Griffiths (1936: 545) specifically as ‘sea waves’, rather than ‘sea shore’, though the translators give little explanation as to the reasoning for this decision.<sup>15</sup> Leslie (1967: 452) notes, on the other hand, that ‘many of the contexts of *faroð* refer rather to shore than to sea’. The *DOE* lists both ‘edge of the sea’ and ‘shallow water along the coast’ as possible meanings, but emphasises the difficulty of assigning either one of these meanings to specific citations. *Mere*

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14 See Leslie (1967); Greenfield (1972: 146-53); DiNapoli (2000: 431); Williamson (1982: 200-1). For a useful overview of issues surrounding the textuality and manuscript contexts of Old English poetry see Pasternack (1995: 1-32).

15 From this they infer that the solution to the riddle cannot be a reed pen as reeds are not found directly in the sea, rather they suggest the solution of kelp-weed which has had runic letters carved on it.

shares a similar ambiguity, its possible meanings being both ‘lake’ as well as ‘the sea’ (Leslie 1967: 453). While the exact positioning of the speaker at the start of the riddle, either in the sea or in a nearby coastal pool or lake, is uncertain, the symbiotic relationship between the speaker and the ecosystem of which it is part remains the same, and forms a crucial part of the riddle’s process of revealing the identity of its speaker.

This coastal ecosystem is similar to that presented in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* and previous discussion of this riddle has contemplated its relationship to the Old English elegiac genre, defined by Greenfield (1966: 143) as ‘a relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation’.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that the genre of the Old English elegy is one constructed by scholars and there is no evidence to suggest that it existed as a poetic genre during the time in which these poems were originally circulating.<sup>17</sup> In her valuable genre study of the Old English elegiac poems, however, Klinck (1992: 11) notes that although it may be problematic to group specific poems as elegies, there are key themes which appear across the poems grouped in this genre, an example of which is the ‘characteristic scenery’ of stormy weather, coldness, the sea, and the edge of land.<sup>18</sup> A significant amount of scholarly work discusses the relationship of the riddles to the other texts in the Exeter Book manuscript, and most notably the relationship between *Riddle*

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16 See also Klinck (1992: 246) for a similar definition of the Old English elegy.

17 See Greenfield (1972): 135; Harris (1983: 46); Klinck (1992: 11).

18 Klinck directs her reader to Pilch (1964). Martin (1969) discusses further elements of winter which occur across Old English poetry, and observes similarities in the presence of aspects of winter in both Old English and Latin texts. Several of the composers of the Latin texts discussed by Martin are responsible for Latin riddles upon which some of the Exeter Book riddles are based, most notably those of Symphosius and Aldhelm.

60 and the elegiac poems.<sup>19</sup> The use of *uht(e)*<sup>20</sup> is particularly significant as it is a term which is often associated with themes of exile, misery, and mourning.<sup>21</sup> Stanley (1955: 434) notes that ‘with the Anglo-Saxons morning was a time of special misery’. He emphasises the difficulty in determining the exact time of day to which the term *uht(e)* refers,<sup>22</sup> but concludes that the mood makes it clear that early morning ‘is a time of terror without solace’ (Stanley 1955: 434).<sup>23</sup> Little discussion regarding the specific meaning and connotations of *uht(e)*, however, has been conducted in the last fifty years. This seems to reflect the rise in interest concerning issues of orality and literacy in association with early medieval literature, whereby work has tended to focus on the use of times of day as formulaic or pattern phrases which may be consistent with oral transmission.<sup>24</sup>

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19 Muir (2006: 191) discusses this relationship in terms of manuscript layout and discusses the challenges which modern editors face when working with manuscript texts. Bitterli (2009: 163-69) discusses the difficulties of defining genres in Old English poetry. She draws specific attention to elegiac passages in riddles 88 and 93, as well as noting the similarities to heroic poetry which are also present. Stewart (1981: 59) observes ‘echoes of elegiac poetry’ in riddle 4, which she solves as ‘bucket of water’. For further discussion of the difficulties of elegy as genre see also Harbus (2002: 127-29).

20 Stanley (1955: 434) presents this as either strong or weak masculine *uht(a)*, whereas both Clark Hall (1984) and the *OED* (s.v. *ughten*) suggest strong masculine *uht* or weak feminine *uhte*. In my own analysis I shall be following the *OED* in the use of *uht(e)*.

21 Notable examples are *The Wife’s Lament* (l. 33), where the term *uht(e)* is used to describe the time of day when the speaker walks alone through the underground dwelling place, and *Beowulf* (l. 126) where it describes the time of day when Grendel’s killings are made known to the men of Heorot.

22 Stanley draws on Tupper (1895) who investigates the time of day to which *uht(e)* refers.

23 See also Rosier (1964: 368); Leslie (1966: 53).

24 For such work see Doane and Braun (1991); Orchard (1997); O’Brien O’Keeffe (1990 and 2012).

Work in this field has examined the relationships and connections between the materiality of literacy and the communication mechanisms of oral transmission.<sup>25</sup>

Recent years have also seen significant developments and increased interest in the field of Anglo-Saxon landscape and place studies.<sup>26</sup> However, previous work concerning the use of compound words in Old English poetic diction raised a chicken-and-egg style debate regarding so-called ‘Nature’ and mood in Old English poetry. Stanley (1955: 433–34) disagrees with White’s suggestion that ‘the finest nature poetry in OE. [sic] was incidental, the setting for an action, or the symbol of a state of mind or moral concept’.<sup>27</sup> Stanley infers from White’s point that she is suggesting ‘that the natural phenomenon came before the mood’, and argues firmly against this, stating that ‘it is the thought that gives the flower, not the flower that gives the thought’ (434).<sup>28</sup> By drawing on such debates alongside work in the field of Anglo-Saxon environmental studies, it is possible to provide further insights into specific terminology such as *uht(e)* to better understand its positioning in terms of both an environmental and poetic context.

The most convincing evidence for the association of *uht(e)* with the misery of exile and painful solitude is the presence of the compound *uhtcearu*.<sup>29</sup> The use of *uht(e)* in *The Wife’s Lament* as part of a description of the speaker’s fate also adds weight to its use as a signifier of loneliness and loss:

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25 For further discussion of this see Foy (2012: 134).

26 See for example Overing and Osborn (1994); Neville (1999); Wickham-Crowley (2006).

27 See White (1955: 13).

28 See also Neville (1999: 49).

29 Found in *The Wife’s Lament* (l. 7). Although not in the form of a compound noun, the terms *uht(e)* and *ceare* are found in close proximity in *The Wanderer* (ll. 8–9).

Frynd sind on eorþan,  
 leofe lifgende leger weardiað,  
 þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge  
 under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu. (ll. 33-36) (Klinck 1992:  
 93)

(There are friends on earth, lovers living who lie protected; while,  
 in the early morning, I walk alone under the oak tree, through  
 this earth-cave.)

While the mood associated with *uht(e)* seems well established within Old English poetry, it is unusual for this term to be associated with a nonhuman subject. Bitterli (2009: 8) notes that several of the Exeter Book riddles develop the scribal topics of the Latin riddle collections (such as pens, books, letters, ink-horns) and turn them into ‘powerful narratives of hardship, exile, loss and death’. If the use of *uht(e)* in the opening lines of *Riddle 60* is an example of such narrative development, then this appears to create conflict with the use of the term *frumstapol* (first place/state). The speaker notes:

minum gewunade  
 frumstapole fæst. (ll. 2-3)  
 (I dwelled firmly rooted in my original place.)

If this is the speaker’s original place of existence, then it seems unlikely that it has suffered the loss which Greenfield associates with the elegiac mood and which accompanies other uses of *uht(e)*.<sup>30</sup> It seems, therefore, that the riddle is

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30 This sense of loss is presented differently in *The Wife’s Lament*, whereby *uht(e)* is associated

creating an elegiac tone through the inclusion of *ubt(e)* and the connotations of loneliness and anxiety that it carries in poetic contexts. It is significant, however, that the invocation of this elegiac tone occurs after the lines

fea ænig wæs  
monna cynnes þæt minne þær  
on anæde eard beheolde,  
ac mec uhtna gehwam yð sio brune  
lagufæðme me beleolc. (11. 36-37a)

(Few were any of the race of men that beheld my dwelling place  
in wilderness, for every dawn the dark sea surrounded me with its  
enveloping waves.)

These lines concern the human presence, or lack of presence, within this place. It seems, therefore, that the riddle is making a distinction between the firm and comfortable dwelling of the speaker in this location, and human feelings towards such an environment. Further to this, the riddle as a whole inverts the theme of exile as it is usually presented i.e. a movement from human society to so called ‘wilderness’. Instead, the reed of *Riddle 60* moves from ‘anæde’ (wilderness/solitude) into human society.<sup>31</sup> The speaker is removed from its original location and then finds itself communicating in its own distinct way (i.e. mouthless) across the ‘meodubence’ (mead-benches) of a human mead hall. The

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with immobility and, consequently, the inability to regain what has been lost rather than actively moving away from something.

31 Other attestations of *anæde* are found in *Guthlac A* (ll. 331 and 335), which also plays with the theme of exile, as Guthlac goes into exile willingly and turns it into a *locus amoenus*.



mead-benches represent hall-life, the heart of human community and the antithesis of solitude.<sup>32</sup> It is also worth noting that elsewhere in the riddles of the Exeter Book themes of loneliness and loss are often associated with objects once they have been transformed from the original state of their raw materials, examples being *Riddle 73* (lance), *Riddle 93* (staghorn), and *Riddle 5* (shield). *Riddle 60* demonstrates an awareness that reeds interact differently with other entities which constitute the coastal environment to human beings. The poetic inversion of the theme of exile and the acknowledgement that a reed would feel differently towards this habitat are significant examples of the distinctive way in which the Exeter Book riddles engage with ecological interaction through this creative, poetic medium.

While the use of *uht(e)* complicates the interpretation of the feelings of the speaker towards its habitat, the term *frumstapol* (original state/place) is also particularly significant in its connection to the term *gewunade* (dwelled). Regardless of the positive or negative connotations associated with the ecosystem described in the opening lines of the riddle, the speaker is placed firmly within this ecosystem. It is important to consider the significance of this idea of dwelling (*wunian*). Heidegger's 'The Question Concerning Technology' ['Die Frage nach der Technik'] (1953) drew heavily on ideas of building and dwelling in order to try to navigate and conceptualise the relationship between humans and the world as a whole.<sup>33</sup> Heidegger's background as a medievalist influenced

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32 For work on the significance of the hall as the heart of community in Old English poetry see Magennis (1996: 35-59). Neville (1999: 84-88) contrasts community with exile, creating a strong dichotomy between human society as enclosed by protective boundaries and 'the unmastered natural world' outside.

33 See Bate (2000: 205-85); Garrard (2004: 30-32 and 110-13). For the problems associated with Heideggerian philosophy and literary ecology see also Rigby (2004); Westling (2007).

his theories on dwelling. As discussed in Chapter One, much of Heidegger's work draws on the etymologies and many of these involve Old Germanic terms. In *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* Heidegger notes that Old English *buan* means to dwell: 'the way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is *buan*, "dwelling"' (Heidegger 1993: 349).<sup>34</sup> The German word *Bauen* (building) is cognate with *buan*, and shares connotations of 'to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine' (1993: 349). *Buan* means to tend growth and, in this way, it is building but not actively making anything. The modern sense of *building* is that of construction in the way that people build houses or craft objects. It is here that Heidegger makes the distinction between cultivation and construction. He notes that the original meaning of *buan*, of building in the form of dwelling, sits behind the concept of building as construction and later this form takes the name of building for itself and 'the proper sense of *bauen*, namely dwelling, falls into oblivion' (1993: 350).<sup>35</sup> Heidegger compares *buan* with the Old Saxon word *wuon*<sup>36</sup> (Old English *wunian*), noting that, like *buan*, *wunian* means 'to remain', but *wunian* 'says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced' (1993: 350-51). He infers that *wunian* means 'to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace' (1993: 351).<sup>37</sup> Heidegger's discussion of these terms can provide an interesting insight into the sentiments of the opening lines of *Riddle 60*, but these lines themselves also reveal the problematic nature of Heidegger's ideas regarding being and dwelling. The speaker, in these lines, appears to be dwelling

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34 The *DOE* agrees with this definition.

35 See *DOE* s.v. *buan* definition 1 'to inhabit, dwell in (some place)'.

36 Heidegger should refer here to Old Saxon *wuon*.

37 Clark Hall (1974) notes that *wunian* is cognate with *wynn* (denoting joy, rapture, pleasure, delight, gladness).

in its ecosystem in Heidegger's sense of *wunian* in that at this point in the poem it remains at peace within its original dwelling place. The reed, however, does not dwell in Heidegger's sense of *buan*, in that it does not cultivate its environment. Here Heidegger's concept of dwelling deviates from ecological understanding. Heidegger's ideas of dwelling in the form of *buan* extend only to the human cultivator. The opening lines construct the reed as part of the ecosystem of the coast, but it does not actively cultivate its environment in Heidegger's sense of *buan*.

The rigidity of Heidegger's linguistic analysis does not allow room for variation in the interpretation of certain terms. As is noted above in the case study of *technology* and *craft/craēft*, it is important to remain cautious of such inflexible linguistic inferences, and to be aware that these are valid readings but only in the context of many other possibilities to which Heidegger appears firmly opposed to considering.<sup>38</sup> While Heidegger's readings provide important ways in which we can re-evaluate the way in which the world is presented in Anglo-Saxon texts, I would argue that there are further underlying problems with his analysis of dwelling; these surround his argument that only human beings dwell. Heidegger suggests that humans are part of what he terms *the fourfold*; this consists of earth, sky, divinities and mortals, and that it is through the saving of *the fourfold* that humans dwell (1993: 352). By 'saving' Heidegger means preservation through the process of revealing and bringing forth (1993: 352-53). Westling (2007: 237) is troubled by Heidegger's sense of 'human exceptionalism'; this is a concern which I share. Westling suggests that such human exceptionalism is also 'an implicit denial of embodiment' (2007: 237). Heidegger's contemporary, Merleau-Ponty, provides a much more inclusive concept of *being*

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38 For further connotations of *wunian* see *OED* (s.v. *wone/won* v).

as ‘active within the whole flesh of the world’, and including ‘earth and its denizens, as well as the cosmos’ (Westling 2007: 233).<sup>39</sup> For Merleau-Ponty the world itself is flesh and this flesh is ‘in this sense an “element” of Being’ (1968: 139). Within the world, bodies come into contact with one another through the processes of both touching and being touched (Westling 2007: 243). Merleau-Ponty argues, ‘why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each?’ (1968: 142) This sense of *being* appears to be presented in *Riddle 60* through the relationship that the speaker shares with its habitat in the opening lines of the text. The emphasis is placed on sensation, of the speaker feeling the waves surrounding it and, itself, exerting a physical sensation on the earth through its ‘fæst’ position in the ground. The word *eard*, which appears in line 5 of the riddle, also holds a significance alongside this concept. The *DOE* lists the most common denotations of *eard* as ‘dwelling-place, country, region, native land’. This adds to a sense of rootedness and belonging which is associated with the speaker in terms of the space that it inhabits and suggests a truly ecological presentation of an entity which shares a ‘symbiotic association with all the creatures that surround and nourish it’ (McKusick 2000: 83). While the philosophy of Heidegger is both useful and problematic in terms of the questions it raises regarding *being*, I would argue that Merleau-Ponty’s presentation of being as more ecological, non-hierarchical, and universal, provides an important perspective from which to reconsider the relationship between the nonhuman, human, writing, and God in Anglo-Saxon texts.

### Language and Communication

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39 Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* was first published in French in 1945, see Merleau Ponty (Smith [trans]) (2002).

While the opening lines of *Riddle 60* show the speaker interacting as part of its ecosystem, the following lines depict the speaker as removed from this habitat:

Lyt ic wende  
 þæt ic, ær oþþe sið,    æfre sceolde  
 ofer meodubence    muðleas spreca,  
 wordum wrixlan.    Þæt is wundres dæl,  
 on sefan searolic    þam þe swylc ne conn,  
 hu mec seaxes ord    ond seo swiþre hond,  
 eorles ingeþonc    ond ord somod,  
 þingum geþydan,    þæt ic wiþ þe sceolde,  
 for unc anum twam    ærendspræce  
 abeodan bealdlice,    swa hit beorna ma  
 uncre wordcwidas    widdor ne mænden. (ll. 7b-17)

(Little did I expect that I, sooner or later, ever would speak  
 mouthless over mead-benches, exchange words. It is somewhat a  
 wonder, complex in the mind, for him who cannot understand  
 such, how the point of the knife and the right hand, man's  
 intention and the blade, worked me with purpose, so that I would  
 boldly disclose a verbal message for us two alone, so that other  
 men will not know the meaning of our conversation far and  
 wide.)

Removed from its original location, the speaker is now engaged in a different form of communication. There is some debate regarding the identity of the object which *Riddle 60* becomes. It is almost universally accepted that the

speaker begins its life as a reed,<sup>40</sup> but it is undecided as to whether the object crafted from the reed is a pipe or a pen. Reading *Riddle 60* alongside its source material can help to shed light on this debate. The riddle clearly shows influence from Symphosius' (fourth/fifth century) *Harundo* ('reed') enigma:

Dulcis amica ripae, semper uicina profundis,

Suaue cano Musis; nigro perfusa colore,

Nuntia sum linguae digitis signata magistris.

(Sweet darling of the banks, always close to the depths, sweetly I sing for the Muses; when drenched with black, I am the tongue's messenger by guiding fingers pressed.) (Glorie 1968: 623)

The object in Symphosius' riddle also appears as both a pen and a pipe.<sup>41</sup> It has the ability to sing for the Muses, yet when it is placed in ink then it becomes the tongue's messenger, the singing is silenced by the process of writing, but at the same time the action of the fingers in the final line can also refer to the playing of the reed as a pipe. The speaker of *Riddle 60* reflects upon its own transformation with a sense of both wonder and suspicion; Clark Hall (1984) lists the denotations of *searolic* (l. 11a) as 'artistic, ingenious, cunning'.<sup>42</sup> *Riddle 60* shows signs of a residual sense of orality which was embedded in the poetry

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40 With the exception of Colgrave and Griffiths (1936) who provide the specific suggestion of 'kelp-weed'.

41 Bitterli (2009: 137) agrees with this dual purpose. Leslie (1967: 454) also links the object of the pipe with the classical story of the maid Syrinx who turned into a reed when pursued by Pan. Leslie suggests that l. 2a of Symphosius' enigma 'recalls the pastoral tradition of the reed-pipe'.

42 See Chapter One, pp. 75-78.

transcribed into manuscript form, extending this interest to interspecies communication.

For both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty language is a key factor in the concepts of being and dwelling, though their opinions differ greatly as to how language affects dwelling. For Heidegger, the essence of being is a showing up or 'revealing'. In order for this 'revealing' to take place a 'space' must be cleared where this being can exist. Heidegger views language as the source which brings forth beings. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1936) he states that 'language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance' (Heidegger 1993: 198). Heidegger argues that it is through language that human beings build and, therefore, dwell. For Heidegger, however, only human beings have language and, consequently, only they can dwell. While both the Exeter Book reed pen riddle and Symphosius' *Harundo* explore the wonders of writing, the use of prosopopoeia in *Riddle 60* problematises the idea of language as dwelling in the Heideggerian sense. Merleau-Ponty, however, argues that language is not restricted to humans but is part of what ties humans to the flesh of the world. In his summary of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy on language, Abram (1996: 97) notes that language is 'born as a call for and response to a gesturing, sounding, speaking landscape — a world of thunderous rumblings, of babbling brooks, of flapping, flying screeching things, of roars and sighing winds'. This view of language allows for a much more ecological and interconnected world philosophy. In his development of an ecopoetics based on Heidegger's philosophies, Bate (2000: 259) notes that 'humankind alone among species has a knowledge of beauty, of kindness and purity, of the divine'. The use of prosopopoeia in *Riddle 60* allows the nonhuman speaker to express the same sense of wonder and experience of the divine. Rigby (2004: 432) emphasises the

importance of obscurity in order to dwell in a place. She suggests that if a poem allows familiar things to appear strange ‘as if encountered for the first time’, then it is possible for them to ‘cease to be mere equipment’. *Riddle 60* allows for this sense of obscurity and, in turn, the speaker enters into a dialogue with humans which allows it to exist as more than just a piece of equipment.

### **Language and the Divine**

Both the Anglo-Latin riddles and those of the Exeter Book explore the concept of language and the relationships which it creates between human and nonhuman, and also the divine. Neville (1999: 165) discusses the concept of ‘the world as book that reveals God’s will to humanity’ as presented by Augustine of Hippo, which she notes ‘is one of the most characteristic commonplaces of the Middle Ages’. Neville also notes that the world as book notion is not limited to the teachings of Augustine, but it occurs extensively elsewhere within Anglo-Saxon teaching and literature, specifically the work of Alcuin and Bede.<sup>43</sup> This differs starkly from Merleau-Ponty’s notion of language as part of the connected state of the world flesh; Augustine’s doctrine separates humans as interpreters from the rest of the world as symbol. While the riddle genre may encourage the act of interpretation and ‘reading’ the material world, the process of the object itself speaking ties the interpretive and textual context of the riddle to the physical, nonhuman object of the speaker, both before and after the reed changes form by its interaction with human hands. Neville (1999: 190) views Augustine’s philosophy as a way of limiting the ‘natural world’, of making it subordinate to a more important book, the Bible. Reading *Riddle 60* in light of Merleau-Ponty’s work on language, however, provides an alternative reading of the riddle as a text

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43 Neville directs her readers to Gellrich (1985: 18) and Bolton (1979: 40).



which constructs and promotes the ‘reading’ of the world and the speaking of the objects as a dialogue or mutual exchange. This draws together the human, the nonhuman, and the divine as one, and the riddle itself begins to resemble the concept of a world flesh as outlined by Merleau Ponty. Exeter Book *Riddle 60*, therefore, appears to present, and promote, a worldview distinct from Augustine’s doctrine. The interaction and communicative exchange between the riddle speaker and the reader/listener creates a sense of dialogue or exchange between the text and the audience. This differs from the more hierarchical structure of Augustine’s ‘world as book’ analogy, whereby the world created by God is presented as a passive ‘text’ for human beings to read and try to understand.

Overlapping in many ways with Merleau Ponty’s concept of a world flesh, Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic ontology provides a useful medium through which the alternative worldview constructed by the riddles can be reread and better understood. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari begin by outlining the analytical model of the rhizome.<sup>44</sup> The concept of the rhizome is

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44 The work of Deleuze and Guattari has, in recent years, been used as a productive and successful analytical viewpoint for exploring methods of analysis in medieval literature. The majority of this work, however, has tended to focus on later medieval texts, with little early medieval literary scholarship engaging with these models. This is evidenced in work such as Siewers (2009); Burger (2003: xiii); Joy (2012: 162). For work which draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of ‘minor literature’ See also Chance (2007); Hexter (2012). Cohen’s (2003) work *Medieval Identity Machines*, however, draws directly on theories of Deleuze and Guattari in its exploration of identity across a range of both early and later medieval texts. The Deleuze and Guattarian notion of the *Body without Organs* (also referred to as *BwO*) is also crucial to this analysis. *BwO* was first introduced by Deleuze in his work *Logic of Sense* (1969), but was not fully developed until the later collaborations with Guattari of *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). The phrase itself is taken from Antonin Artaud’s *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, a radio play of 1947.

adapted from that of the desiring machine, as is described in the earlier work, *Anti-Oedipus* (1984). *Anti-Oedipus* argues that machines exist everywhere, connected and inseparable from one another. These are desiring machines driven by production. For this reason Deleuze and Guattari state that there is no separation between Nature and industry:

For the real truth of the matter – the glaring, sober truth that resides in delirium – is that there is no such thing as relatively independent spheres or circuits: production is immediately consumption and a recording process (*enregistrement*), without any sort of mediation, and the recording process and consumption directly determine production, though they do so within the production process itself. (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 3)

According to the above statement, therefore, everything is production. A dividing line cannot be drawn between what we might call ‘natural’ or ‘industrial’. The infinite numbers of machines which make up being are all tied into this cycle of production and consumption; feeding and feeding off one another in a perpetual process. Deleuze and Guattari describe these processes as ‘flows’ and ‘interruptions’ (1984: 2). Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the ‘machine’ and its removal of the boundaries between terms such as ‘natural’ and ‘industrial’ can also be conceptualised in part through the Latin form of the word, *machina* as discussed in Chapter One (see pp. 61-63). Cohen (2003: xiv-xvi) considers the link between Deleuze and Guattari’s machine and that of its ‘medieval counterpart, *machina*’, stressing the associations which *machina* makes

with the human body. The association between Deleuze and Guattari's machine and medieval Latin *machina*, however, can be pushed further, beyond the human body, to object relationships and interactions. Chapter One discussed how understanding the connotations of Old English *cræft* and its semantic overlapping with *technology* can change the way that we see both the concept of technology and human/nonhuman interactions. The glossing of *machina* with Old English *cræft* suggests the potential for this word to convey intellectual as well as physical ingenuity, productivity and creativity, merging the supposed 'natural' and 'industrial' in the interactions between humans and nonhumans. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the model of the machine is adapted into the rhizome to emphasise that *machine* did not necessarily have to mean mechanical in the same sense as we might think. Deleuze and Guattari wanted to make clear that the notion of *machine* was one which was not governed by a sense of 'overarching' order or government (Cohen 2003: xiv) .

The rhizomatic model is built on that of a particular plant-life form, perhaps the most common example of which is the potato. The tubers of the potato plant are all necessarily connected to one another equally and, crucially, there is no beginning and end. This idea of 'being in the middle' is the most significant in that it supports the idea of the equality of each actor in any one network. In terms of Deleuze and Guattari's methods, the tree metaphor poses the opposite structure to the non-hierarchical rhizomatic model. In arguably the most famous passage from *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 15) reject the tree, and stress 'We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of aborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics'. The problem with trees for Deleuze and Guattari is that they are 'organizations of power' (Wood 2004: 38).

The rhizomatic model displaces this notion of power, as Deleuze and Guattari themselves state: ‘puppet strings, as a rhizome or multiplicity, are tied not to the supposed will of an artist or puppeteer but to a multiplicity of nerve fibers, which form another puppet in other dimensions connected to the first’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 8). In this analogy power and control is dispersed away from a singular entity and rather distributed among a series of connections and actors.

*A Thousand Plateaus* initially presents the model of the rhizome through the example of the book. For Deleuze and Guattari the book is a prime example of a rhizomatic structure at work. They state that:

In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movement, deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitute an assemblage. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 3-4)

The above passage makes the primary point that a book is a collection of different interactions or in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, lines of ‘segmentaries’, ‘strata’, ‘territories’ as well as ‘flight’, ‘movement’, ‘deterritorialization’, ‘destratification’. A book is not a singular, static entity. It is comprised of many different actants, and interacts with many others; a book ‘forms a rhizome with the world’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 11).

Like *Riddle 60*, Exeter Book *Riddle 26* also appears to reflect a worldview distinct from the hierarchical interpretative view of the world as a book which is

to be read and understood by human beings in order to bring them closer to God. *Riddle 26* documents the process of book making and writing. The riddle describes the physical processes involved in the production of the book; this includes the killing of a cow and the preparation and treatment of the skin in the production of vellum. The riddle also engages with the intellectual process of reading and its social implications. In the case of *Riddle 26*, the context suggests that the book's content is religious in nature:<sup>45</sup>

Gif min bearn weras brucan willað,  
 hy beoð þy gesundran ond þy sigefæstran,  
 heortum þy hwætran ond þy hygebliþran,  
 ferþe þy frodran; habbaþ freonda þy ma  
 swæsra ond gesibbra, soþra ond godra,  
 tilra ond getreowra, þa hyra tyr ond ead  
 estum ycað, ond hy arstafum  
 lissum bilecgað, ond hi lufan fæþmum  
 fæste clyppað. (ll. 18-26a)

(If the children of men want to use me, they will be the more whole and the surer of victory, bolder and more joyful in their hearts, wiser in spirit; they will have more friends, dear ones and kinsmen, honest and good, profitable and loyal, when their honour and possessions increase from love, and they are surrounded by kindness and favour, and clasp them tight with

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45 Bitterli (2009: 177-78) discusses the religious nature of the riddle and the suggestion that the speaker undergoes its own passion to, ultimately, provides grace for humans. In reference to this idea, Bitterli also cites Williamson (1983: 178-79).

embracing arms of love.)

This Christian context affects the social connections which are described in the above passage. The power of God implied in this text does make the idea of a non-hierarchical interpretation of the riddle problematic.<sup>46</sup> While the notion of free will is touched on in the riddle, partly indicated by the presence of the subordinating conjunction 'gif' (if), the apparent power which God's will can assert is also heavily emphasised. It is important, however, not to overlook the material context of the riddle subject matter. Deleuze and Guattari note that attributing a book to a subject is 'to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate a beneficent God to explain geographical movements' (1988: 3). In other words, a singular totality is created (in the form of God) which masks the multiplicity of the assemblage which is the book. The very nature of the riddle genre works to both break down and rebuild singular bodies. The singular identity of the riddle subject is often emphasised at the end of the text by a phrase such as 'Frige hwæt ic hatte' (say what I am called), as is evidenced in line 28 of *Riddle 26*, but the name of the apparent subject can only be disclosed through a thorough understanding of its assembled parts and participating actants.

*Riddle 26* explores the notion that the physical object of the book is crucial to its social purpose as a text of guidance.<sup>47</sup> Scholarly discourse on the connections and interactions between environment and the divine in Old English

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46 The problems between Christianity and non-hierarchical analyses of environment are also explored in their modern contexts through work such as Burbery (2012).

47 See Harbus (2002: 101-2), for an interesting discussion of the significance of textual learning in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Elene*.

poetry have tended to take the view that Christian doctrine has an overwhelming significance in representations of the natural world; this is perhaps most extensively explored in the work of Neville (1999) and Stanley (1955). Low (2009) argues for a more materialist view of environment in Old English poetry, suggesting that previous academic focus on symbolism and allegory has detracted from our readings of the physical environments constructed in Old English poetic texts.

The detailed focus on the physical nature of the book displayed in the opening section of Exeter Book *Riddle 26* indicates its engagement with the book as a material object as much as a symbol of divine power. The significance of the materiality of spiritual books is a concept which extends beyond the Exeter Book riddles. The refusal to view the book as a static and passive vessel for the contents of the world is discussed extensively in the work of the Renaissance philosopher and poet Tommaso Campanella. Campanella criticised Aristoleians who placed all their energies in the reading of truth in a text, rather than in actual lived experience. Ernst (2010: 7) notes that ‘Campanella took up the metaphor of the book of nature, connecting it to that of the living temple’. The passage is as follows:

The world is the book in which Eternal Wisdom  
 Has written its ideas; it is a living temple  
 Decorated from high to low with living statues  
 Representing its own undertakings and its own example.  
 (Campanella 1998: 44)

The idea of book as ‘living temple’ is particularly interesting as it taps into the

notion of the book both as a spiritual vessel, and as an active, living agent in the transmission of its own contents. These conceptions of the nature of books are strikingly similar to those conveyed in *Riddle 26*. Bitterli (2009: 170-78) discusses the physical nature of the riddle subject as animal flesh made into a book. His opening comments to this section address the conceptualisation of the book as a body. This line of thinking spans across history and thrives in our modern lexis of textuality. Bitterli notes ‘when we talk about books, we tend to personify and anthropomorphize them, referring to their parts in terms of the human body. As if a book had feet, a back, and a head, we speak of its “footnotes”, its “spine”, and the “heading” of its pages’ (Bitterli 2009: 170).<sup>48</sup> This is an interesting observation regarding our linguistic engagement with books, but it is important to note that Bitterli does not distinguish between metaphors of typography i.e. ‘footnotes’ and ‘headings’ and those of the book itself. Perhaps the most interesting anthropomorphization of books is their ability to say things. *Riddle 26* asks its reader/listener to ‘Frige hwæt ic hatte’ (l. 26b) (say what I am called). The riddle forges a dialogue, here, between the riddle speaker and the reader/listener. The book speaks the word of God, and the audience is asked to respond by naming the riddle speaker.

The interaction between the material and spiritual aspects of the book described in *Riddle 26* are perhaps most prominent in the following lines:

Nu þa gerenon    ond se reada telg  
ond þa wuldorgesteald    wide mære

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48 See the poetry of Gregory Orr for modern literary work which engages with the notion of book as body. In particular his (2005) work *Concerning the Book that is the Body of the Beloved*.



dryhtfolca Helm, nales dol wite. (ll. 15-17)

(Now may the ornaments and the red dye and the glorious  
trappings widely distinguish the Guardian of the people; know no  
sin.)

In these lines, the action of the physical object of the book and its adornments overlaps with that of the text it contains. It is the physical trappings of the book which exalt God as well as the spiritual teachings contained in the text. In this way, *Riddle 26* seems to connect with the Deleuze and Guattarian concept of the book as 'forming a rhizome with the world'. The apparent hierarchical presence of an omnipotent God is complicated by the significance and need of other actants in order to convey Christian teachings. *Riddle 26* merges Christian and technological creation. It acknowledges and embraces materiality and the interactions between material objects as key mediators in a network which includes divine teaching.

The riddles provide an alternative model of knowledge to that of more hierarchical Christian worldviews which can be found elsewhere within the Anglo-Saxon literary corpus. This is not to suggest that the riddles are not part of a Christian context. The riddles do, however, provide their own rhizomatic and, in many ways, scientific model of the world. The Exeter Book riddles in particular place their audience in the middle of a series of interactions which they must follow in order to understand/solve each riddle. Following the interactions between the actants forces the reader to contemplate the agency and significance of each object (or actant) involved in the production, maintenance, use or simply existence of any one particular object. The Anglo-Latin riddles work from a slightly different angle, in that they provide their audience with the name of an

object which the riddle then explores in greater detail. The Exeter Book and Anglo-Latin riddles do, however, share an engagement with exploring the processes, networks and objects which constitute the make up of the lived environment or biosphere. These explorations differ in kind to other texts which also engage with worldly creation, perhaps most notably Bede's *De natura rerum* (Kendall and Wallis [trans.] 2010). While Bede's text engages in a similar interaction between scientific explanation and Christian doctrine, it takes the form of a much more hierarchical structure, whereby chapters such as 'de mundi formatione' (on the formation of the earth), 'de elementis' (on the elements) and 'de firmamento' (on the heavens), clearly mark and separate the varying objects of which Creation is comprised. The Exeter Book riddles in particular merge the everyday interactions between objects with those of larger aspects of Creation, often within the same riddles, as is indicated by *Riddle 26*. Technological processes are merged with those of divinity. While this merging of technology and spirituality is not uncommon within Anglo-Saxon literary texts – perhaps the most famous example being the famous passage of the construction of heaven as a roof in *Cædmon's Hymn* – the interdependence between the interactions involved in technological processes and the spiritual connotations associated with a particular object mark the Exeter Book riddles as distinctive in their presentation and construction of existence.

### **Language, Naming and Revealing**

Merleau-Ponty (2002: 206) argued that 'for pre-scientific thought, to name an object is to bring it into existence, to modify it: God creates beings by naming them, and magic affects objects by speaking of them'. In response to this, Bate (2000: 175) suggests ecopoetics as a method that 'reawakens the pre-scientific

magic of naming'. While the riddles appear to engage with this so called 'magic of naming', they also self-consciously play, manipulate, and challenge this process of naming through their constant and dynamic movement between obscurity and revelation.<sup>49</sup> Bate's outline of ecopoetics, drawn heavily from the work of Heidegger, reinforces the authoritative human presence; something must be named in order for it to exist. Merleau Ponty rather broadly and unhelpfully labels the time in which the riddles were composed as one of 'pre-scientific thinking'; however, these texts clearly engage with both the scientific and the poetic, particularly in their self-conscious explorations of the processes of writing. In his discussion of the Anglo-Saxon scriptorium riddles; Bitterli (2009: 141-42) makes reference to Isidore of Seville's seventh-century *Etymologies*, which discuss the terminology for the scribe and his tools. It is likely that the enigmata of Aldhelm were significantly inspired by the work of Isidore of Seville (Orchard 2001: 171-72).<sup>50</sup> This is partly evidenced in Aldhelm's elaborate use of unusually scientific and specific learned and arcane Greek terms for animals. Isidore details the items of the scriptorium and provides explanations of why they are given their individual names. As part of Isidore's process of providing etymologies, Bitterli (2009: 142) notes that that he connects the various tools to the plants and animals from which they are derived and 'thus he sees these tools and materials as part of God's Creation, associating the inanimate with the animate and the profane with the divine'. This appears to adhere to Merleau-Ponty's theory that for pre-scientific thinking 'God creates beings by naming them', and by conveying and explaining the naming of such beings Isidore (and riddle

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49 For work on the problematic nature of this kind of view see Hall (2008: 281-84).

50 For more discussions of Aldhelm's connections to Isidore see John (1996: 39-40); Cameron (1985: 117).

writers such as Aldhelm who explore his ideas) makes direct connections between writing and religion, and/or writing and Creation. Bitterli (2009: 142-43) explores this concept further through the common motif of writing as ploughing in order to cultivate a “holy harvest” of doctrine’. This topos appears in the enigmata collections of Aldhelm, Tatwine, Eusebius, as well as those of the anonymous eighth-century writer known as Pseudo-Bede;<sup>51</sup> the evidence for this as a specifically Christian theme is suggested by its absence in the earlier enigmata of Symphosius. Aldhelm’s wax-tablets enigma states:

Nunc ferri stimulus faciem proscindit amoenam  
 Flexibus et sulcos obliquat ad instar aratri  
 Sed semen segetis de caelo ducitur almum  
 Quod largos generat millena fruge maniplos  
 Heu tam sancta seges diris extinguitur armis. (Stork 1990: 37)  
 (Now a goad of iron cuts my pleasant face; In the likeness of a  
 plough, it bends the furrows with its curving motions. But from  
 heaven comes the nourishing seed for the harvest, which brings  
 forth generous sheaves in a thousandfold fruit. Alas that such a  
 holy crop is destroyed by harsh weapons!) (Trans. Stork 1990:  
 138)

The agricultural metaphor presents words as a force of cultivation. This link between words and agricultural cultivation appears to connect with Heidegger’s

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51 For further discussion of the work of pseudo-Bede see Bitterli (2009: 111-112). Bitterli also directs his readers to Tupper (1905).

interpretation of *buan* as dwelling through cultivation.<sup>52</sup> Bitterli emphasises the scribe as ploughman; this adheres to Heidegger's notion that language is exclusive to human beings, enabling only them to truly 'dwell'. Aldhelm's riddle, however, connects the stylus with the image of the plough which is the focus of the metaphor, the human figure is absent from the riddle and, therefore, the apparent cultivating nature of language is here connected with the nonhuman stylus.

The riddle is conflicted in its presentation of this writing process. The marking of words in the wax of the tablet is presented as both a cultivating action, which creates the furrow in which the 'nourishing seed' is planted, but also the tool which destroys the pristine nature of the tablet before it is inscribed. This demonstrates a conflict between the physical and the spiritual. The process is cyclical; just as the stylus destroys the unmarked surface of the wax, it will also destroy the words written in order to prepare the tablet for reuse.<sup>53</sup> Transience is contrasted with the materiality of the writing tools. The human scribe is absent in this riddle, and there is no description of the crafting of the implements into tools for the scriptorium. At the same time, the riddle presents an intricate description of the technological process of writing, complicated by the inclusion of the divine metaphor of 'holy doctrine' as seeds. The sense of transience originates not from the concept of writing itself, but from the specific process of writing on wax. It is, therefore, the material of wax

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52 See pp. 100-101.

53 Porter (1997: 10) notes the mention of wax tablets and razors for clearing them in *Colloquy 14 of The Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*. Brown (2003: 195) notes that 'part of an early seventh-century set of six yew writing-tablets with wax plate inserts were found preserved in the Springmount Bog', he directs the reader to Brown (1992: 80-81, no. 64) for detailed descriptions and pictures of these tablets.

which affects the existence of the words. Rouse and Rouse (1989) discuss the importance of the wax tablet as a writing tool and draw specific attention to the practical differences between writing with different implements on various surfaces. They note that the motif of the pen as plough originates from Cicero and his contemporaries, and results from the fact that, as a necessity of working with a stylus on the material of wax, the writing must be that of ‘an incised script rather than a fluid script’ (Rouse and Rouse 1989: 185). In the process of forming the letters ‘the stroke plows up a furrow, pushing material aside in the process of writing’ (1989: 85). This challenges the motif of the pen/stylus as plough and the writer as ploughman as a metaphor for the preaching of Christian doctrine. By interpreting this motif as a presentation of the practical ways in which tools and materials effected the writing process, the riddles appear to be contemplating how the spiritual and the material are intrinsically dependent and interdependent on one another. The spiritual idea of the spreading of Christian doctrine is presented through the motif of word as seed, pen as plough, scribe as ploughman, yet this motif also encapsulates the very thingliness and materiality of the riddle. The concept of divine doctrine must be conceived through both a metaphor of materiality, and the material itself. This foregrounds the nonhuman and environmental in its presentation of the spiritual.

The opening lines of Aldhelm’s wax tablet enigma demonstrate further this fixation on the original environments of the entities used to form the tablet:

Melligeris apibus mea prima processit origo,  
 Sed pars exterior crescebat cetera siluis ;  
 Calciamenta mihi tradebant tergora dura. (Lapidge and Rosier  
 1985: 76)

(My origin was from (the wax of) honey-bees, but my other  
outer part grew in the woods. Stiff leather provided me with my  
shoes.) (Trans. Lapidge and Rosier 1985: 76)

The speaker views itself as a single entity, though it speaks of its constituent parts as originating from specifically different environments and processes. This is indicated by the conjunction 'sed' (but) which separates the description of the wax as originating from bees and the frame from forest wood.

The allusions to the physical processes of writing and the ways in which the tools and materials of the scriptorium affect the metaphors which surround the written word suggest that limiting the riddles to an allegorical interpretation of God's Creation underestimates their complexity and subtlety. The riddles engage with the technologies of writing in their playful and equally thought-provoking game of naming and concealing.<sup>54</sup> The idea of play is central to the riddles as a poetic form. Beechy (2010: 89-90) discusses in detail the nature of the riddle as a poetic form, and draws on the work of Huizinga who suggests that 'the eternal gulf between being and idea can only be bridged by the rainbow of imagination' (Huizinga 1955: 133). This idea of 'bridging' is common in discussions of the nature of language; what it represents, and how it affects our interactions with other things. Wrathall (2011), in light of Heidegger's widely recognised phrase 'language is the house of being', presents a concise summary of two different views of the function and nature of language, the first being that 'there can be more to the content of our experiences or to the structure of our world than we can capture in language', and 'that language [is] a bridge that lets us reach entities that are constituted independently of language' (Wrathall 2011:

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54 For further work on the riddles as a playful form see Beechy (2010: 56-59).

122-23). The second view is linguistic constitutionalism, whereby it is believed that language has ‘an ineliminable role on the constitution of entities or our experience of the world’ (Wrathall 2011: 122-23).<sup>55</sup> The unconstitutionalist view acknowledges language as a tool which bridges the gaps between entities and our conception of them. The riddle as a poetic form plays with this notion of bridging by simultaneously revealing and obscuring their subject. The riddles demonstrate a self-conscious awareness of language as a technology which engineers words, through which the gap between the nonhuman object and the object of the reader/listener can be joined.

This interaction between obscurity and revelation is central to the idea of dwelling and of bringing-forth and is often presented in the Anglo-Latin riddles and those of the Exeter Book through the language of lightness and darkness. Appropriately, the speaker of Symphosius’ *Harundo* uses the blackness of the ink to mark the transition between the speaker’s life as a reed and as a pen. Aldhelm’s (seventh-century) quill pen enigma develops further the theme of the blackness of ink as presented by Symphosius, adding a contrast between the blackness of the ink and the whiteness of the page on which it is placed.<sup>56</sup> In this case, the black ink is contrasted with the white of the page and this whiteness links back to the colour of the bird from which the quill originates:

Me dudum genuit candens onocrotalus albam,  
 Gutture qui patulo sorbet de gurgite limphas.  
 Pergo per albentes directo tramite campos

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55 Wrathall (2011: 122-23).

56 For further discussion of what are termed *pennae* (pen/quill) riddles see Murphy (2011: 88-90).



Candentique viae vestigia caerulea lingquo,  
 Lucida nigratis fuscans anfractibus arva. (Stork 1990: 176)  
 (The bright, white pelican, which swallows the waters of the sea  
 in its gaping throat, once begot me [such that I was] white. I  
 move through whitened fields in a straight line and leave dark-  
 coloured traces on the glistening path, darkening the shining  
 fields with my blackened meanderings) (Lapidge and Rosier 1985:  
 82)

The dark letters of the text are described as both being composed in a straight line, but also *nigratis* ‘blackened’ meanderings. Lapidge and Rosier translate *nigratis* as blackened but this, arguably, does not fully encapsulate the glossy texture of the ink.<sup>57</sup> This sense of clarity and obscurity mirrors the role of text as both a clear ordering of words and phrases, and the ambiguity and need for interpretation which accompanies both the riddle genre and the act of scriptural interpretation.<sup>58</sup> While Aldhelm’s quill pen enigma is influenced by Symphosius’ earlier riddle, it shows the development of a much more sophisticated and literary style. Aldhelm constructs a universe in his enigma collection which consists of a ‘series of subjects which continually undergo elemental change’ (Lapidge and Rosier 1985: 64). Neville (1999: 193) notes that in the *Enigmata* collection of Aldhelm,

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57 The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* does not specify the level of lustre to which *niger* may refer. It is significant, however, that the word chosen is *niger* rather than *ater* which specifically means ‘charred black’; see *Oxford Dictionary of Latin*.

58 For further discussion of darkness in Anglo-Saxon riddles see Tiffany (2001).

rather than appearing as a limiting or defining force for human beings or constructions, the natural world is presented as fully subordinated to the intellectual activity of exploiting interesting connections, wordplay and literary skill.

While intellectual activity undoubtedly plays a significant part in the work of Aldhelm, it is his interest in natural history which equally informs his work. This is evident in his use of natural historical terminology such as *onocrotalus* (pelican).<sup>59</sup> It is particularly unusual that Aldhelm chooses to name the bird as a pelican as the majority of quill pens in Anglo-Saxon England came from goose quills, and these were widely used from the sixth century (Serjeantson 2002: 43). Aldhelm develops the theme of light and darkness, obscurity and clarity/revelation from Symphosius but takes it further so that the poem consistently links the object of the quill pen to its origin as a pelican feather. This is indicated in the repetition of ‘candens’ and ‘candentique’ (shining/bright white) to describe both the pelican and the surface which is covered in the inky meanderings. Bitterli (2009: 143-44) notes that ‘from the concrete scribal tool, the riddle progresses to the complex act of writing, and from there to its effect on the devout reader’. He emphasises not only the contrast between the white of the bird’s plumage and the darkness of the ink but also the creation of straight lines of text which create a direct line ‘from bird to page, and from page to Heaven’. The contrast of the black ink and the whiteness of the surface is crucial for the visibility of the words on the page; they cannot exist and be brought

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59 For more work on Aldhelm’s interest in natural history see Cameron (1985); Forbes (2005). See also Bitterli (2009: 143) for notes on other interpretations of *onocrotalus* and its origins and etymological information.

forth without this contrast, just as the text cannot exist without the pelican. This constant flux between the origin of the writing tool, the tool itself, and the text it produces, binds together the human and the nonhuman through the medium of textuality, and the poetic nature of the riddle creates another level of *poiesis* which serves as a constant connection between human and nonhuman, preventing the subject from ever becoming just a resource.

At the same time it is the persistent awareness of the technologies of writing which negotiates the interaction between humans and the environment in the riddle texts. Porter (1997: 10) notes that ‘writing was the exercise of an entire technology governed by linguistic competence in Latin’. Porter uses ‘technology’ here to refer to the intellectual knowledge of writing, but the physical aspects of the technology of writing also had a significant place within the Anglo-Saxon scriptorium. Porter (1997: 10) describes the contents of the scriptorium as ‘an arsenal of writing tools’. ‘Arsenal’ is a particularly apt description in this context as is demonstrated by Bitterli’s detailed discussion of the Anglo-Saxon scribe as a ‘struggling warrior’ (2009: 145-50). Evidence from a wider range of sources suggests that the craft of writing was one of both intellectual and physical challenge. As Porter (1997) observes in the *Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*, colloquy 14 depicts a student searching for someone to sharpen his pencil as he does not know how to do it himself. This is a significant example of the integral way in which knowledge and practical skill depend on one another. Its presence is a practical demonstration of the combination of practical skill, intellectual knowledge, and the social demand to develop that skill (i.e. both the sharpening of the pencil and the wider skill of writing) which was evidenced in Chapter One’s case study of the term *craft*, and is carried in our own concept and use of the term *technology*.

In her analysis of Exeter Book *Riddle 51* (pen and fingers), Lees (2010: 126) draws attention to the structure of interlace which the riddle embodies.<sup>60</sup> She draws attention to the intertwined nature of sight and sounds within the riddle (and the riddle genre as a whole), and to the presentation of the scribe as ‘winnende wiga’ (struggling warrior) (l. 6). The concept of the struggles of the scribe is one which refers to both the physical and intellectual challenges of writing. *Riddle 51* is as follows:

Ic seah wrætlice    wuhte feower  
 samed siþian;    swearte wæran lastas,  
 swaþu swiþe blacu.    Swift wæs on fore,  
 fuglum framra;    fleag on lyfte,  
 deaf under yþe.    Dreag unstill  
 winnende wiga    se him wegas tæcneþ  
 ofer fæted gold    feower eallum.

(I saw four wondrous things travelling together; their tracks were swarthy, their footsteps were very black. It was swift on its journey, bolder than the birds; it flew across the air, dove under the water. Busy was the struggling warrior, who showed all four of them the way over plated gold.)

The four ‘wondrous things’ refer to the pen and two fingers and a thumb.<sup>61</sup> The

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60 This discussion is accompanied by a wider exploration of the riddle alongside Basil Bunting’s *Briggflats* and with reference to John Leyrer’s essay on ‘*Beowulf* and the Interlace Structure’.

61 Bitterli (2009: 146-47) discusses in detail the way in which the scribe would hold the pen which matches the description presented here in the riddle. Bitterli also refers to de Hamel (1992: 29).

riddle depicts how the scribe is responsible for moving the fingers and the pen in order to produce the text, depicted here in the form of dark tracks on the page. While the image of the scribe is central to the riddle, the process of writing is also firmly connected to the bird from which the pen is made. Even as a tool, seemingly so connected to the anthropocentric task of writing, the riddle intertwines this craft with the movement of the bird from which the pen derives. Writing is a journey, but it is not one of a human being alone. The riddle is self-consciously aware of the connected nature of human, tool, and animal. Lees (2010: 126) notes that, in the centre of the riddle, the fingers and the pen merge into one. This is depicted by the change of subject from plural to singular, characterised as 'the writing hand'. It is significant that this point of merging between pen, fingers and scribe then forms the passage which draws on the action of the bird. The riddle notes that this action is 'fuglum framra' (bolder than the birds). This phrase acknowledges the way in which the writing hand embodies the action of the bird, but demonstrates how this is modified by the technological process of turning quill into pen. This demonstrates a sophisticated conceptualisation of the interaction between the actants of the human writer and the nonhuman bird and pen. The riddle creates in its centre a point of convergence whereby something new is brought forth, something which draws on both the physical action of the scribe and the natural properties of the quill; this is presented in the form of the writing hand. While it appears that the final lines of the riddle return a sense of human dominance to this interaction – demonstrated in the image of the scribe showing the way to the pen and fingers – these final lines *do not* fully break down the equal union of quill, fingers and scribe. The pen and the fingers remain indistinguishable from one another; they are presented as 'feower eall' (all four). The limbs of the scribe act as an

assemblage with the bird/pen. The struggling warrior of the scribe refers to the intellectual process of writing and the concluding line of the riddle acknowledges the simultaneous separation between the physical and intellectual processes of writing, while also emphasising the unity and equal significance of both.

### **Conclusions**

As demonstrated by the case study of *craft* and its similar semantic field to that of *technology*, the craft of writing, as constructed in the Anglo-Saxon riddles, emphasises further the intertwined state of the physical processes and technologies of the craft and the intellectual context of producing a written text. The riddles also offer a model of knowledge which engages with the poetic, scientific and divine. The interaction between the material and the spiritual within the riddle texts provides a less hierarchical model of knowledge to those displayed elsewhere within the Anglo-Saxon literary corpus. This model of knowledge is dependent on the poetic nature of these texts, and it is in this way that they construct their own literary ecology. This literary ecology is constructed through their poetic engagement with the physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of writing. This chapter has explored the extent to which the riddles are both engaged with, and dependent on, the concepts of revealing and concealing. It is this constant play between concealment and revelation that allows the riddles to construct and explore the networks of interaction which take place in the processes of producing written texts and the tools required for writing. The Old English and Anglo-Latin riddle traditions merge scientific observations of the material world with religious doctrine through the medium of poetry. The key concepts of revelation and concealment work by presenting the reader with assemblages of actants which reveal the identity of the riddle

speaker through their interactions.

This chapter has demonstrated how Anglo-Saxon riddles construct a literary ecology which engages with both scientific knowledge and poetry, with the material as well as the intellectual. Through these ideas, I have interrogated Heidegger's notions of being and dwelling, and the model of ecopoetics which scholars such as Bate (2000) have drawn from Heidegger's work. Reading the riddles alongside Heidegger's philosophies on being, dwelling, and the idea of technology provides a contrasting sense of human and nonhuman engagement to the (in many ways) anthropocentric model outlined by Heidegger. In these texts humans do not speak for nonhumans, but rather the riddles construct a poetics which present human beings and nonhumans in dialogue and entwined interaction with one another. Understanding these interactive processes demonstrates that the Anglo-Latin and Old English riddles constitute models of knowledge. While these sets of texts differ in their presentation of these knowledge models, they convey similar kinds of information. The riddles are engaged with both scientific and artistic models of thinking. They rely on the knowledge of their readers/listeners, but also utilise a range of complex literary and poetic techniques to simultaneously conceal and reveal the identities about which they speak.

The next chapter considers further the idea of nonhuman agency which this chapter has begun to develop. It investigates the interaction between motifs of hoards and hoarding in Old English poetic texts, and considers how modern postwar poetry explores the interaction between past and present through the agency of objects in, and on, the surface of the ground.

## Chapter Three

### The Hoard Uncovered: Objects and the Ground as Poetic Ecosystems

‘Each spark trills on a tone beyond chronological compass,  
yet in a sextant’s bubble present and firm  
places a surveyor’s stone or steadies a tiller.  
Then is Now’ - Basil Bunting, *Briggflatts*.

The influence of Anglo-Saxon literature on much post-war twentieth century poetry is widely recognised and remains apparent in twenty first-century poetry.<sup>1</sup> There has been a recent surge in interest in the influence of Anglo-Saxon literature on our culture today; collective works such as the 2010 publication *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination* edited by David Clark and Nicholas Perkins, and Chris Jones’ (2006) *Strange Likeness* draw together a wealth of discussion of a wide range of areas of Anglo-Saxon culture and its influence on diverse aspects of current art forms and experiences.<sup>2</sup> A particularly

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1 Examples of twentieth-century work influenced by Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, include Gordon Wardman’s *Caedmon*, the work of Jane Draycott, and Liam Guilar’s *Lady Godiva and Me*. The last fifteen years has also seen several major literary translations of medieval texts such as Heaney’s *Beowulf* (2000) and, although a later medieval text, Simon Armitage’s (2007) version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For further details of twentieth/twenty-first-century writers influenced by Anglo-Saxon literary culture see Jones (2010). The influence of Old Norse literary traditions has also enjoyed burgeoning interest demonstrated in work such as O’Donoghue (2004: 149-201).

2 More specific areas of discussion and research have developed as a result of this rise in



prominent example of this work is Lees' (2010) discussion of Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* and Exeter Book *Riddle 51* (usually solved as pen and three fingers) in relation to the idea of interlace structure, as was discussed briefly in the previous chapter.<sup>3</sup> Lees (2010) argues that examining these historically distant texts alongside one another can enhance our reading and understanding of the riddle text, as well as contribute significantly to discussion of Bunting's twentieth-century work.<sup>4</sup> It is no new observation that the writing of Seamus Heaney, Geoffrey Hill and Basil Bunting draws heavily on medieval literature and culture, but further engagement is required regarding the ways in which medieval and twentieth-century texts construct and share this dynamic relationship. Previous work discussing the influence of medieval literature on modernist writers has emphasised aspects of structure, metre, and lexis.<sup>5</sup> Reading poetry across time also has significant potential for further developing our understanding of conceptual frameworks. It offers untapped potential for strengthening an

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interest, namely those of the influence of early medieval cultures on video and online gaming, see for example Fugelso and Robinson (2008). Projects such as The Society for the Public Understanding of the Middle Ages (<http://publicmiddleages.com/>) are also working to bring together research and interest in the field of medieval influence on twentieth/twenty-first-century art and culture.

- 3 For more on interlace in Anglo-Saxon poetry see Leyerle (1967: 1-17). For a particularly useful overview of twentieth century and twenty first century influenced by Old English poetry see Jones (2010).
- 4 For work on the impact of medieval literature on modern texts from a medievalist perspective includes the final chapter of O'Donoghue's (2004) work on Old Norse literature; McCarthy (2008); Clark and Perkins (2010); McGowan (2002); Jones (2006). Davies (2010) specifically focuses on the work of Bunting, Hill, Heaney, and Hughes.
- 5 See for example Makin (1992). See also Ingelbien (2002: 145-88) for references to Heaney's work.

understanding of literary ecology as a developing critical perspective, and for understanding the potential that thinking in terms of a literary ecologies can offer to medieval literature.

This chapter engages with the work of three major twentieth-century poets whose work has previously received significant attention regarding its medieval influences. The poetry of Heaney, Hill and Bunting shares an interest not only in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, but also in the role that objects (and the ground in which they are found) play in accessing and encountering the past. Anglo-Saxonists have been keen to establish a dialogue between texts and objects, as is evidenced particularly in the work of Hines' (2004) *Voices in the Past: English Literature and Archaeology* and Carver's (2000) 'Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves'. While these projects have proved important in suggesting ways in which the study of literary and material sources can be linked, they have struggled to produce new insights into source material through the execution of these methods. Poetry offers a different medium through which Anglo-Saxonists can explore the interactions between the material and the poetic. The poetry of Heaney, Hill and Bunting does not claim to be historically accurate in its constructions and engagements with the past, but it nevertheless provides a new way in which to think about the past and how that past interacts with the present. Through their poetry, these three writers create their own ecologies which demonstrate a merging of the past and the present which may be considered impossible outside the poetic environment. At the same time, this work also demonstrates how material environments are constantly engaging in a dialogue with the past, particularly through connection between historic objects and the ground.

The ground acts as a physical medium through which Heaney, Hill and

Bunting explore the interaction between human and nonhuman objects across time. Understanding the variety of different ways in which the ground is constructed poetically as a mediating actant between past and present, provides further insights into the ways in which twentieth-century poetry interacts with the physical world, but also challenges preconceived ideas of how environment is constructed in Anglo-Saxon poetic texts. The concept of time and the interaction between past and present plays a key part in this chapter, but this chapter is structured in such a way that enables a focus on how time is constructed poetically through the interaction between objects and the various networks of the ground. Heaney's collected works were published in 1998 under the title *Opened Ground*, demonstrating the significance of the ground and archaeology throughout his work. Using this title as inspiration, this chapter is structured according to archaeological strata, rather than chronologically according to the publication of each poet's work. I examine the way in which the poetry of Heaney, Hill and Bunting engages with the interaction between the past and the network of objects constituting and interacting with the ground. I begin by examining Heaney's interest in digging into the ground, then move on to Hill's objects worming their way up through the soil's layers, and finally concluding with Bunting's objects on the surface of the ground. Therefore, while Bunting's *Briggflatts* was published in 1965, before both Hill's *Mercian Hymns* (1971) and Heaney's collection *North* (1975), it is the final text discussed in this chapter.

In this chapter I pay particular attention to the synchronic or diachronic presence of objects within these texts, and how these constructions affect the connections between objects, the physical world, and the past. Objects are a key part of this process; they act as physical links between the past and the present, and unify this temporal distance through their physical presence in the world.

ANT states that both human and nonhuman actors possess agency, and thus actively shape networks of connections which are traceable across time. Poetry by Heaney, Hill, and Bunting not only draws inspiration from early medieval culture, but from archaeological finds dating from this period. As a result, these three writers are often compared to archaeologists; the common image of the pen as a spade plays a crucial role in this association.<sup>6</sup> Archaeological tropes were a common feature of Modernist poetry, which turned time – in the form of the past – into depth, in the form of ‘spatialized time’ (McHale 1999: 240).<sup>7</sup> This technique builds on a pre-existing set of embedded metaphors associated with the way that human beings often conceptualise and express time.<sup>8</sup> Time is recognised as a dimension, but one in which we cannot move. Space, therefore, provides a metaphorical category which enables human beings to conceptualise a movement through time. Previous exploration of the archaeological nature of Heaney’s work has emphasised the transformative nature of poetry. Taking this line of discussion, Finn (2003: 75) offers the example of Heaney’s poem ‘Victorian Guitar’, which she notes ‘considers an engraved plate on an instrument case and, through the clues it offers to owner and date, constructs a biography that goes beyond the pragmatic and knowable, into the imagined and possible.’ This movement from ‘knowable’ to ‘possible’ illustrates the transformative action of poetry on an object. At the same time, the object of the guitar is an equally important actant in the network of the poem. It is the material qualities of the guitar which trigger the start of this ‘transformative process’ of accessing history.

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6 See Stallworthy (1982); McCarthy (2008: 46-47); Finn (2003).

7 See also Jameson (1991: 154).

8 See Lakoff (1993: 218); Boroditsky (2000). For a discussion of the links between metaphors in Old English and Modern English see Kay (2000).

Even the written information provided on the object is presented through a description which focuses on its material qualities. The text is described as ‘engraved’ rather than just written, and this form of inscription is likened to that found on a coffin (another physical object). Writing and the material qualities of the guitar work alongside the narrator’s imagination within this poem. The creation of the poetic work, therefore, should be read as a construction formed by the equal influence of the object and the human mind.<sup>9</sup>

The link between the material qualities of a particular object, an inscription it bears, and the medium of poetry is not limited to Heaney’s poetry or to poetry of this era more generally. A strikingly similar moment occurs in *Beowulf*, whose original circulation dates from between a thousand and thirteen hundred years previous.<sup>10</sup> Once he has slain Grendel’s mother in her underwater dwelling place, Beowulf presents to king Hroðgar the hilt of a sword which he found in that cave and used to slay her and decapitate Grendel. The poem narrates how Hroðgar gazes on the hilt’s inscription;<sup>11</sup> at this point the poem enters into a passage recounting apparent historical events. The narrative is ambiguous, however, as to whether it is Hroðgar, as the beholder of the inscription, or the poet, through the proxy of this beholder, who is taken through this transformative process of accessing history. In a remarkably similar way to that of Heaney’s ‘Victorian Guitar’, the material qualities of a particular object, in this case the inscription on the hilt, trigger a transformation from the

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9 For a discussion of the linking of physical and intellectual creativity, particularly in relation to Old English *craft* and Modern English *technology*, see Chapter One.

10 The exact dating of *Beowulf* is an infamous source of debate, but is estimated to date from between the 8th-11th century (Klaeber 2008).

11 See ll. 1677-99. The text is ambiguous as to whether this is a visual or textual representation, presumably composed in runic figures.

knowable solidity of the physical inscription to the possibilities of the past. In the *Beowulf* passage, it is also unclear whether the audience is presented with Hroðgar's own meditation or the narrator's, which enhances this interaction between the object described and inscribed and the narrative of the poem. Whether it is Hroðgar or the narrator who experiences this process of entering into the past, it is the object of the hilt which triggers this action. Not only does the hilt provide a movement into the past, but, as a result of this process, the narrative is also propelled into a passage concerning the future. Hroðgar delivers a sermon-like speech which not only draws its warnings from events of the past – specifically the illiberality of King Heremod of the Danes – but appears prophetic in the way that it cautions Beowulf on the dangers of pride and avarice. The examples of both Heaney's 'Victorian Guitar' and the sword hilt passage from *Beowulf* demonstrate the dynamic interaction between material objects and poetry. The interaction between material object and poetry is cross-temporal; it not only takes part in a dialogue across time, but can often actively initiate such cross-temporal experiences.

### **Language, Objects and Time**

This interaction between the creative mind of the poet and a physical object has led to the analogy of the poet as archaeologist. Brandes (1996: 52) comments on the similarities between the writer and the archaeologist, but also likens the writer to a 'digger' or 'diviner', whereby all those who work in these areas approach their work with tool in hand, and most crucially 'the object of their search precedes them in both time and space' (1996: 52). While the origins of these ideas can clearly be seen in the work of poets such as Heaney, such suggestions mark the poet as a discoverer rather than a creator in a way which

does not convey the dynamic nature of poetic composition and poetic engagement with the past. Heaney's 'Bone Dreams' demonstrates a peeling back of time, where the discovery of an object (in this case a bone) transports the narrator back through history. The narrative oscillates between temporal phrases of past, present, and future: 'I push back' (l. 21), 'I found' (l. 36), 'soon my hands, on the sunken / fosse of her spine, / move towards the passes' (l. 62).<sup>12</sup> The imperative 'Come back past / philology and kennings' (ll. 49-50), which marks the beginning of the fourth section, firmly asserts the voice of the narrator. It is the physical object of the bone, however, which enables the creation of the past to be constructed within the poem. Time is also ambiguous in lines 49-50. The overhanging of 'past' at the end of line 49 makes it difficult to distinguish whether it is acting as a noun or preposition. Heaney also adds to the ambiguity of the movement of time in this stanza by not stating whether the direction of travel is forward or backward. At this point in the poem, the narrator's rootedness in the present — established in the opening lines of the poem with the finding of the bone — has been destabilised. The reader can no longer be sure of the temporal location of the speaker. Earlier in the poem, the bone transported the narrator into the past where

In the coffered  
riches of grammar  
and declensions  
I found *bān-hūs*. (ll. 33-36)

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12 All quotations from Heaney's poetry are from Heaney (1998). Subsequent quotations will be referenced simply by line numbers.

Object and language work together to explore the environment both in the present and the past. In this passage, language is closely tied to materiality. Grammar becomes a medium in and through which the past can be stored and explored; this invites comparison to the image of the ground as a place where the ‘coffered riches’ of the material past can be found. Just as the bone is an active agent in the connection between past and present, so too is language. Language is presented as an active and dynamic entity, whereby the ‘coffered riches of grammar’ are constantly growing and changing. This passage also shows Heaney drawing on the *wordbord* (word-hoard) motif, which is found widely in Old English poetry. The *wordbord* motif has a significant presence across the Old English poetic corpus; this is evidenced by the fact that *bord* and *word* collocate with each other on at least fourteen occasions, with many more other connected occurrences of these terms across the corpus (Tyler 2006: 56).<sup>13</sup> The word-hoard motif has received significant previous attention,<sup>14</sup> with much of this work being connected to discussions on oral and literary cultures in Old English poetry, and also to the association between words and wisdom or knowledge. Work in these areas often emphasises the connection between the idea of the *wordbord* and that of the mind-hoard (*wis-*). The mind hoard is where feeling and emotions reside, but it also the place where intellect and cognition are contained; this is located within the chest cavity (*breostbord*). Language, emotion, and cognition or intellect are connected together and associated with the imagery of enclosure which also characterises literary constructions of hoarded treasure.<sup>15</sup> While the

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13 Tyler (2006: 56) lists these occurrences as: *And* 167, 315, 601, 669, *HmFgl* 3, *Vng* 3, *Wid* 1, *OrW* 17, *Rid84* 54, *Beo* 258, 2788, *MB* 6.1, *Ps50* 26.

14 See Stevens (1978); Jager (1990); Tyler (2006: 56–60); Harbus (2012: 37).

15 There appears to be much debate over the idea of the breast as locus for both the mind and the heart or for emotion and intellect. Godden (1985) discusses the varied views on this topic



connection between the emotions of the *breostbord* and the language of the *wordbord* is important to acknowledge and explore, previous discussion in this area has sometimes led to the over simplification of these motifs. In particular, there is a tendency to associate these ideas with the ambiguous notion of ‘heroic culture’.<sup>16</sup> Jager (1990: 849) says that ‘verbal prowess is collated in the chest along with the vital powers and moral virtue, making the chest a “centre of action”, and a symbolic repository of heroic values’. The notion of ‘heroic values’ is as problematic as ‘heroic culture’. It imposes a generalised term on the complex ideas which are interwoven into the constructions of language, wisdom, emotions, and material objects within Old English poetry.

Such a reading, particularly expressed using terms such as Jager’s notion of chest as ‘symbolic repository’, also tends to be somewhat reductive in its handling of the notion of the *bord*. The idea of the *wordbord* as a ‘repository’ can be read as an interesting counterpoint to Heidegger’s notion of standing reserve [*Bestand*].<sup>17</sup> Heidegger associates standing-reserve with the potential energy which technology makes available to be stored and called upon for human use whenever it is required. As discussed in Chapter One, standing reserve is a form of forced revealing or ‘enframing’, whereas poetic language is one way through which things disclose themselves without being forced and defined in terms of instrumental value. Jager’s interpretation of the *wordbord* as a ‘repository of

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proposed by a range of Anglo-Saxon sources. He concludes that poetic texts tend to associate mind or cognition with emotion and distinguish this from the idea of soul or spirit. Across the poetic sources, the mind and emotion appear to be associated with the breast, see Godden (1985: 290).

16 The archaic and problematic nature of this phrase has been discussed in the previous chapter.

17 For a discussion of Heidegger’s notion of standing-reserve see p. 50.

heroic values' (1990: 849) appears as a twisted form of Heidegger's notion of standing reserve, whereby language itself is stockpiled to be brought forth when demanded. While the collocation *wordhord* does carry similar connotations of enclosure to those of both *breosthord* and material treasure-hoards, this notion of enclosure is not as fixed and static as is suggested by the term 'repository'. Although it is usually characterised as a hidden collection of entities, a hoard – either material, linguistic, emotional, or intellectual – can and does maintain a sense of activity and agency while it is within this enclosure. Old English *hord* also appears to have a slightly broader semantic range to that of Modern English *board*. *Hord* can pertain to a closet or container, a person's wealth or value, as well as the more familiar connotations associated with a mass or accumulation of something or treasure/riches.<sup>18</sup> There is also a well recognised understanding within Old English poetry that the hoarding of treasure is a negative quality, and that hoards exist to be unlocked. Tyler observes that treasure forms part of 'an Anglo-Saxon *ars poetica*' as it was 'not simply a common motif but rather part of the fabric of poetic discourse in a manner analogous to stylistic phenomena such as formulas, variation and kennings' (2006: 18). While treasure may have become part of the 'fabric of poetic discourse' its materiality was still key to its active role within this discourse. Unlike kennings or variation, the motif of treasure occurred in Old English poetry as a complex merging of the material and the poetic. The idea that both emotions and the mind or cognitive experiences are housed in the breast is particularly key to the dynamic nature of enclosure and hoarding presented by Old English poetic texts. Heaney's 'Bone Dreams' brings the material associations of the *wordhord* to the fore, while also emphasising the active and dynamic nature of such hoarded language, and consequently poetic

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18 See *TOE*.

creativity as a hoard in the mind, seemingly enclosed yet active and creative. Heaney's invocation of the *bān-hūs* kenning links together the physical object of the bone, both in the past and the present, with the riches and creative potential of language. The narrator finds *bān-hūs* in the 'coffered riches / of grammar', conveying, here, the sense of enclosure which the Old English *wordbord* connotes. Heaney also draws on the *wordbord* motif in 'North', where the narrator is encouraged to:

Lie down  
in the word-hoard, burrow  
the coil and gleam  
of your furrowed brain. (ll. 29-32)

This passage not only conveys the sense of enclosure which is associated with the notion of the hoard, but also connects this directly with the ground as the specific enclosure in which treasure hoards are usually found in Old English poetry. The use of 'burrow' connects to Heaney's more general conceit of the poet as archaeologist; this echoes throughout the collection of *North* and more widely in Heaney's writing. The physical qualities of the ground are crucial to the concept of the hoard, as is, in this particular passage, the visual nod to the figure of the dragon ('the coil and gleam') who is associated with hoarded treasure in the Old English poems *Beowulf* and *Maxims II*.<sup>19</sup>

Heaney's 'Bone Dreams' also explores language in its material form as written text. As the mind of the narrator moves back in time, she/he evokes 'the iron / flash of constants / cleaving the line' (ll. 30-32). Attention is also subtly

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<sup>19</sup> See *Beowulf* (ll. 2566-70a) for a description of the coiling action of the dragon.

drawn here to the dynamic nature of both the material object of the bone and the ground in which it is found. It is ‘the rough, porous / language of touch’ (ll. 3-4) which triggers the creative exploration of language to transport the subject matter into the past. The ground itself does not appear as a static vessel in which objects are contained. Like the ‘coffers’ of language, the ground is a vessel which changes and is shaped by, and actively shaping, the object of the bone.

This image of the dynamic vessel or enclosure is also extended to the body through the ‘*bān-hūs*’ (bone house – a skeleton) kenning. Like the *wordbord* and *breostbord* motifs, the notion of the body as enclosure for the soul is also common in Old English poetry, notable examples being those found in the poems *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*.<sup>20</sup> Heaney uses the materiality and language of the body in the creation and exploration of the physical environment of both the present and past. The kenning ‘bone house’ (or *bān-hūs*) is, itself, described as ‘a skeleton / in the tongue’s / old dungeons’ (ll. 18-20). This is taken further by calling upon orality. The kenning, and language more generally, is not just something which exists as the written word, but also as a formation of the tongue’s actions.<sup>21</sup> It is the materiality of the Old English kenning that attracts Heaney. The opening lines of ‘Bone Dreams’ are fixated on the physicality of the object (the bone). The idea of ‘the language of touch’ is taken further by means of the *bān-hūs* kenning. Dailey (2006: 206-9) discusses the connections between kennings and the body in Old English. She draws attention to the semantic associations between *cenning* and birth/procreation, and notes

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20 Both these poems will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.

21 This in itself presents an interesting juxtaposition between the materiality and non-materiality of spoken and oral language. For further discussion of materiality and wider issues regarding Anglo-Saxon oral and written language see Christie (2012); Doane (1991); O’Brien O’Keeffe (1990).

that the verb *gecennan* ‘spans the semantic range of to conceive, bring forth, produce, beget, create, produce, nominate, declare, assign, show oneself, and make a declaration in a court’ (Dailey 2006: 207). This term implies significant connections between the physical body, creativity, and language. Heaney’s ‘Bone Dreams’ draws on the enmeshment of these concepts, and places the artefact of the bone at the centre of this network.

Creativity plays a key part in this encounter between human being, object, and the wider physical environment. The *bān-būs* kenning extends further in the poem, where it creates the image of a physical house ‘where the soul / fluttered a while’ (ll. 39-40). The use of the verb ‘fluttered’ nods to the famous Anglo-Saxon analogy of the sparrow in the hall documented in Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*.<sup>22</sup> Connections can also be drawn between the soul and the image of a bird, which appears elsewhere as a widely recognisable motif in Old English poetry and medieval Irish literature. The ‘fluttering’ of the soul adds to the feeling of constant movement which the poem evokes. In ‘Bone Dreams’, Old English poetic imagery and language allows Heaney to explore the material artefact of the bone through the creativity of language, just as the physical object of the bone enables linguistic creativity to be explored. A symbiotic relationship occurs between language and object. One enables the other, and both acknowledge the significance of the ground as a crucial actant in this process.

The co-working of language and material agents can serve as a point of reference for the reconciliation of language and materialism. The recent

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22 The passage of the bird through the hall is part of a passage where Bede expounds upon human life; the known of life is compared to the sparrow’s time in the hall, but what comes before it enters and after it exits is unknown.

movement in the humanities known as New Materialism or the “Material Turn” has developed as a reaction against the so called “Linguistic Turn”, which emphasised the significance of language in the construction of reality.<sup>23</sup> It is the evocation of the past, specifically the Anglo-Saxon past and the language and stylistics of Old English poetry, which enables the convergence of language and material object to take place. Language, therefore, becomes a tool for excavating historical connections between humans and the physical world. Those working in the field of New Materialism are often perhaps too quick to dichotomise language and materiality. Bryant, Harman, and Srnicek (2011: 3) note that the so called ‘anti-realist’ positions of those working in fields associated with the linguistic turn (phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism) are ‘not equipped’ to face up to developments in our modern world, such as ‘looming ecological catastrophe’ and ‘the increasing filtration of technology into the everyday world (including our own bodies)’. This is arguably not the case. Language does have the potential to engage with the physical world in a way which does not seek to overshadow the materiality of the environment, but rather explores the encounters of human beings with other nonhuman entities. Heaney engages with the notion that it is both the materiality of the bone and the creativity of language which allows the reader to explore and encounter the physical environment in which the bone is located, both in the present and the past. Heaney extends the physicality of the bone from the original artefact to incorporate the surrounding land in which the bone is found. This is exemplified in the lines: ‘its yellowing, ribbed / impression in the grass’ (ll. 5-6). The reader is then, very much in a Latourian sense of

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23 See Iovino (2012: 75-76); Coole and Frost (2010). The “material turn” is also referred to as “the speculative turn”, see Bryant, Srnicek and Harman (2011).

‘following the actors’, encouraged to trace the interactions of this small bone back in time to reveal how it has shaped, and itself been shaped by, the many different objects with which it has interacted.

Reading Heaney’s ‘Bone Dreams’ with a more attuned awareness of medieval literary and cultural studies also reveals previously under-discussed insights into the poem’s archaeological imagery. The close connection and co-working of language and the material object in ‘Bone Dreams’ connects with some of the anxieties of twentieth-century archaeological theory. The post-processual movement in archaeology developed during the 1970s and 80s as a reaction to the objective approach of processual archaeology practised by the so-called ‘New archaeologists’ of the 1960s. Post-processual archaeology is based on the idea that archaeology is subjective. The focus is placed on interpretation and the search for cultural meaning in the archaeological record. As a result of this humanist turn, textual metaphors were often used to convey the way in which meaning can be derived from material artefacts.<sup>24</sup> This encouraged archaeologists to ‘read’ artefacts in order to try to understand and interpret their meaning. Jones (2004: 328) argues that a substantial problem with applying this textual metaphor to material culture is that it ‘treats the material world as a mere substratum on to which humans lay their ideas and concepts.’ Arguably, this may have led to the dematerialisation of artefacts and, as such, was criticised by the likes of Olsen (2003). Hawkes (2011: 247) discusses the notion of objects as palimpsests and the idea that objects are historical, not because of our ‘subjective experiences of them’ but because of their inherent properties. This idea of objects as palimpsests connects with more explicit work on ANT and archaeology. In this line of work, Olsen (2003: 88) proposes what he calls a more ‘symmetrical

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24 See Hodder and Hutson (2003).

archaeology' which is based on the idea that 'things, all those physical entities which we refer to as material culture, are beings in the world alongside other beings, such as humans, plants, and animals. All these beings are kindred, sharing substance ('flesh') and membership in a dwelt-in world.' The movement of ANT in archaeology has developed from feelings of anxiety amongst some archaeologists that the discipline has become 'undermaterialized' (Olsen 2003: 90).<sup>25</sup> Growing interest in fields such as 'consumption studies' tend to focus the attention not on the materiality of objects and the way in which human beings and other entities in the world interact and exist with one another, and but on the social meaning of 'material culture'. While the textual metaphors may impose limits on objects' materiality, they also potentially explore objects further. Heaney's 'Bone Dreams' demonstrates how language enables further contact with a specific object and that object enables explorations in language and time.

### **Exploring Deeper into the Ground**

'Bone Dreams' concerns digging and uncovering. While the combination of material object and language plays a vital part in the poem's exploration of the past, the agency which the bone appears to possess is somewhat undermined by Heaney's preoccupation with the digging analogy. Heaney has referred to his (1966) poem 'Digging' as the place where he found his voice (Heaney 2002: 14-16). The trouble with the metaphor of digging is that it imposes and insists on the process of uncovering. This uncovering can also be read as revelation, and begins to resemble the Heideggerian notion of the ability of poetic language to 'bring forth' what is hidden, *poesis*. As discussed in Chapter Two, Heidegger views this poetic 'bringing forth' (enabled by language) as the way in which

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25 See also Olsen (2010).



humans 'dwell'. This is problematic due to Heidegger's insistence that language is something which only human beings possess. As a result, any sense of agency from the nonhuman material entities of the poem (i.e. that of the bone and the ground) is displaced. To read 'Bone Dreams' in this way characterises the human mind as sole agent; the object (the bone) is picked up and wound in 'the sling of mind' (l. 13). The human mind then takes over the projection of the object and all its interactions. The presentation of the past and the objects which create that temporal space, is then characterised by a reaching down (digging) or a "revelation". It is not only the agency of the bone which can be lost in this analogy, but also that of the ground and its multiple constituent entities/actants. This can lead to the interpretation of the ground as an inactive storage unit, and to objects as lifeless and inanimate relics. Again, this idea shares echoes with Heidegger's notion of standing-reserve, though it is quite different in its presentation. Unlike Heidegger's notion of standing reserve, in this reading, the ground does not exist as a potential source of energy. Rather than the contents of the ground being forced into revelation for its instrumental value, the network of the ground itself lies inert and passive. At the same time, language, the thing named by Heidegger as the method by which the world can be saved, is brought to the fore and dominates the agency of the object of the bone and the other objects constituting the network of the ground. 'Bone Dreams', however, manages to avoid losing this sense of nonhuman agency by closely tying together the objects of the bone and the ground. The 'bone's lair' becomes a 'love nest in the grass'. The bone is there because the network of actants which comprise the ground have preserved it, and the network of the ground itself has been altered by the imprint of the bone. It is the material and physical qualities of both the bone and the ground which lead to Heaney's contemplation of the environments

in which this object has existed/exists in the past and present. Heaney conveys this sense of agency through his anthropomorphism of these nonhuman actants. The use of anthropomorphism is a much debated issue within ecocritical reading, and its relationship to the agency of nonhuman entities has been an equally popular topic of discussion.<sup>26</sup> Some suggest that to attribute human characteristics to nonhuman entities is an act of humanisation and, therefore, detracts from the true nature of the specific subject. While the use of anthropomorphism does not allow us as human beings to truly understand the characteristics of nonhuman entities, it *does* allow us to make connections which may otherwise not be possible. Moreover, anthropomorphism of this kind is also a manifestation of a more embedded cognitive phenomenon, evidenced by the large number of anthropomorphizing metaphors in human languages. Such a cognitive phenomenon may suggest an acknowledgement that nonhuman entities can, and do, possess agency.<sup>27</sup>

In order to more fully understand the ground as a network of active agents which are themselves constructed by the poem it is useful to consult the more explicit references to earth-agency which appear in several Old English riddle texts. The well established presence of nonhuman agency which Anglo-Saxon riddles contain has been discussed in previous chapters.

Anthropomorphism is the most prominent technique for conveying this sense of agency, with the use of the first-person voice of an object being the most widely occurring example of this technique across the corpus. Exeter Book *Riddle 35*

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26 For a thorough discussion of the use of anthropomorphism in relation to literature and the environment see Clark (2011: 192-201).

27 Anthropomorphism has been much discussed in the various fields of animal studies, particularly regarding the impact that it has on our understanding of animal agency; see Lulka (2009: 71-72).

deals specifically with an object whose raw materials are formed in the ground. The speaker of *Riddle 35* is a mailcoat which depicts the processes of its crafting from metal into armament. The opening section of the riddle deals with the origins of the metal from which the mailcoat is made:

Mec se wæta wong,    wundrum freorig,  
of his innape    ærist cende. (ll. 1-2)

(The wet ground, wondrous cold, originally brought me forth  
from its womb.)

The ground is depicted as an actant in the network of the mailcoat's production. The use of the verb *cennan* (past third person singular *cende*) is particularly significant as it carries the meanings of 'conceive, beget, bring forth, create, produce' (Clark Hall 1982: s.v. *cennan* and *TOE* s.v. *cenning*).<sup>28</sup> The ground, therefore, is responsible for the bringing forth of the raw material of the metal. Rather than the human action of digging down, *Riddle 35* constructs the ground as pushing out the metal. The agency of ground in Old English riddle texts is not limited to the occurrence in *Riddle 35*. Elsewhere in the riddle corpus there are further examples, which can be found in texts such as such as Exeter Book *Riddle 72* (lance/battering ram):

Ic on wonge aweox,    wunode þær mec feddon  
hruse ond heofonwolcn.

(I grew up in the fields, dwelled where the sky-cloud(s) and the  
ground fed me.) (ll. 1-2a)

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28 See also p. 142-43 for further discussion of this verb.

In a similar manner to *Riddle 35*, this riddle draws on the idea of the ground as a nurturing entity. While the human actions of those who use the speaker (later in its life as a weapon) have a significant role in shaping this object, the ground is presented as the place from which the speaker not only originates, but is fed, nurtured, and shaped.

In *Riddle 35*, the ground brings forth the metal ore from inside. The image of the metal originally dwelling in the ground in many ways resembles that of the hoard as widely conveyed in Old English poetry. It has been argued that riddle texts play with this motif.<sup>29</sup> By engaging with both the material and ecological aspects of the image as presented in the two Exeter Book riddles, the interaction between ground and metal can be read as an inversion of the hoard motif. Rather than gold and metalwork being hidden in the ground, the riddle texts convey the idea of metal being pushed forth from the earth. The notion of the hoard, therefore, becomes associated with production rather than the typical sense of preservation or, worse, a sense of the hoard being rendered useless through being removed from circulation. This interplay between hoard/metal and the ground can also be seen at play in *Beowulf*. In the account of how the dragon's hoard came into being, the narrator notes that the original hoarder spoke a few words before placing the gold in the ground:

Heald þu nu, hruse,    nu hæleð ne m[o]ston,  
 eorla æhte!    Hwæt, hyt ær on ðe  
 gode begeaton. (ll. 2247-49a)

(Hold now, earth, now that men cannot, the wealth of men!

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<sup>29</sup> See Tyler (2006: 63); Harris (2007: 4).

Indeed, from you those worthy men previously obtained it.)

This passage indicates that the treasure existed previously as another hoard in the ground from which it was raided, or perhaps alludes to the origins of precious metal as a raw material. The suggestion later in the poem that the gold is cursed<sup>30</sup> could potentially allude to the returning of the hoard to the ground from which it had previously been raided, but the direct address to the ground makes it appear more likely that this passage is referring to the ground as the origin of the metal ore from which the treasure has been crafted. This suggests a connection between the hoard motif and the ability of the actants which form the ground to bring forth treasure as well as enclose it.

This sense of productivity is further demonstrated in *Riddle 35*. The use of ‘innape’ in the second line of the riddle can refer specifically to a womb, or more generally to insides, entrails, or breast/heart, but, combined with the physical description of the action of bringing forth from within, the passage would suggest the connotation of ‘womb’. In this way, the riddle appears to draw connections between the ground and the female body, a connection which is also made in Heaney’s ‘Bone Dreams’. In this context, however, the description is much more passive. The *bān-hūs* skeleton of the poem is also female, as the narrator states ‘I hold my lady’s head / like a crystal’ (ll. 55-56). The female skeleton then merges with the ground, as the narrator becomes

screens on her escarpments,  
a chalk giant

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30 See *Beowulf* (ll. 3069-75).

carved upon her downs. (ll. 59-61)

Heaney pushes this merging of the female body and the ground (or land) further, with the tracing of the speaker's hands across the female skeleton. The skeleton then merges into the form and shape of the landmass of Britain.

As I estimate  
for pleasure  
her knuckles' paving,  
the turning stiles

of the elbows,  
the vallum of her brow  
and the long wicket  
of collar-bone,

I have begun to pace  
the Hadrian's Wall  
of her shoulder,  
dreaming of Maiden Castle. (ll. 69-80)

In both *Riddle 35* and 'Bone Dreams' the association between the ground and the female body share connections with the notion of enclosure. The *bān-būs* of 'Bone Dreams' is referred to as a 'love-den, blood-holt / dream bower' (ll. 47-48), and the narrator then depicts himself as cradling the skeleton 'between the lips /

of an earthwork' (ll. 67-68). The womb, or other internal space from which the metal ore is brought forth in *Riddle 35*, also draws a connection between the ground and the idea of enclosure. The connection between women and earthen or subterranean enclosures has a presence in Old English poetry, which also appears more widely in Anglo-Saxon art and artefact ornamentation. Occurrences of this trope include the dwelling place of the speaker in *The Wife's Lament*, probably the right-hand panel of the Franks Casket, and arguably the cave/underground dwelling of Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*. Substantial work has also been conducted on the nature of underground dwelling places and their association with female characters.<sup>31</sup> Earthen dwelling places in Old English poetry appear in a variety of different possible contexts: as hovels, graves, or heathen sanctuaries (Battles 1994: 267). Women are confined to these spaces for their own protection or act as guardians of some other hidden artefacts. The ground, in these contexts, is often read as a type of anti-hall. Hume (1974: 68) notes that the construction of an anti-hall inverts normal characteristics associated with the Anglo-Saxon hall as a place of social order, security, and community. It is the physical characteristics of the ground which manifest as the inversion of the hall motif. Earthen dwellings are not weather-tight, and are thus not places of warmth and dryness. It is conditions like these which implicitly construct the sense of loneliness and despair which is so prominent in texts such as the *Wife's Lament*.

References to the ground in Old English poetry are also often linked to death. Much previous work has discussed the role and use of burial mounds in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture,<sup>32</sup> including the significance of barrows as

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31 See Hall (2002); Battles (1994); Anderson (1991: 73-76); Semple (1998).

32 See Reichardt (1974); Semple (1998); Lench (1970); Davidson (1950); Shook (1960);

places of exile, as well as places where supernatural beings (like the dragon of *Beowulf*) dwell and guard their hoards.<sup>33</sup> The ground is also frequently associated with decay and the physical deterioration of the body after death. The poem *Soul and Body II* presents the address of the soul to the dead earthly body, accusing the body of conducting the actions in life that have led to the soul's damnation in death. The speaker makes extensive use of imagery of decay and *wyrmas* (worms, maggots or larvae) feeding on the flesh. The poem also conveys the idea that the body is encased within the ground; this is a fitting image, resembling the motif of the soul encased in the enclosure of the body. There is a combined sense of the individual actions of actants in the ground such as the worms, but also of the unifying nature of the ground as a network of actants. In this way, it begins to resemble a machine in the Deleuzian sense, as discussed in the previous chapter. The energy machine of the decaying body is connected to the organ machine of the worms.

Elsewhere in Old English poetry the ground possesses a similar sense of agency. In *The Ruin* the ground is characterised as holding objects in its grasp, as is conveyed in the phrases 'eorðgrap' (earth's grasp) (l. 6) or 'heardgripe hrusan' (hard grip of the earth) (l. 8).<sup>34</sup> The earth is said to have in its possessing grasp 'waldend wyrhtan forweorone, geleorene' (the mighty builders, perished, departed) (l. 7). The motif of the ground as enclosure, plays with the notion of the ground as both a destructive and a preserving substance/place. The grasping action of the ground simultaneously conveys action and suspense, life and death,

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Sample (2003).

33 The trope of hoarding and its relationship with the ground is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

34 The idea of binding and grasping is also attributed to frost and ice in other Old English poems such as *The Wanderer*.



decay and preservation. 'Bone Dreams' shares obvious parallels with the tropes of death and the ground which are present in several Old English poetic texts. The opening lines of 'Bone Dreams' invoke the image of a ship burial. The bone lies in an 'impression' in the grass, drawing on that sense of enclosure. The word 'impression', however, also conveys the sense that the bone has itself had some impact on the ground in which it is/was buried. The relationship between the ground and the artefact is thus one which is both complex and dynamic.

Exploring the interaction between objects (including the human body) and the ground provides insights into the way in which Old English poetry engages with the ground as part of the wider environment. While much previous scholarly attention has been focused on the role of the ground as a space of hostility, approaching constructions of the ground from an object-oriented and ecological position reveals a more complex and varied engagement with earth and the network of the ground than has previously been acknowledged. The construction of the ground in texts such as *Riddles 35* and *72*, therefore, holds particular significance. These constructions connect with other Old English poetic depictions of ground, while also playing on widely recognised tropes such as the anti-hall. It is the connection between ground and crafted object which creates a positive construction of this actant within *Riddle 35* and *Riddle 72*. *Riddle 35* is composed not only in the first-person voice of the mailcoat speaker, but also from its point of view. It is the cold and damp properties of the ground which enable the production and bringing forth of the metal ore. These qualities are referred to as 'wundrum' (wondrous), as they are the preferred (and necessary) conditions for this substance to dwell. The ground, therefore, is constructed as productive rather than destructive. This demonstrates the riddle's engagement with the importance of the origins of the raw materials from which

a particular object is crafted, and in doing so conveys a very different attitude towards environmental conditions.

In Heaney's 'Bone Dreams', the ground from which the bone is plucked gives birth to the history of the object, and the object itself is marked by its contact with the ground. The final stanzas depict the speaker running his fingers over the tiny shoulders of a dead mole and stating:

I touched small distant Pennines,  
a pelt of grass and grain  
running south. (ll. 94-96)

The bone is connected, here, with both the body and the ground. The use of Pennines is significant as they are often described as "the backbone of England".<sup>35</sup> Heaney's use of 'Pennines', therefore, embodies the physical ground in/on which the bone is preserved, the materiality of the bone, and the linguistic materiality of *bān-hūs*. At the same time Heaney also taps into the deeply embedded anthropomorphic bodily metaphors which are rooted within everyday human language as well as the poetic.

'The Relic of Memory' from *Door into the Dark* further demonstrates Heaney's fascination with ideas of encasement and the preservative qualities of mineral substances. In 'The Relic of Memory', the speaker casts aside and brands 'normal' stones as 'too simple', in comparison to the 'lure' of a small piece of wood which has been petrified in the Lough Neagh waters:

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35 See Chapter Two for discussion of descriptions of books which invoke the body. See Chapter Four for discussion of Simon Armitage's poetic engagement with the Pennines.

That relic stored –  
 A piece of stone  
 On the shelf at school,  
 Oatmeal coloured. (ll. 21-24)

It is the idea of preservation through petrification which attracts the speaker's admiration in 'The Relic of Memory'. Preservation is a theme which Heaney develops further in *Wintering Out* (1972) and *Stations* (1975), and is particularly evident in the development of his bog poems. While these poems demonstrate the creative ability of the human mind to construct a vision of the past from an artefact dug up from the ground, they also construct a sense of wonder at the preservative qualities of the ground itself. The close connection between the ground and objects in Heaney's poetry, combined with the sense of agency which he attributes to the action of the ground on an object, suggest that the ground itself, which is usually the place in which a hoard is kept, is also actively taking part in the process of hoarding. In her analysis of Heaney's work on bogs Dianne Meredith uses the approach of literary geography to suggest that 'poetic license may stretch description of a regional landscape beyond the confines of objective reality, bringing to light a stronger objectivity which is inclusive not only of the physical environment, but also of the social, psychological, and the historical climate' (1999: 127). It is true that, within his poetry, Heaney binds together the physical environment with the social, psychological, and historical. Just as an artefact is released and revealed from the ground by the archaeologist, the poet uses the physical qualities of the object (Heaney's 'language of touch') to re-imagine its history, or rather form a new construction of its history.

For Heaney, the ground appears as an equal actant, between real

interactions in which the object is a presence and those which are later created by the human imagination. In 'The Graubelle Man', the poem opens with a series of similes which gradually become fully developed metaphors as the poem progresses. This shift from simile to metaphor marks the transition between the interactions which can be witnessed between the body and other actors – 'As if he has been poured / in tar, he lies / on a pillow of turf' (ll. 1-3) – and those which are formed in the mind of the narrator:

His hips are the ridge  
and purse of a mussel,  
his spine an eel arrested  
under a glisten of mud. (ll. 16-20)

As the poem progresses further, the image of the Graubelle man becomes further defined by the workings of the narrator's mind, highlighted most explicitly in the lines 'but now he lies / perfected in my memory' (ll. 40). The preservative qualities of the ground are such that they enable this heightened state of creativity within the narrator's mind. In a similar way to the significance of crafting to the portrayal of the ground in *Riddle 35*, the ground plays an important role in preserving the physical object which becomes the creative influence of the poem. 'The Graubelle Man' also invokes imagery of birth in association with the ground. This is particularly interesting when compared to the similar imagery used in *Riddle 35*. The man is brought forth 'out of the peat' with his head and shoulder 'bruised like a forceps baby' (l. 36). The productive potential of the body born from the bog lies in its potential to inspire poetic creativity, and, while *Riddle 35* explores the productive potential of the ground

and the metal ore, the riddle's command to the person 'wordum wisfæst' (with wise words) to say what the garment is also connects to a sense of linguistic and poetic creativity. The birth of the Graubelle man from the ground, however, also presents a kind of re-birth; the man is brought forth as a very different object to that which entered the ground. It is this combination of change and preservation which instills an uncanny feeling in the reader. Following the raising of the body from the ground, it is then transported into the mind of the narrator. This transportation is conveyed in the use of 'but now' which precedes 'he lies / perfected in my memory'. Collins (2003: 95) considers the association with *The Dying Gaul* in the final lines of the poem, and suggests that Heaney draws 'a subtle parallel between victims of atrocities past and present'. The killing of the Gauls and the sacrifice of the Graubelle man are here linked to the atrocities of the deaths of those involved in the troubles in Northern Ireland. The past, present, and future are evoked through this association. *Riddle 72* draws the productiveness of the ground into a comparable political critique of violence to that of Heaney's 'The Graubelle Man'. The lance/battering ram speaker observes

hwilum eawunga eþelfæsten

forðweard brece, þæt ær frið hæfde. (ll. 25-26)

(Sometimes, inclined forward, I openly break the security of a town, that before had peace.)

The inclusion of the phrase 'þæt ær frið hæfde' (that before had peace), stands in stark comparison to the breaking of that security. This line also echoes the sense of nurture which the ground offers in the opening lines of the riddle.<sup>36</sup> This

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36 See pp. 149-50 for discussion of these lines.

sense of nurture contrasts with the violent nature of the speaker once it has been crafted into the battering ram. The ground as poetically constructed, therefore, appears to have a cross-temporal sense of nurture and acts as an object which can critique the presence of human violence.

Heaney also creates cross-temporal literary ecologies through the dynamic interactions between language and materiality. The presence of 'digging' metaphors in Heaney's work and the concept of the hoard in Old English poetry have appeared as major topics in the scholarly discourse of both these sets of texts. Reading these texts in dialogue with one another, however, reveals insights into both bodies of work which would otherwise not be possible to access. Heaney's self-conscious exploration and constructions of environments formed from, and in touch with, both the past and the present provide a framework for understanding the often taken for granted (yet arguably under discussed) motif of the hoard in Old English poetry. Many working in Anglo-Saxon studies have been keen to explore a dialogue between material and textual sources. While the work of poets such as Heaney has often been discussed in terms of its interest in the medieval, such work has yet to be fully tapped for the potential which it has for providing insight into earlier poetic material. The interactions between language and material objects in Heaney's poetry emphasise the network activity of environment, and particularly the notion of the ground as a network of objects which are constantly engaged with both the past and the present. In this way, Heaney's poetry makes its audience think about the past as something which has not disappeared or been left behind, but is very much present in the interactions that we as human beings experience with the network of actants we call the ground. Examining the literary ecologies constructed by Heaney's poetry sheds light on similar interactions between nonhuman objects, human beings, and the

ground in Old English poetic texts. The Old English poetic corpus contains several instances where the agency of the ground is explored. Reading passages associated with hoarding in light of these references to earth agency provides alternative ways to examine the motif of hoarded treasure. These readings suggest that hoarded treasure in Old English poetry takes part in a complex and dynamic relationship with the ground in which it is often found.

The figure of the poet as archaeologist is an obvious and striking difference in the way that that Heaney's poetry and the Old English poetic texts of *Beowulf* and the Exeter Book riddles access the past. Heaney's poet as archaeologist provides a self-conscious depiction of the role of the poet as a mediating figure between past and present. By contrast, rather than digging down to the past, Hroðgar's gazing on the hilt in *Beowulf* demonstrates the accessing of the past through an object which has already been brought to the surface. Similarly, *Riddle 35* demonstrates an inverted notion of digging down into the past, through the procreative bringing forth of the ancient metal from the ground.

The next section of this chapter explores further the relationship between past and present through the interaction between human beings, nonhuman objects, and the ground. Hill's *Mercian Hymns* pushes the concept of poet as archaeologist further, exploring not only the action of digging down to the past, but also the presence of the past on the surface environments of Hill's Mercia.

### **Raising the Hoard in the Work of Geoffrey Hill**

Geoffrey Hill's (1971) collection *Mercian Hymns* constructs its interactions between past and present by connecting objects to form a physical cross-temporal literary ecology. The work of Wootten (1998) and Crawford (2010) on

*Mercian Hymns* discusses Hill's engagement with history and his merging of the past with the present in relation to the building of a regional identity and to interrogations of nationalism, concepts discussed in further detail in the following chapter. The place of objects and their position in the ground has also been the source of much discussion of the poems, and this work has made its own connections with the poetry of Heaney.<sup>37</sup> The overt influence of early medieval language and culture on *Mercian Hymns* is also well documented, yet while previous work has connected the objects of *Mercian Hymns* with the idea of the hoard and the activity of hoarding,<sup>38</sup> this work does not consider the contexts of hoards as they appear in Old English poetic texts.<sup>39</sup> McHale (1999: 242) reads Hill's construction of the physical world in *Mercian Hymns* in a similar way to the use of archaeologisms in Heaney's works *North* and *Wintering Out*, stating that Hill 'conflates two epochs, the early Middle Ages and the England of the poet's own lifetime'. While the term 'conflate' indicates the bringing together of these two 'epochs', arguably, Hill's construction of time and place is a more dynamic process than this implies. Rather than the past being contained within objects buried in the ground, accessible only through the imagination of the human mind and heightened by a physical encounter with such an artefact, Hill's environments are constructed, and continually in the process of *constructing* themselves, from the ongoing and active interchanges between past and present.<sup>40</sup> These interchanges occur through the interactions of

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37 See Annwn (1984); McHale (1999).

38 See North (1987: 470-77).

39 The influence of early medieval literature on Hill's work is well documented and discussed. For a particularly useful analysis of *Mercian Hymns* in the light of Anglo-Saxon contexts see Crawford (2010).

40 For further discussion of Hill's negotiation between different times see Lloyd (1988).



physical objects. In similar ways to Heaney, Hill engages with the idea of archaeology and the relationship between history, artefacts, the ground, and the human mind. The objects in *Mercian Hymns* also appear to possess a similar sense of agency. The voice of Hymn V notes:

I wormed my way heavenward for  
ages amid barbaric ivy, scrollwork of fern. (ll. 4-5)

The speaker in this passage can be read as either an artefact in the ground, or as the poet speaker himself, as is suggested by the following lines:

Exile or pilgrim set me once more upon that ground:  
my rich and desolate childhood. (ll. 5-6)

The ambiguity of these lines demonstrates Hill's blurring of the boundaries between human figures, other objects, and the wider environment. The speaker actively 'worms' its way through the ground, before appearing on the surface. Here the archaeology motif discussed in relation to Heaney's work is turned on its head. Rather than the spade digging down, the artefacts here burrow their way upwards. History, ground, and human crafted object, are active in the present; they shape the environment of the present, and create a dynamic, constantly shifting construction of environment from this constant interaction between objects, people, and the wider physical world. The ground also acts as a physical manifestation of the passing of time. The past in Heaney's work is 'deposited in strata' (McHale 1999: 240). The model of strata and their double articulation as developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* can

contribute to an understanding of the way in which both large and small objects in *Mercian Hymns* are presented. Strata, in the Deleuze and Guattarian sense, are ‘acts of capture, they are like “black holes” or occlusions striving to seize whatever comes within their reach’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1996: 40). For Deleuze and Guattari stratification is a method of organisation, where strata (described as layers or belts) take part in ‘imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1996: 40). Based on this description, the position of hoarded objects buried within the ground or actively kept in an enclosure resonates with this idea. The objects in the ground of Hill’s *Mercian Hymns* actively resist this stratification ‘worming’ their way to the surface to take part, and taking part on the way, in new interactions with other entities. This movement through the strata also indicates a movement through time. A movement which brings the past into the present, and creates a language which binds together the childhood of the poet with the notionally historical figure of the powerful eighth-century Mercian king Offa.

The opening poem of *Mercian Hymns* constructs the central character of Offa through his connections with a series of physical objects and other nonhuman entities. He is:

King of the perennial holly-groves, the riven sand-  
stone: overlord of the M5: architect of the his-  
toric rampart and ditch, the citadel at Tamworth,  
the summer hermitage in Holy Cross:  
guardian of the Welsh Bridge and the Iron Bridge: contractor  
to the desirable new estates : saltmaster : money-  
changer: commissioner for oaths: martyrologist:

the friend of Charlemagne. (ll. 1-8)

The built object of the M5 merges with the land, and is itself a part of the physical network constructed and presented in these lines. Hill's poem constructs the physical environment through these objects, thereby challenging the concept of world as separate from its contents. The Welsh and Iron Bridges connect Offa to the industrial revolution, while his title as 'Overlord of the M5' and 'friend of Charlemagne' simultaneously invoke the present and the past, within the physical environment constructed in the poem. History, therefore, exists on the surface as well as in the ground, contrasting with the work of Heaney discussed above. This merging of time and space and/or place is a key aspect of *Mercian Hymns*. North (1987: 466) notes the contrast between the 'perennial holly-groves', as the continuity of time, and the 'riven sandstone', as spacial separation. McHale (1999: 243) refers to this technique of merging past and present as 'deliberate anachronism'. He elaborates on this point to suggest that the work of both Heaney and Hill involve the 'mingling of "deeper" and "shallower" historical strata'.

The effect of merging historical strata is enhanced by the use of apposition. The opening poem is made up of noun phrases in apposition which collectively construct the character of Offa. The use of apposition distributing the presence of Offa in different ways throughout time. The use of apposition allows Hill to subtly vary his representations of Offa; the opening lines linger on Offa as architect, whereas his role as guardian is understated and his position as overlord enforced. Apposition also ties this human figure to the physical place of Mercia and all of its inhabitants (both human and nonhuman) and recalls its extensive use in Old English poetry. The technique of apposition is perhaps most

widely discussed in relation to *Beowulf*.<sup>41</sup> Apposition provides one technique whereby the *Beowulf* poet creates links or emphasises disjunctions between the pre-Christian past in which the poem is set and the Christian society of the poet's time. Hill uses apposition in the opening poem of *Mercian Hymns*, not as a reconciliation between past and present, but in order to actively bring the two together. Robinson (1985: 14) notes that the technique of apposition can also be linked to other lexical techniques of variation, such as compounding. The *Beowulf* poet creates a narrative for the ancestors of his own society which does not, at least explicitly, pass judgment on them for being uninformed of the Christian god.<sup>42</sup> The use of compounds assists in this process, by shifting the emphasis from verbs to noun phrases, avoiding judgment by creating 'a style more suggestive than assertive, more oblique than direct' (1985: 13). The poem does not become static, however, but instead there is a lot of verbal action which is implied by those compound nouns rather than in actual verb forms. Hill's use of compounds also has a similar effect of foregrounding the presence of the object, while still conveying a sense of action. The compounds 'saltmaster' and 'moneychanger' are rich in connotations of action and activity, emphasised by the rapid list of apposed compounds.

In *Mercian Hymns*, Hill's constructions of ecosystems are also heavily centred on the connection between objects and the ground. Throughout the collection, Hill invokes and plays with the notion of the hoard and hoarder. Previous work on the poems has discussed the themes of commerce and financial transaction, and their development throughout *Mercian Hymns*.<sup>43</sup> There are,

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41 See Robinson (1985).

42 See Robinson (1985: 13).

43 See North (1987).

however, connections between the motif of hoarding as it appears in Old English poetry such as *Beowulf* and the presence of hoarded ‘treasure’ in *Mercian Hymns* that have yet to be discussed. North (1987: 472) describes the ‘retentive capacity’ of the ground in *Mercian Hymns* as a hoard. This discussion is limited to the motif of the hoard in relation to the wider theme of bonds and commerce. Examining Hill’s reference to hoards and hoarding, in conjunction with Old English examples of the motif, sheds further light on the way in which Hill constructs an ecosystem in which artefacts play an active part. Hill characterises the hoarder as three different figures, which run parallel to each other throughout *Mercian Hymns*. These hoarding characters are the boy poet figure, the mole, and the badger. Hill uses these characters to explore the notion of hoarding, and the concept of the hoard itself.

Jane Bennett (2012) discusses the concept of the hoard in terms of the power which objects can exert over people. She suggests that objects can have an attraction to people which goes beyond the attractions which human beings themselves map onto such artefacts, either through sentimentality or through ideas of economic value. Bennett also notes that it is common for humans to glorify objects through a focus on aestheticism, but she stresses that it is important when thinking about objects to keep a focus ‘on what things do and resist the all-too-human tendency to reduce thing-power to a projection of human agency’ (261).<sup>44</sup> Hoarders often find themselves ‘*imperiously called* to buy,

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44 Bennett coins the term ‘thing-power’ for this concept. While this term is used to describe the pull which objects have over certain people, Latour’s development of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (on which Bennett sometimes draws) dismisses the term ‘power’. Latour suggests that ‘power’ is a homogenising term which masks the intricate series of interactions which cause a specific action/event to happen, and can lead to the overshadowing of certain actors in a network of complex and varied interactions. This ties in to Latour’s wider

to collect, to amass stuff' (Bennett 2012: 252). These compulsions are often explained by the hoarder in terms which both resist the 'animistic thinking' of material agency, but also affirm its existence with phrases such as "things just took over", got out of hand, and "overwhelmed" them' (Bennett 2010: 252). While this acts as evidence of the material agency of things, studies into the nature of hoarding also suggest that it may be a form of control. Drawing on the evidence of Furby (1978), Grisham and Frost, et al. (2009: 357) suggest that 'possessions are seen as physical extensions of the self, which enable a person to exert direct control over their immediate physical and social environment, resulting in feeling of self-efficacy.' The concept of hoarding, therefore, is another difficult issue for ecocriticism and ecologically-focused study. The act of hoarding objects is often aligned with commodity fetishism, this is evidenced by a strong strand of ecocritical theory which focuses its attention on issues of waste and the negative impact of objects in a capitalists society.<sup>45</sup> In such discussions hoarding is often viewed as a form of environmental control. While work on the negative connotations of human interactions and compulsions towards material objects is vital to the impact of ecocriticism, a thorough understanding of objects as entities which mediate human and nonhuman relationships is also vital if the ecocritical movement is to progress and engage in wider debate on how human beings can interact more positively with other objects. Bennett (2012: 240) suggests that by listening to and understanding the 'call of things' we can better understand the implications for 'our writing, our bodies, our research designs,

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resistance to the use of 'social force' being an entity possessing agency, see Latour (2005: 64-66).

45 See Sandilands (2011) for a particularly interesting exploration of rubbish and commodity fetishism; Benet (2007). See also Luke (1999) for a rethinking of Marx and ecological criticism.

our consumption practices, our sympathies’.

Hill’s work in *Mercian Hymns* engages with this idea of thing-power, exploring the psychology of a young boy who is fixated on the objects of the past. He notes, ‘I, who had none, fostered a strangeness; gave / myself to unattainable toys’ (*Mercian Hymns*, VI). The use of ‘fostered’ invokes a sense of nurture and also invites association with the idea of upbringing, perhaps linking to the literal raising up of treasures from the ground, but perhaps also connecting to the idea of the ground in itself as a place of nurturing. In this way, the boy poet is himself nurturing his own hoard, the moments and language which will later be expressed in the form of poetry. Bennett (2012: 241) suggests that those who hoard things are particularly receptive to the calling of objects. In *Mercian Hymns*, it seems that for the boy poet, objects take the place of social connections with other children. The boy is uninterested in the usual trappings of childhood, those found on the surface of the ground such as ‘candles of knarled resin’, ‘apple branches’, ‘the tacky mistletoe’, and those connected with the bodily marks of childhood: ‘their scars of dried snot’, ‘wrists and knees garnished with impetigo’. Instead, it is the objects of the past, and their existence in the ground, which calls to the boy. In ‘Hymn VI’, the boy poet speaker notes:

The princes of Mercia were badger and raven.

Thrall to their freedom, I dug and hoarded. (ll. 1-2)

The use of the archaic term *thrall* is particularly significant (present already in late Old English as a loan from Old Norse *þræl*). The use of *thrall* in this context not only connects the image of the hoard linguistically to the Anglo-Saxon past, but also invokes the agency of the hoard and the pull which it has over the boy.

Parallels can be drawn between the boy figure of *Mercian Hymns* and the dragon of *Beowulf*. Comparing these hoarders can help shed light on the position of objects and those who hoard them in relation to the societies within/outside which they dwell. The man who lies with the hoarded treasure in the barrow before the dragon later inhabits it does so after the death of his kinsmen. He is left alone, and the hoarding of the treasure becomes part of the grieving process:

Ealle hie deað fornam  
ærran mælum, ond s[e] an ða gen  
leoda duguðe se ðær lengest hwearf,  
wear winegeomor, wende þæs ylcan,  
þæt he lytel fæc longgestreona  
brucan moste. (ll. 2236b-41a) (Klaeber 2008:76)

(In earlier times death had seized them all, and he who still survived alone from that nation's army lingered there, a mournful sentry, expected the same, that he might enjoy those ancient treasures for just a little while.)

This passage demonstrates a connection between the hoard and the place in which it is guarded. The narrator notes that the man lingered with the treasure 'þær' (there), specifically in that place. The location of the treasure plays a significant part in the activity of lingering with it as a hoard.

Steketee and Frost (2010: 55) in their analysis of the condition of hoarding, note that 'the grieving in some cultures over the possessions of a loved one demonstrates the extent to which a possession can be considered as an extension of personal identity.' In the above passage, the treasure hoarded by the man can



be seen as an extension of the identities of his kinsmen from whom he is now separated. The gold stands not just as an extension of the people themselves, but of all the social trappings of a community.<sup>46</sup> The treasure, therefore, is more than material wealth, but that does not mean that it is subject to some sort of abstract ‘social force’.<sup>47</sup> The connections between the treasure in *Beowulf* and social systems have been extensively discussed in work on the poem, but such discussions have previously been firmly fixed on defining the ‘symbolic value’ of the treasure. Cherniss (1968: 475-76) states that ‘we may define the function of treasure as that of a tangible, material symbol of the intangible, abstract qualities of virtue in a warrior.’ The treasure hoarded in *Beowulf* maintains a *physical* rather than symbolic connection to the past and to the people of that past. The man who hoards his kinsmen’s gold meticulously recounts how each item in the hoard will no longer experience the interactions it had previously with these kinsmen. The connection between this treasure and society or social bonds, therefore, is characterised in a particularly physical and material form. The idea of physical objects as extensions of individuals can also explain the possessive behaviour which characters exhibit in relation to their treasure. Steketee and Frost (2010: 115-16) document the case of an individual who experiences pain and grief when separated from these ‘extensions’ of her self. She describes the idea of being forced to discard one of the extensions as ‘like asking me to throw out my children. They’ll be dead. I’ll kill to prevent that.’ Approaching the notion of treasure hoarding in *Beowulf* in light of modern studies on hoarders, it is possible to draw connections between the aggressive nature of the dragon as a hoard

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46 See *Beowulf* (ll. 2249-66).

47 See the discussion of Latour’s rejection of the notion of ‘social forces’ in Chapter One, pp. 43-44.

guardian, and the woman depicted in Steketee and Frost's case study.

The hoarding figure of the dragon in *Beowulf* has been complicated further by the suggestion by Smithers (1961) and, more extensively, Tripp (1983) that the dragon is the transformed figure of the last survivor. Rauer is critical of Tripp's presentation of this hypothesis, on account of a lack of substantiating evidence. At the same time Rauer (2000: 39-40) suggests that evidence can be found in Scandinavian literature which may support this suggestion. Rauer's links to Scandinavian literature make this hypothesis plausible, and this is further supported by the way in which the narrative treats the emotional interactions between the hoarding figures and the treasure. The survivor who hoards the treasure does so, at least in part, as a result of his grief. Following the hoarding of the treasure by the survivor the poem moves into a passage which resembles the *ubi sunt* motif widely discussed in relation to the Old English elegies.<sup>48</sup> The survivor laments how various objects of the hoard will never experience the interactions with his kinsman which they had previously. This passage conveys a powerful sense of loss, grief and mourning. Following these affective lines, the narrative quickly reports that when the man dies a dragon takes over the barrow and the guarding of the hoard. While it is impossible to tell from the narrative whether the dragon represents a transformed state of the survivor or whether it is an entirely separate entity, the fate of the dragon appears similar in some ways to that of the survivor. The narrator notes that it is in a dragon's nature to seek out treasure 'ne byð him wihte ðy sel' (l. 277b) (though it is no good for him). This line echoes the final stages of the last survivor's life, where he is described as

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48 See *Beowulf* (ll. 2252b-66). The sense of worldly transience which these passages in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* convey is discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.

living unhappily every day and night until his death.<sup>49</sup> The emotion of grief turns to anger through extensive social exclusion and the poisoning effects of preventing gold from circulating. If the dragon is read in this light then the poem demonstrates a further engagement in the agency of nonhuman material objects. Whether the dragon represents a transformed state of the last survivor or a different creature, these two figures are connected through their interactions with the treasure.

The connection between social exclusion or loss and physical objects is important to understanding the motif of hoarded treasure in *Beowulf*. The dragon takes up the hoard when the original hoarder dies. The original hoarder started his hoard after the loss of his kinsmen, and similarly the dragon is also a character who lacks social ties. Just as Grendel is doomed to walk the shadows around the human habitation of Heorot, it is in the dragon's nature to seek out treasure, as others may seek out hall companions:<sup>50</sup>

He gesecean sceall

b[o]r[d on h]rusan, þær he hæðen gold  
warað wintrum frod; ne byð him wihte ðy  
sel. (ll. 2275b-77) (Klaeber 2008: 78)

(It is in his nature to find a hoard in the earth, where, ancient  
and proud, he guards heathen gold, though it does him no good.)

An association, therefore, can be drawn between those who lack social companions and hoarders of treasure. The boy poet figure shares these similar

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49 See *Beowulf* (ll. 2268b-70a).

50 Parallels can be drawn here with *The Wanderer* (ll. 20-29).

traits, finding himself attracted to the calling of objects and words rather than the activities of his peers.

The notion of the hoard in *Mercian Hymns* is not limited to the ground. Hill plays with the notion that the soil of the ground is itself made up of thousands of different fragments from the past, in the form of both biological and mineral entities. Hill explores the notion of the soil as a product of thousands of years' worth of life: 'epiphanies', 'vertebrae of the chimera', 'armour of the wild bees' larvae'. *Mercian Hymns* also suggests that the ground can bring forth that which resembles a golden mass of treasure. 'Hymn XII' states:

It is autumn. Chestnut-boughs clash their inflamed  
leaves. The garden festers for attention: telluric  
cultures enriched with shards, corms, nodules, the  
sunk solids of gravity. I have accrued a golden  
and stinking blaze. (ll. 9-12)

It is the fertile nature of the ground which has given life to the 'festering' hoard of autumn vegetation which now inhabits its surface. Hill draws on the characteristics of a treasure-hoard, such as the golden hue, and uses these to invert the notion of the hoard as a hidden collection of treasure. Here the real treasure is the fertility provided by the ground and its constituent parts. Hill's use of the word 'enriched' plays on both the nourishing actions of the ground, and the notion of the financial potential of hoarded treasure. This hoard also calls out to the speaker in the same way as treasure in the ground captivates his attention. The speaker notes that the garden 'festers' for attention, conveying a sense of both animation and also the luring action which Bennett discusses in her

exploration of the power of things and their effect on human hoarders.

In a similar way to the work of Heaney, key to Hill's depiction of hoarding in *Mercian Hymns* is the tension and interaction between the motif of the treasure-hoard (material artefacts) and that of the word-hoard (poetic vocabulary). The hoarding of language in *Mercian Hymns* is intertwined with the hoarding of artefacts. Hill's Anglo-Saxon influences are brought to the fore through this interplay of treasure hoard and word hoard. *Mercian Hymns* appears to draw on the structure of *Beowulf*, where the connections between material treasure and language are key to the structure of the poem. Although the theme of gold and treasure within *Beowulf* and Old English poetry more widely has received substantial scholarly attention, it has always been a difficult topic, about which scholars have often struggled to say anything conclusive. Work which tackles the relationship between the hoard and its concealment in the ground has often tended to be rooted in emphasising the transience of worldly glory. This has historically tended to lead to over-generalisations about Anglo-Saxon worldviews. In his discussion of the interaction between the word-hoard and the gold-hoard in *Beowulf*, Stevens (1978: 220-21) highlights the contrast between 'a healthy world' where 'goods and words are exchanged where there is flow and animation, and where life is defined by its "give and take"' and 'the dark, idle, and inarticulate underworld, the closed hoard from which the antilife forces dole out their power'. These contrasts are definitely present within *Beowulf*, forming a significant part of the themes which the poem explores. Stevens, however, is quick to make a leap from these interesting contrasts to mapping these tensions onto a dualistic relationship between man and Nature. He states:

the progress of the poem after the entry of the young hero

[Beowulf] is to move from the open “word-” and “treasure-hoard” to the closed. It is to shift from a world in animation, an organic world, in which men gain control of nature and artifact, to a world finally in stasis, an inanimate world in which the elements rule. (Stevens 1978: 221)

This oversimplifies the interaction between humans, objects, and the wider physical world within the text. For Stevens the ground is solely a place of concealment, which simultaneously restricts the flow and exchange of objects and words. The key problem with Stevens’ analysis is that he insists on separating ‘the organic’ from what he terms ‘the elements’. This creates a strange and unsustainable division between humans, other life forms, and other nonbiological entities of the wider environment, which the poem simply does not uphold. The idea that the poem moves into a world of stasis and inanimation is undermined by Stevens himself: he later notes that ‘verbs for eating and consuming are now ascribed to inanimate forces’, his specific examples being the action of fire consuming ‘everything in sight, from hall to treasure to human bodies’, and the action of rust eating away the treasure (Stevens 1978: 225-26).<sup>51</sup> These processes depict a sense of action and animation; it is just that this animation has shifted from human figures to nonhuman entities and phenomena. *Beowulf*, therefore, provides its own interesting and engaging account of nonhuman agency.

*Mercian Hymns* gathers together its own hoard over the course of the poems. The items which are buried in the earth are constantly moving throughout the poems. Hill repeatedly connects the idea of hoarding to that of provision and productivity: Mercia is

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51 See *Beowulf* (ll. 3047-50).

Primeval heathland spattered with the bones of mice  
 and birds, where adders basked and bees made pro-  
 vision, mantling the inner walls of their burh.  
 (Hymn XX, ll. )

This passage also demonstrates Hill's sustained exploration of the figure of the hoarder and the concept of the hoard. The bees produce their own hoard of liquid gold on the surface of the earth,<sup>52</sup> just as the trees in autumn produce a 'golden and stinking blaze' (Hymn XII). The image of the hoard, therefore, is entwined with the ecology constructed in *Mercian Hymns*. Hill does not distinguish between human crafted objects, humans, and other entities (biological and non-biological), but rather the ground is 'riddled with toy-shards' and constructed from 'splinters of habitation' ('Hymn XIX'). For Hill, these splinters and shards are on the surface, yet still very much connected to the ground. *Mercian Hymns* raises the hoard to the surface of the ground, but keeps one foot still in the soil. As the boy in *Mercian Hymns* hoards treasures, he also hoards language; 'Hymn XXII' sees the speaker take his word-hoard and enter into his own earthly shelter, in this case a bomb shelter during World War II. *Mercian Hymns* creates its own ecosystem, and promotes the significance of the past in shaping the material of this network.

Hill's *Mercian Hymns* develops similar themes to those of Heaney regarding the engagement between past and present, but presents them in quite different ways. Hill is particularly interested in the figure of the hoarder and how

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52 The link between bees and gold is common in Anglo-Saxon poetic texts and occurs in riddles about bees and honey in both the Old English and Anglo-Latin riddling traditions.

this figure engages with the past and the present through their interactions with other objects. This demonstrates a shift in focus from that of Heaney's poet as archaeologist. Reading Hill's *Mercian Hymns* alongside *Beowulf* in particular prompts more subtle analysis of the interaction between the hoarders and the treasure hoard than is perhaps conveyed by Heaney's more vertically focused excavations. Equally, *Beowulf* has much to offer to the reading of Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. *Beowulf* constructs a complex relationship between the hoarder, hoard, and location of this hoard. The poem connects the hoarder (in the form of both a man and a dragon) to the treasure emotionally as well as physically.

Understanding this emotional connection between a hoarder and a hoard is key to the interactions between human beings and nonhuman objects in *Mercian Hymns*. While Hill evokes the idea of layers of history being present in the way in which objects lie in the earth, he also constructs cross-temporal narratives through the interactions between objects on the surface of the earth. Treasure in *Beowulf* holds a similar presence as objects both buried in the ground and as active agents on the surface. Hill builds his own literary ecology of Mercia through these interactions in *Mercian Hymns*. *Beowulf* may appear to be less interested in ecological interactions, but it constructs a powerful dialogue between the objects of the ground, treasure, and hoarder. The environment of the barrow is constructed from this network of interactions and plays a key role in the development of the hoard motif.

The final section of this chapter examines further the interaction between objects on the surface of the ground, specifically in reference to Bunting's *Briggflatts*. *Briggflatts* explores, to an even greater extent than the work of Heaney and Hill, the sense of a self-conscious poetic. Words play an active part in the creation of environment in *Briggflatts* and this pushes the interaction between



poetry and environment. The aural qualities of the poem speak across time to the sound of Old English poetry and in turn this speaks back to the present through intertwined connection to the material environment.

### **Basil Bunting and Objects on the Surface**

Like the work of Heaney and Hill, Bunting's *Briggflatts* also constructs environments which exist in a cross-temporal state. Bunting's constant textual metaphors work to connect the past and present. The physical actants of the environment of the poem are interwoven with the concept of written texts, forming an ecology of both material objects and poetic sounds constructed within the lines of the poem. While similarities have been drawn between the work of Bunting, Hill and Heaney, each poet exhibits certain significant differences in both their constructions of environments and their engagement with the past through these environments. Heaney's poetry takes the pen as a spade and uses it to dig its way into the past, and, in this way, the ground is constructed as a place of both preservation and poetic creative potential. Heaney's work can, therefore, be read as a diachronic approach to time and the interaction of objects both human and nonhuman. Hill's work interweaves past with present both on the land's surface, but also through the idea of stratification and the layering of history in the ground. Bunting's work differs from that of both Heaney and Hill in that it can be read as a more synchronic construction of both time and environment. For Bunting, the pen does not dig down to the past, but rather the past is written on the surface, constructing and shaping the environment and participating as an active part of the present. This difference between the work of Bunting and Heaney is perhaps most evident in the presence of writing implements in both 'Bone Dreams' and *Briggflatts*. Bunting

opens his poem with the inscription of letters on stone. Bunting uses this inscription as a marker of the convergence of past and present within the poem; Heaney uses the physical inscription of writing as a contrast between past and present: the narrator ‘pushes back’

to the scop’s  
twang, the iron  
flash of consonants  
cleaving the line.<sup>53</sup> (ll. 29-32)

The image of the consonants ‘cleaving the line’ is presented as distinctly different to modern writing composition.<sup>54</sup> The invocation of the iron stylus acts as an indicator that the action has moved away from the present and into the past. For Bunting, the pen cannot convey the physical connection between language and the material world. The mason in *Briggflatts* exclaims:

Words!  
Pens are too light.  
Take a chisel to write. (I, ll. 115-17)

Written and spoken language is a part of the physical environment in *Briggflatts*.

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53 All quotations from *Briggflatts* are from Bunting (1968). All subsequent quotations from *Briggflatts* will be referenced by part and line number.

54 This notion of the written word cleaving the line differs strikingly from the dynamic relationship between oral and written language as presented in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and Simon Armitage’s version of the poem as is discussed in Chapter Four (see pp. 143-45).

Just as the material actants of the environment form the content of the poem, written text must forge a physical connection to that environment.

Clare Lees (2010) presents an important analysis of how the interlace structure in both Anglo-Saxon visual and verbal art influences *Briggflatts*. Lees draws attention to the interactive nature of sound and vision which Bunting draws from his love of Anglo-Saxon Northumbrian art (specifically the carpet pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels), and this leads to a discussion of how Anglo-Saxon riddles (specifically Exeter Book *Riddle 51* ‘pen and three fingers’) can be read as ‘verbal laces that make use of visuality – like Bunting’s Lindisfarne lines’ (2010: 127). In light of this work conducted by Lees, it is possible to turn our attention to how the interlace structures in *Briggflatts* explore the ways in which both human and nonhuman actants interact to form the environments of the text.<sup>55</sup> Previous discussion of the poem has sometimes tended to interpret this technique of creating a network, and the interweaving of sounds within the poem, as creating a sense of ‘harmony between man and nature’ (Barry 1985: 209). It is important to move away from the insistence that these interactions must be interpreted solely as either positive or negative, but rather work towards accepting their existence as it is and happens. Previous work has acknowledged the significance of environment within *Briggflatts*, and has discussed the important interaction between ecological and social relations which it invokes.<sup>56</sup> Discussion of environment in *Briggflatts*, however, is often tied to debates surrounding regional identity and culture.<sup>57</sup> Such work provides insights into the

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55 Tomaney (2007: 365–66) also discusses the interlace style of *Briggflatts*, in relation to the art of the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, but also the interweaving of layers of history. .

56 See Tomaney (2007: 358).

57 See Tomaney (2007); Hatlen (2000); for a discussion of regional voice see Annwn (2000).

way that the structure of interwoven actants reveals the interconnected nature of both the ‘natural/physical’ and the ‘social’ in the construction of a specific place or regional identity. It does, however, often lead to the overshadowing of the interactions between the actants which take place in the construction of this environment.

*Briggflatts* is built from entities which interact to form the assemblage of the poem and its environments. The line ‘each pebble its part / for the fell’s late spring’ (1. 3-4) seems to fully embody this sense of communal construction. Greaves (2005: 5) compares Bunting’s *Briggflatts* to the work of Hughes, and suggests that while Hughes’ poetry ‘heightens the tension between nature and culture [...] by focusing on the dividing line between the two’, Bunting concentrates on ‘making inroads into the territory of the Other [what one may call “nature”].’ It is this sense of ‘territories’, however, which I would suggest is exactly what Bunting avoids in *Briggflatts*. Bunting does not make ‘inroads’ into the territory of Nature, because his work does not erect such boundaries in the first place. *Briggflatts* is constructed from the actions and interactions of an array of entities both human and nonhuman, often with a lack of distinction between the two. This collective activity of actants, both human and nonhuman, begins to resemble a hoard. Each actant is significant in that it interacts with others around it, and collectively they form the environment(s) constructed in the poem. Individual actants exist with their own vibrancy, and the focus on aural qualities works to create a swelling hum:

Stone smooth as skin,  
cold as the dead they load  
on a low lorry by night.

The moon sits on the fell  
 but it will rain.  
 Under sacks on the stone  
 two children lie  
 hear the horse stale,  
 the mason whistle,  
 harness mutter to shaft,  
 fellow to axle squeak,  
 rut thud the rim,  
 crushed grit. (I, ll. 40-53)

The aural qualities of *Briggflatts* have been well discussed,<sup>58</sup> and their connection with vision in the poem is crucial to the construction of the active entities which make up this environment. This passage demonstrates how actants communicate with one another, both in terms of movement and sound. Greaves (2005: 72) makes the observation that within the poem ‘things are presented first and foremost through their thingliness’. In a somewhat paradoxical way, these sounds and movements happen at different times, but they are also occurring together. This hum of sound and movement is the collected assemblage of the environment composed in *Briggflatts*.<sup>59</sup> In *Briggflatts*, the assemblages of the

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58 See Tarlo (2000: 156-60); Lees (2010); Burton (2010: 85-86); Hawlin (1995).

59 I prefer the term ‘assemblage’ to landscape, as ‘landscape’ is a notoriously problematic term in the field of ecocriticism, implying as it does environment as painting. Shephard (1997: iii) refers to ‘wilderness’ as ‘the world before humans appeared in it’ and notes that ‘*cultivation* is everything we have done to it since. *Landscape* is another name for the strategies that have governed what we’ve done’. McDowell (1996: 387 note 1) favours the term *landscape over nature*, and suggests that *landscape* conveys more of a sense of mutual interaction between

various environments are simultaneously broken down and reconstructed, in a similar way to that of the Anglo-Saxon riddles. Like the Latin riddling tradition, the poem provides its reader with a title or solution; the body of the poem then breaks down this entity into a series of actants. Like the Old English riddling tradition, however, the poem also works from the multiple and various to singular and whole. The collective of *Briggflatts* is accordingly both disassembled and assembled before the reader's eyes and ears.

The distinctive aural qualities of *Briggflatts* also help to open up the idea of the assemblage and make those connections which often go unnoticed more evident and detectable. *Briggflatts* demonstrates how poetry can help to promote an understanding of the way in which actants interacting together form an environment. Bunting's work, therefore, provides a different sense of an ecopoetics. Bate (2000: 75-76) draws on Heidegger's idea that language creates a clearing (*lichtung*) into which things can be drawn, and the true nature of being and dwelling is revealed. He states that ecopoetics asks 'in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling place — the prefix *eco-* is derived from Greek *oikos*, "the home or place of dwelling"'. Bate suggests that poetry may be the most direct 'path of return' to the *oikos* because of its metrical form, which he suggests may act as an echoing of 'nature's own rhythms' (2000: 76).<sup>60</sup> On the surface, Bunting's poem appears to provide a fitting example of this notion of ecopoetry in action. While *Briggflatts* actively links the aural qualities of the environment to language and the formulation of written text, the poem

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human and nonhuman. See also Tomaney (2007: 4) for further discussion of how human culture constructs landscape.

60 For further discussions of the problems associated with this line of thinking, particularly the notion that only humans can truly dwell as only they have language see Chapter Two pp. 105-106.

acts as almost the reverse to Bate's notion of ecopoetry. The poetic language of *Briggflatts* does not act as a clearing through which the true essence of being is revealed, but a busy, vibrant network of action and actants. Bunting does not *reveal*, but instead *creates* an assemblage of objects. In her discussion of how people can better attune themselves to understand and respond to the call of objects, Bennett (2012: 242) applies the specific term 'word-workers' to poets, and suggests that:

Word-workers can best keep faith with things, I think, if they approach language as rhetoric, as word-sounds for tuning the human body, for rendering it more susceptible to the frequencies of the material agencies inside and around it. The goal: to use words to make whatever communications already at work between vibrant bodies more audible, more detectable, more *senseable*.

Poetry in this sense is not about revelation but more about interpretation. If nonhuman objects are already vocal and communicative, poetry is a way in which we can interpret these varying forms of communication to enable our own human understanding. *Briggflatts* engages with this process of translation and allows the reader to hear and sense the communications between actants in this environment; the poem constructs the past as an active part of the present. Perhaps one of the most significant examples of this effect at work can be found in the first section of *Briggflatts*, where the following passage merges the character of Erik Bloodaxe with the beat of the mason's mallet which resounds throughout the poem:

Brief words are hard to find,  
 shapes to carve and discard :  
 Bloodaxe, king of York,  
 king of Dublin, king of Orkney.  
 Take no notice of tears;  
 letter the stone to stand  
 over love laid aside lest  
 insufferable happiness impede  
 flight to Stainmore,  
 to trace  
 lark, mallet,  
 becks, flocks  
 and axe knocks. (I, ll. 131-43)

The collection of objects in the final lines – lark, mallet, becks, flocks and axe knocks – assemble together to form the collective noise of the environment which is constructed in *Briggflatts*. While these lines form an assemblage of actants, Bunting integrates into these lines the strikingly linear narrative of Erik Bloodaxe’s rise to power and flight to Stainmore as presented by Roger of Wendover (Giles [trans.] 1849: 255-56). Bunting works this allusion to Bloodaxe and the linear narrative of his life into his own dynamic narrative created through the lines of *Briggflatts*. Unlike Heaney’s downward motion of digging into the past, Bunting’s allusions are merged in a network of actants on the surface of his constructed environment. The rhythm of the final lines of the passage above is timed to the beating of the mason’s mallet, which matches that of the ‘axe knocks’. The communications between objects are made more detectable



through the rhythm. The list of objects is preceded by the words ‘to trace (...)’, which emphasises the patterning and communication between these objects, and asks the reader to follow these interactions in order to experience and better understand the assemblages of the various spaces and places in the poem. Bunting’s dynamic use of historical allusions, and his merging of a linear and network narrative bears resemblance to the narrative structure of *Beowulf*, which makes extensive use of allusions and half told stories.<sup>61</sup>

*Briggflatts* is written in free verse but makes strong use of alliteration and rhyme to convey a sense of activity.<sup>62</sup> Bunting’s use of these sound effects also helps to establish the connections between individual objects, simultaneously allowing them to be viewed as individual entities and as actants in a wider network. In her work on hoards and hoarders, Bennett (2012: 247) observes the similarities between artists and hoarders. Both ‘hear more of the call of things — to conjoin with them, play with them, respond to them’. Bunting’s *Briggflatts* demonstrates this sensitivity towards objects and their characteristics. Bunting conveys ‘the call of things’ through his use of sound effects. The use of this technique in *Briggflatts* shares remarkable similarities to the description of the dragon’s hoard of *Beowulf*. In this passage, Wiglaf looks on the scene of the hoard:

Geseah [...]  
 gold glitinian grunde getenge,  
 wundur on wealle, ond þæs wrymes denn,

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61 For further work on the digressions in *Beowulf* see Bonjour (1950).

62 See Von Hallberg (2008: 174-75), for a particularly effective analysis of Bunting’s use of both alliteration and free verse ‘musicality’.

ealdes uhtflogan, orcas stondan,  
 fyrnmanna fatu, feormendlease,  
 hyrstum behrorene. Ðær wæs helm monig  
 eald ond omig, earmbeaga fela  
 searwum gesæled. Sinc eaðe mæg,  
 gold on grund[e] gumcynnes gehwone  
 oferhigian, hyde se ðe wylle. (ll. 2756-66) (Klaeber 2008: 94)  
 (He saw [...] glittering gold lying on the ground, wondrous  
 objects on the wall, and the lair of that serpent – the old creature  
 that flies before daybreak – cups standing, vessels of people of  
 old, lacking a burnisher, deprived of adornments. There was  
 many a helmet, old and rusty, many arm-rings skilfully twisted.  
 Treasure may easily, gold in the ground, overpower any one of  
 mankind, whoever wants to hide it.)

The striking visual descriptions of both the individual items of the hoard and the collective splendour of the assembled objects is further conveyed by the sound of the poetry. The added alliteration of ‘glitnian’ in the a-verse describes both the appearance of the gold and creates a sense of unity by connecting it metrically and alliteratively with the ground. While the use of alliteration in the a-verse may not be a particularly unusual feature, the fact that double alliteration is sustained through to the end of the passage, adds emphasis and intensity to these particular lines. *Beowulf* as a whole is a poem more restrained in its use of such sound effects than others in the corpus, and this passage draws attention to the vibrancy of the treasure. The tensions between the Christian position of the poet and the poem’s setting in a pre-Christian past, lead the poet to take a step

back from the description of the hoard. The passage ends with the gnomic statement

sinc eaðe mæg,  
 gold on grund[e] gumcynnes gehwone  
 oferhigian, hyde se ðe wylle. (ll. 2565–66)  
 (treasure may easily, gold in the ground, overpower any one of  
 mankind, whoever wants to hide it.)

Atherton (2010: 38), in his discussion of Sweet's textual selections for the *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, draws attention to Sweet's fascination for Nature and suggests that his preference for including gnomic texts such as the Old English maxims may indicate that 'subconsciously, Sweet may have had in mind the intermingling of human, animate and inanimate activity' that features in these verses. The tendency of gnomic statements in Old English poetry to include a sense of the intermingling of human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, is evidenced in the final lines of this passage from *Beowulf*. The narrator draws together in his warning statement the mineral of gold, the crafted objects of the hoard, human behaviour or nature, and the ground. Bunting also makes use of gnomic statements, which are presented through the character of the mason.

The Mason says: Rocks  
 happen by chance.  
 No one here bolts the door,  
 love is so sore. (I, ll. 36–39)

Mineral, human behaviour, and the abstract concept of love are entwined in this statement.<sup>63</sup> Other gnomic statements such as ‘follow the clue patiently and you will understand nothing’ are interspersed throughout poem, woven into the connections between objects. These statements provide a constant reminder of the ability of poetry to act as a translator for those many and varied forms of interaction between the entities which form the assemblage of any given place.

Bunting’s aural connections to Old English poetry are also woven deeply into the lines of *Briggflatts*. The references to masonry and the rhythm of the axe knocks, which can be heard resounding throughout the poem, echo Tolkien’s description of Old English poetry as it is presented in ‘The Monsters and the Critics’.

The very nature of Old English poetry is often misjudged. In it there is no single rhythmic pattern progressing from the beginning of a line to the end, and repeated with variation in other lines. The lines do not go according to a tune. They are founded on a balance; an opposition between two halves of roughly equivalent phonetic weight, and significant content, which are more often rhythmically contrasted than similar. They are more like masonry than music. (Tolkien 1991: 33)

The masonry analogy fits into a bigger sense of modern conceptualisations of Old English poetry as both stone-like and earthy, and an association of Old

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63 These connections are followed up in further allusions to the death of Erik Bloodaxe on Stainmore, see pp. 185-86 and 193.

English poetry with a sense of rootedness and permanence.<sup>64</sup> In the introduction to his *Beowulf* translation, Heaney talks about translating *Beowulf* as ‘a way of ensuring that [his] linguistic anchor would stay lodged on the Anglo-Saxon sea-floor’, but also confesses that often the process was like ‘trying to bring down a megalith with a toy hammer’, commenting that ‘what had been so attractive in the first place, the hand-built, rock-sure feel of the thing, began to defeat me’ (Heaney 2000: xxiii). Heaney’s notion of *Beowulf* as ‘rock-sure’ is encoded in Tolkien’s masonry analogy, and most likely came down to Heaney directly from Tolkien’s work. The rock-sureness which Heaney feels from Old English poetry works its way into his own writing by way of his references to digging and excavating the earth. For Heaney, the earth provides a means for accessing the past and a material manifestation of Old English poetry itself. Hill also invokes the figure of the mason in *Mercian Hymns*.

Itinerant through numerous domains, of his lord’s  
 retinue, to Compostela. Then home for a lifetime  
 amid West Mercia this master-mason as I envisage  
 him, intent to pester upon tympanum and chancel-  
 arch his moody testament, confusing warrior with  
 lion, dragon-coils, tendrils of the stony vine.  
 (Hymn XXIV, ll. 1-6)

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64 Chapter Four explores the interaction between poetry and place in detail. It also considers the problematic nature of poetically linking Old English with a rootedness in place, particularly its appropriation as part of a nationalistic agenda building and attempting to construct a very specific notion of apparent ‘Englishness’.

Hymn XXIV is positioned in the middle of a section of three hymns labelled 'Opus Anglicanum'. Hill merges the images of needlework and masonry through his references to the interlace and vine scroll styles of entangled 'dragon-coils' and 'tendrils of the stony vine'. The previous poem in the series (Hymn XXIII), engages with the art of needlework.

In tapestries, in dreams, they gathered, as it was enacted, the return, the re-entry of transcendence into this sublunary world. *Opus Anglicanum*, their stringent mystery riddled by needles: the silver veining, the gold leaf, voluted grape-vine, master-works of treacherous thread. (ll. 1-6)

Although these passages about the work of the mason and the needlework depict similar artwork created through different mediums, Hill contrasts the work of the mason, conducted in the heights of 'chancel arches', with the 'sublunary world' associated with the needlework. Hymn XXIII follows the account of the boy in the World War II bomb shelter at the end of Hymn XXII,<sup>65</sup> linking the underground dwelling-place of the shelter with the earthly nature of 'the sublunary world' he associates with the needlework. Hill dwells on the visual qualities of the needlework, linking these to a sense of earthiness. The work of the mason, on the other hand, focuses on sound; these are sounds which 'pester' rather than resound with a sense of weight and permanence.

Bunting invokes masonry in a different way to both Heaney and Hill. Blanton (2000: 138-44) discusses Bunting's use of masonry in *Briggflatts*, during

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<sup>65</sup> See discussion of this passage on p. 177.

specific attention to the connection between the actions of the mason in the present and Erik Bloodaxe's death at Stainmore in the past. Blanton's analysis links the materiality of the stone with the poetic merging of past and present, specifically in relation to the 'musicality' which Bunting draws from his masonry references. But this 'musicality' in *Briggflatts* runs deeper than surface connections between historic figures (such as Bloodaxe) and the work of the mason in the present to resonate with the *form* of Old English poetry. While *Briggflatts* is not written in the Old English metrical style,<sup>66</sup> Bunting's references to masonry create a material representation of the Old English poetic style. This association is not simply representational. Instead, it acts as a series of dynamic interactions between the material and the poetic, each affecting our interaction with the other. The sense of permanence associated with Old English poetry, through the connections with earth and stone, emphasises the nature of these substances (or networks of objects) to exist on timescales much greater than those of our own lives.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, it is the material qualities of earth and stone that trigger the connections with the poetic form of Old English poetry. Here, poetry helps us understand stone and earth, and stone and earth help us to understand the poetry.<sup>68</sup>

*Briggflatts* is constructed from the interactions between objects which form the assemblage of the poem. The objects in the poem resonate with their own sense of agency and create a literary ecology which goes beyond that of ecopoetry or an ecopoetics. Rather than speaking *for* the environment, *Briggflatts*

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66 As, for example, is Richard Wilbur's 'Junk' (Ferguson, Salter and Stallworthy 2005: 1638-39).

67 This idea is considered further in Chapter Five.

68 The interaction between stone and poetry is explored further in Chapter Five.

constructs an environment through the merging of language and material objects. The aural qualities of the poem resonate with those of Old English poetry and understanding this interaction between language and material objects as an ecological relationship can provide new readings of scenes such as Wiglaf's gazing on the hoard in *Beowulf*. While the aural qualities of Old English poetry are well recognised and have a long history as part of scholarly discourse, their relationship to the construction of environments in that poetry is yet to be fully explored. Reading passages such as those related to the hoarded treasure in *Beowulf* in light of this sense of a literary ecology – an ecology built from the relationship between material objects and language – reveals the extent to which nonhuman agency plays a significant part in their narratives. The presence of the hoard in *Beowulf* provides a series of intimate moments between human beings and the hoarded treasure. The aural qualities and poetic features such as gnomic statements present in *Beowulf* are both techniques used to shape the metrical structure of the poetry and play an important part in constructing the interactions between objects in a specific and intimate way. These features convey agency, wonder, sensitivity, and activity. Literary techniques and the material qualities of the hoarded objects are intertwined and interdependent in the poetic construction of the hoard.

### **Conclusions**

Reading the work of Heaney, Hill, and Bunting alongside Old English poetic texts such as *Beowulf* and the Exeter Book riddles does more than just reveal interesting parallels between these sets of texts. It helps to develop an understanding of how poetry can speak to poetry across time, but also how poetry can speak to, and between, material objects across time. Heaney, Hill, and



Bunting create their own literary ecologies from the interaction between poetic language and the material objects which their texts construct and explore. Understanding the different formations of these literary ecologies can help us to understand the way in which poetry can create environments which emphasise the interactive nature of the past and the present which is constantly present in our material environments, yet often goes unnoticed. These literary ecologies speak to those of Old English poetic texts which specifically explore the interaction between human beings, nonhuman objects, and the ground, as part of wider narrative motifs. The work of Heaney, Hill, and Bunting collectively provides three different ways of thinking about the interaction between objects and the ground, and the way that these interactions mediate our encounters with the past. This chapter explored Heaney's work as a vertical exploration often conveyed through excavations into the ground. Hill's *Mercian Hymns* considers the interaction of objects with each other and the past both in the ground and in the process of being raised from the ground. Bunting's *Briggflatts* constructs its environments through objects on the surface of the ground. *Briggflatts* does not explore the ground as a storage vessel for the past, but rather suggests that the past is an integral part of all objects interacting on the earth in the present. These varying poetic engagements with the interaction between environments, human and nonhuman objects, the past and the present offer a medium for exploring the past through poetic means.

The following chapter develops further the interaction between poetry and environment in an examination of how past and present interact. Continuing to explore the interaction between writing and materiality, it examines how medieval and current environments can be merged in the formation of specific literary ecologies, and how these cross-temporal environmental constructions can

challenge one's preconceived notions of place.

## Chapter Four

### Literary Geographies: Nationalism, Localism, Medievalism

The previous chapter explored the cross-temporal dialogues which can take place between Anglo-Saxon literature and some poetry of the twentieth century. It argued that the relationship and interaction between objects and the ground plays a key role in this dialogue between past and present. Key to the first three chapters of this thesis has been the idea of literary ecologies, whereby the interaction between poetry and material environments forms new ecologies from both intellectual and physical creative processes and interactions. Chapter Three considered the role of the ground as an active agent (or network of agents) in the formation of literary ecologies which talk to one another across time. This chapter progresses from examining the formation of literary ecologies to think more specifically about place. It explores how poetry can create not only literary ecologies, but how it can also engage with the formation of specific *literary geographies*. This chapter considers Armitage's (2007) version of the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as continuing discussion of Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. While the previous chapters have explored Anglo-Saxon poetic texts, examining *Gawain* allows the differences between the construction of environments in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English texts to be brought to the fore. These differences relate to the way in which the text's audience (either reader or listener) is positioned in relation to the environment constructed in the text. Drawing out these insights is crucial to developing a sense of how poetry and the writing process affects the interaction between human and nonhuman, both in the material world and in different literatures, and how these poetic

processes change across time. The previous chapter began to explore the concept of place, and how poetry specifically can construct ‘places’ as cross-temporal environments through the interactions between objects in a specific location. This chapter continues to explore the interaction between poetry and time, but also begins to interrogate further the idea of place and location, questioning how we think about and construct place specifically in relation to ideas of localism, nationalism, and globalism.

In his outline of what he terms ‘literary geographies’, Thacker (2005: 60) notes that ‘to think geographically about literary and cultural texts means to understand them in material locations, locations that can and should be examined historically and with an awareness of how diverse spaces can reflect, produce or resist forms of power’. Thacker’s notion of literary geographies speaks to a wider idea of bioregionalism. A bioregion is defined as ‘a geographical area defined by biological or environmental characteristics, rather than political or administrative boundaries’.<sup>1</sup> This chapter engages with Thacker’s arguments concerning the importance of history in the discussion of literary geographies, and works to test the rigour of Thacker’s definition alongside the notion of bioregionalism. By more thoroughly understanding the materiality of locations as they are constructed in poetic texts, a better understanding can be gained about the interaction between material environments and human creativity.

Methodologically, this chapter is based, in part, on material present in the literary archives of Armitage and Hill, housed in the Brotherton Library Special Collections archive at the University of Leeds. Exploring the drafts, and related materials, behind the composition of this poetry provides new insights into the interaction between environment, poet, and writing tools/objects, and the ways

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1 *OED* s.v. *bioregion*.

in which these interactions create new literary ecologies.

### Simon Armitage's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in Context

The progression of ecocriticism into medieval literary studies started with Middle English literature, before gradually working its way back to critically engage with Old English material.<sup>2</sup> *Gawain* has been an important text for ecocritical analysis for some time, partly because of its attention to environmental detail and the verdant appearance of the knight himself. Outside of ecocriticism, much work has also previously been conducted on the identity and geographic location of the *Gawain*-poet, as well as wider issues concerning setting and geographical references in the poem. Much of this work has been conducted in the field of dialect studies, and it has produced some interesting debate around the issues of the *Gawain*-poet's identity and influences.<sup>3</sup> Most of these studies agree that the poem shows the presence of a North-Western Midland Middle English dialect.<sup>4</sup> The detailed description of Gawain's travels in search of the Green Chapel have also prompted much investigation, in an attempt to map Gawain's journey through an analysis of these geographical references.<sup>5</sup> These areas of research have been critical in shedding light on the connection between the poem and its

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2 Ecocritical studies in late medieval literature include: Douglass (1998); Kiser (2001) Stanbury (2004); Rudd (2007); Hanawalt and Kiser (2008); Johnson (2012).

3 See Menner (1922); McIntosh (1962: 5); Tolkien and Gordon (1967: xxv-xxvii); Duggan (1997).

4 See McIntosh (1962). While Putter and Stokes (2007) agree to a certain extent with the suggested regional identity of the language used in *Gawain*, they suggest that the previous study of McIntosh and the subsequent *Linguistic Atlas of Later Mediaeval English* (McIntosh and Samuels 1986).

5 See Elliot (1997); Hill (2009).

associated geographies and environments.

Work in postcolonial studies has followed a similar trajectory to that of ecocriticism. Its expansion into medieval studies has provided significant new insights regarding issues of national and regional identity, othering, and colonialism, in both early and later medieval literature.<sup>6</sup> *Gawain* has provided particularly fertile ground for postcolonial analysis, much of which shares interesting points of convergence with recent ecocritical work on the text. Studies by Ingham (2001), Knight (2003), and Arner (2006) discuss the poem's negotiation of Anglo-Welsh relations by examining the specific ways in which the borderland between England and Wales is presented in *Gawain*, and how this impacts on the constructions of these relations in the text.<sup>7</sup> The text's construction of the Anglo-Welsh border region is a specific meeting point for postcolonial and ecocritical readings of the text. Rudd (2007: 91-132) and George (2010) deal directly with the poem's engagement with ideas such as the perception of wilderness and comparisons between Gawain and Bertilak's interaction with the wider ecology of their surroundings. These investigations examine the concept of borderland as presented in *Gawain* from a specifically environmental perspective, but they also speak clearly to those who examine how the physical portrayal of borderland impacts on the construction of human

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6 See, for example, Cohen (2001); Holsinger (2002); Kabir and Williams (2005).

7 It should be noted that while each of these works investigates similar issues using the same critical approach, they do not always agree in their arguments. Ingham (2001) proposes that gender difference overtakes the disparities between constructions of English and Welsh as the text progresses. Arner (2006) firmly disagrees with Ingham's conclusions, arguing that distinct differences between English and Welsh are maintained throughout the poem and concludes that 'geographic incongruities' are not 'effaced' during the course of the poem, but that gender provides a locus within which they are 'reinscribed'.

identities in the poem. The work of Rudd (2007) and George (2010) brings the poem into contact with current debates more broadly in the field of ecocriticism, and expands our understanding of literary engagement with environment in Middle English literature. There is scope, however, for further ecocritical engagement with the poem which draws on some of the earlier critical work regarding its geographical setting, the role which language plays in the creative construction of environment within the text, and the tension between the national and the local which it evokes.

### **Storytelling and Translation**

Armitage's introduction to his version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* emphasises the language of the original Middle English text as a significant factor which captured his interest in the poem.

To a contemporary poet, one interested in narrative and form, and to a northerner who not only recognizes plenty of the poem's dialect but who detects an echo of his own speech rhythms within the original, the urge to blow a little warm breath across the layer of frosting eventually proved irresistible. (Armitage 2007: vii)

It is this identification with the language of the Middle English version of *Gawain* which Armitage claims is the driving force behind his version of the poem. While this claim may have been made to bolster the sense of regional identity which Armitage's version seeks to establish, Armitage's work more widely demonstrates an unabashed, unapologetic, and relentless focus on his own

home region, supporting his claims to the attraction of the poem.<sup>8</sup> Armitage's work has a deep sense of connection to place. His poems make extensive reference to specific places in West-Yorkshire and Greater Manchester, bringing together, in both comparison and contrast, urban environments of Leeds, Huddersfield, and Manchester with the farm and moorland of Yorkshire and the Pennines. Davidson (2005: 215) observes that even when he is engaged with contemplating a different geographical location (namely Iceland in *Moon Country*, co-authored with Glyn Maxwell), Armitage finds it hard to leave behind the pull of Yorkshire. He writes with his bare feet in the sands at Breiðavík 'YORKSHIRE' and the picture is captioned 'homesickness' (Armitage and Maxwell 1996: centre fold).<sup>9</sup> For Armitage, the locality of Yorkshire permeates both his connections with other geographical locations and the creativity of his writing.

The connections explored by Armitage between poetry and local geographies, both rural and urban, is particularly prominent in 'On Miles Platting Station', from his early collection *Zoom!* The poem follows the journey of a train from the Pennine moors to its arrival in Manchester. 'On Miles Platting Station' draws together the rural environments with those of the urban settlements and the object of the train acts as a mediator through which we experience and perceive both. Place, however, does not just appear as a setting within Armitage's poems, but rather it plays an *active* role in establishing the relationship between words and images in his poetry, dynamically shaping the composition of each of the lines. Armitage's own West-Yorkshire dialect

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8 For a comprehensive discussion of Armitage's own regional identity and topography in his poetry see Davidson (2005: 213-17).

9 See Davidson (2005: 215).



influences the shape and sounds of each of his poems as much as the numerous references to individual people and places. The poem-play *Xanadu*, an epitaph for the Ashfield Valley housing estate in Rochdale, effectively demonstrates the way in which language and place are bound together in Armitage's poetic composition. The opening of the poem situates the estate within its social and environmental contexts. Armitage's early drafts of *Xanadu* and other works focus on the interaction between language, sound, and place. Armitage's drafting process appears methodically built around the sound of key words which are often associated with particular place names or characteristics. Even the earliest drafts of his poems demonstrate an awareness of the rhythm, sound, and locality of the poem. These details are the first to be sketched out in lines and stanzas, with gaps left where other lines or words must take their place around those already developed central concepts. Lists of words often appear at the bottom of Armitage's draft pages, which document his methodical search for the appropriate sound/word/image to accompany or complement the words and lines already fixed in the poem. At other times, key words or phrases hang on the side of the page; their potential already recognised, they are ready to be pulled into the poem as and when the right space appears in the sounds and images, controlled by the gradual shaping of the drafting process.

Armitage also draws connections between the process of navigating and of composing poetry. In reference to his recent project of walking the Pennine way, composing and performing poetry en route, he observed 'it turns out whatever part of my brain I need for writing poems, I also need for navigating'.<sup>10</sup> Not only a comment on his perhaps somewhat sketchy navigational skills, this

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<sup>10</sup> See <<http://blog.waterstones.com/2012/10/poetry-or-bust-simon-armitage/>>, accessed 01-02-2013.

also demonstrates the connection between Armitage's creative process and his experience of place and environment; the two are entwined to the point where they occupy the mind in the same way. It is this merging of place and poetry which fuels Armitage's poetry and forms the basis of his version of *Gawain*.

Armitage's dialectal connection to the poem apparently inspires him to pull *Gawain* towards the locality of his own home of Marsden in West Yorkshire. Following a discussion of past research which has attempted to locate the physical locations of *Gawain* in the environment today, Armitage muses that although there is no conclusive evidence that the environs of *Gawain* are based on real physical locations, the detail with which the poet describes certain geographical features makes it difficult to believe that the poem was not composed with specific locations in mind. Taking his cue from this discussion of the potential connection between real geographical features and those presented in *Gawain*, Armitage notes

a similar strategy has informed this translation; although my own part of northern England is separated from Lud's Church<sup>11</sup> by the swollen uplands of the Peak District, coaxing *Gawain* and his poem back into the Pennines was always part of the plan.

(Armitage 2007: vi)

Crucially, he constructs a connection with the poem which stems not only from the regional specificity of its dialect, but also from its physical environments. The connection between the language of the poem and his own dialect and speech

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11 A fissure in the rocks near the village of Flash in Derbyshire which, it has been suggested, provided the inspiration for the Green Chapel.

rhythms speaks directly to Armitage's own regional identity; this creates the desire to appropriate the poem physically and geographically into his own, specific, Northern/Pennine locality.<sup>12</sup> Armitage's statement also makes a particularly important connection between material environments and language. For Armitage, in the context of writing and particularly poetry, these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. The materiality of the physical environment (the swollen shape of the mountains, the stone which has formed into the feature known as 'Lud's church') is inseparably tied to the language of poetry.

Armitage's connections between the materiality of the environment and poetry raise some interesting questions about the notion of translation. *Translation* is a complex term. Etymologically the noun form is derived from Latin *translātiō-em* 'a transporting, translation, n. of an action' (*OED*, s.v. *translation*). The term has specific connotations relating to both the process of transporting words between languages, but also more broadly the transference or conveyance of anything from 'one person, place or condition to another' (*OED*, s.v. *translation*). While the term *translation* conveys the movement which takes place whereby a text is transferred from one language into another (or in this case from Middle English into Modern English), it does not necessarily fully convey the dynamic nature of the process taking place in work such as Armitage's *Gawain*. Walter Benjamin (1973: 91-92) argues that storytelling 'does not aim to

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12 Armitage's connection with the poem runs deep. In an interview for the Guardian (16-12-2006), he admits that after a series of coincidences associated with the poem he found himself in the position where 'within about a week, the idea had gone from a fanciful notion to a superstitious (and preposterous) conviction that I was put on the planet for no other reason than to translate this poem.' <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/dec/poetry.simonarmitage>>, accessed 21-02-2013.

convey the true essence of a thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the story-teller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the story-teller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.' The 'things' conveyed in stories, therefore, are always affected by the storyteller. This provides a useful context in which to consider Armitage's process of supposed 'translation' regarding his version of *Gawain*. Guattari evokes Benjamin's thoughts on the figure of the storyteller in his relation to his proposal of 'the three ecologies'. Guattari (1989: 147) emphasises how in Benjamin's conception of storytelling, worlds are brought 'into being' which 'engender universes of reference and existential territories'. For both Benjamin and Guattari, storytelling thus creates new ecologies which are effected by the storyteller.

In his suggestion that a part of his inspiration when working on his own retelling of the *Gawain* story lay in the desire to pull the story towards his own regional and topographical locality, Armitage seems to be tapping into a similar sentiment to that expressed by Benjamin and Guattari. This is particularly significant when considering the place of localism within Armitage's version of the poem. If for Armitage it is the cadences and shape of the language which struck a chord with his own regional identity, then retelling the story allows him not only to pull *Gawain* towards his Yorkshire home, but also to reaffirm his connection to that locality through his own retelling of the *Gawain* story. Through this process of pulling *Gawain* into the Pennines, Armitage not only forges a local connection with the poem, but also elevates the status of his own locality through an act of colonizing the literary canon.

Jones (2006: 13-14) provides some interesting discussion of the nature of translation, with reference to twentieth-century poetry inspired by Anglo-Saxon

poems and more apparently direct ‘translations’ of Old English poetry. Jones emphasises that the translation of Old English (or Middle English for the purposes of this chapter) into Modern English is a process which occurs ‘not across geographical space’, but rather ‘over temporal distance’ (2006: 14). This is a crucial point, which supports the evidence provided by this chapter that locality, and the specific environment of a particular locality, plays a key role in this dialogue. Jones (2006: 14), however, then goes on to suggest that the practice of many of these poets, particularly (he states) Pound and Morgan, ‘betrays the attitude that translation and “original” composition are different activities by degree not kind’. Jones argues that the etymology of *translation* suggests that all poetic work which engages with Old (or Middle) English poetry could be termed ‘translation’. While, to a certain extent, this is true, the processes of ‘absorption’ and ‘drawing out’ conveyed by Benjamin in his outline of storytelling arguably offer an alternative to the notion of translation, and one which may be more conducive to drawing out new insights from Armitage’s *Gawain* and the original Middle English version of the poem. If *translation* is taken as a transference from one context, time, or language to another, then this does not fully convey that process of internalisation and re-externalisation in which the storyteller partakes. Although Armitage himself refers to his work as a ‘translation’, his stated intentions further suggest that his version of *Gawain* is more dynamic than the term conveys. In his version of *Gawain*, Armitage constructs a new literary ecology which is shaped by that process of absorbing the story and retelling it. Armitage’s *Gawain* constructs a literary ecology which is created in poetic form from the experiences of Armitage’s own interactions with the material world. Just like his inscribing of the word ‘YORKSHIRE’ in the Breiðavík sands, Armitage’s physical encounters with his local environment

leave their mark on his retelling of the *Gawain* story. Armitage's *Gawain*, therefore, is a close translation which seeks to convey the meaning, style and sound of the poem into Modern English, but it is also more than this; it constructs active conversation between the past and the present, the material and poetic, a dynamic process of creativity.

### Medievalism and Nationalism

Armitage's version of *Gawain* has received much public critical acclaim, but the text has received relatively little scholarly attention.<sup>13</sup> Examining Armitage's text provides insights into the interaction between language and environment that are not always possible in ecocritical readings based only on the original text. While it is important to note that Armitage presents his version as a poem, first and foremost, rather than 'an exercise in linguistic forensics or medieval history' (Armitage 2007: viii), the text can form an important part of the ongoing discussions about how medievalism affects how we view both the past and present.<sup>14</sup> Armitage's attention to the *local* can be read in contrast to poetic associations with the national which have often been associated with works of

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13 Sánchez-Martí (2010) published a detailed review of the translation in *Arthuriana*. Other than this, scholarly engagement with the translation is scarce, particularly in comparison to Heaney's (2000) translation of *Beowulf*. In many ways Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* shares connections with the poetic intentions of Armitage's *Gawain*. Both writers are inspired by their own regional linguistic and geographical identities in the compositions of their translations. It is, perhaps, only Heaney's more firmly established previous connections to medieval scholarship and medievalism which has led to wider engagement from the academic community than for Armitage's *Gawain*.

14 Alexander (2007); Clark and Perkins (2010); Fugelso (2012).

medievalism and translation, particularly those of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Nineteenth-century literary texts tended to use the medieval in order to create a sense of nostalgia. This movement fed into the more general movements of Romanticism and naturalism. While nineteenth-century evocations of the medieval often emphasised the natural, this had the effect of homogenising the diverse bioregions of Britain.<sup>16</sup>

The effects of the two world wars had a substantial impact on the use and construction of the medieval in literature during the twentieth century. While nineteenth-century engagement with the medieval, to a large extent, worked to support both nationalist and imperialist agendas, postwar literature began to use the medieval as a medium through which to interrogate and question such strongly nationalistic sentiments.<sup>17</sup> A particularly pertinent example of this shift and the subsequent tensions in scholarly discussion is afforded by the fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien and its surrounding criticism. Garth (2005: 312) explores the connections between war and nationalism in Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*, and suggests that Tolkien draws on medieval romance while also tackling 'the themes that Wilfred Owen ruled off-limits: deeds, lands, glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, power', and examines how the experiences of the individual puts 'glory, honour, majesty, as well as courage, under such stress that they often fracture, but are not utterly destroyed'. Tolkien's use of the medieval, therefore, can be read as a medium through which the nationalism of war can be scrutinised and a critique developed. Some criticism of

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15 For further discussion of nineteenth-century medievalism see Chandler (1971).

16 For further work on the impact on national identity of establishing a literary canon at the end of the nineteenth century see Coussens (2008: 21-26).

17 For detailed discussion of the relationship between wars and nationalism, as well as the construction of nationalism more generally see Anderson (2006).

*The Lord of the Rings*, however, accused Tolkien of creating a heavily nationalistic text which created a sense of nostalgia around a mythologized English medieval past. Previous significant literary debates regarding the issue of nationalism (particularly those focused on Tolkien) were largely concerned with the important definitions and distinctions of/between patriotism, nationalism, and imperialism.<sup>18</sup> Further debate is still to be had, however, regarding the way in which specific places and environments are constructed by, or themselves construct, a sense of local, national, or international identity. Curry (2004: 25) emphasises the strong sense of locality from which Tolkien constructed his descriptions of the Shire in *The Lord of the Rings*, noting that Tolkien drew his inspiration for the Shire from a very specific rural corner of the West Midlands of England. Curry (2004: 25) observes, however, that at the same time, people from ‘virtually everywhere in the world’ can connect with the shire as a place and with the parochial lifestyle of the hobbits. Curry refers here to people’s identification with ‘rustic people’ of their own society. While the identification with the lifestyle of the hobbits is undoubtedly important, the identification with the physical environment of the shire also holds significance. Arguably, therefore, such widespread identification with the Shire suggests the potential for literary places and environments to transcend national identity, while simultaneously their construction is deeply rooted in a sense of localism.

### **Armitage and Localism**

Armitage’s work, though not necessarily overtly, often challenges traditional ideas of Britishness and national identity.<sup>19</sup> Coussens (2008) provides a detailed analysis

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18 See Pearce (2005: 306-10).

19 For further discussion of the challenging of traditional ideas of Britishness in Armitage’s



of Armitage's 'Killing Time', a poem composed at the turn of the millennium during his time as poet in residence for the New Millennium Experience Company. The poem is based on news events from the year of its composition (1999) and takes the form of a critical view of Britain's role in the world.

Meanwhile, the lights on Oxford Street this year

ask us to stop and think

not of Christ in his crib or reindeers hauling a sleigh

but a chemically-inferred orange drink

and the nation's best-known brand of frozen peas,

frozen straight from the pod.

[...]

But tonight the bright star over the Middle East is the burn

of a cruise missile homing in,

and on satellite TV we watch a game-show host

disguised as an anchorman for CNN

go live to some security camera on an embassy roof

which turns like an owl's head

as tracer-bullets rise like Amaretti papers aflame

before the connection goes dead. (Armitage 1999: 5)

By moving between events inside and outside of Britain in the poem, Armitage also 'subverts traditional "patriotics" poetry by denying Britain's insular complacency and forcing recognition of its place in the world' (Coussens 2008: 29). This oscillation between local, national, and international is key to

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work see Coussens (2008).

Armitage's work. More than presenting an awareness of the global position of Britain, however, Armitage's work also often consciously plays with the specifics of locality while also providing a view of that locus from a global position. By fixating on the local and the global Armitage critically diminishes the weight of the national. The national becomes something which is either observed from a wider international perspective or overtaken by the specifics of local environments and cultures.

Armitage (a geography graduate) draws particularly on geography in the shaping of his creative consciousness. For Armitage, place is about specifics; the materiality and physicality of a given geographical area and its relation to other physical places. The opening lines of his *Gawain* poem subtly carry the weight of these geographic specificities. In the opening lines of the original Middle English *Gawain*, the poem lays out a brief history of Britain up to the reign of Arthur:

Mo ferlyes on this folde han fallen here oft

Then in any other that I wot, syn that ilk tyme. (ll. 23-24)

(Anderson 1996: 168)

(More wonderful things have happened here in this land than in any other that I know, since that [earlier] time.)<sup>20</sup>

Armitage tackles these lines this way:

and through history more strangeness has happened here  
than anywhere else I know of on Earth. (ll. 23-24)<sup>21</sup>

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20 Prose translations of the Middle English are my own unless otherwise stated.

21 For all quotations from Armitage's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* see Armitage (2007). All

The inclusion of ‘on Earth’ at the end of the second line of Armitage’s version subtly places the locality in which the poem is set (i.e. the North West) in a global context; while also invoking a sense of the ecology of the Earth as something which affects and is affected by all its inhabitants, invoking some of the sentiments of Sagan’s *Pale Blue Dot* as discussed in the Introduction, such as the notion of a global community and the resulting sense of responsibility for protecting that object. While the Middle English version notes that more ‘ferlyes’ have occurred ‘on this folde’ (on this soil/ in this land), its references beyond ‘this folde’ are more vague; they are simply referred to as ‘then in any other’ (than in any other), suggesting the idea of ‘other’ lands but without the sense of a shared global identity that is carried in Armitage’s use of ‘Earth’. Tolkien’s version of these lines differs in the way that it presents the place in which the mysteries/marvels to which the narrator is referring have taken place.

In this domain more marvels have by men been seen  
 than in any other that I know since that olden time.  
 (Tolkien 1979: 14)

Tolkien’s use of ‘domain’ adds connotations of territory and governance which neither the Middle English nor Armitage’s versions convey. Both the Middle English and Armitage’s versions focus on physical ‘here’ - the attachment to a physical bit of land being emphasised in the Middle English through the ‘folde’ - rather than a specific ruling territory. Turville-Petre (2004: 341) discusses the idea of nationalism and the development and maintenance of a specific English

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subsequent quotations are referenced with line numbers.

identity in the fourteenth century. He suggests that, by the end of the fourteenth century, English had secured its position as an established vernacular language of literature. Turville-Petre suggests that authors earlier in the century may have felt the need to assert the distinct Englishness of their writing in order to bolster the position of English as a major vernacular language. By the latter part of the fourteenth century this authority was firmly established and it is reasonable to suggest that the *Gawain*-poet's agenda may have been somewhat different from those writing earlier in the century. While the *Gawain*-poet may not have experienced such pressure to work towards the establishment of English as a powerful and credible literary language, the poem appears to be working hard to explore more internally and self-consciously the idea of 'England'. An interesting phenomenon occurs within these lines, both in the original Middle English and Armitage's version. The Middle English original sees hints of cultural imperialism reaching out from the text, suggesting that at the time of the composition of *Gawain*, contrary to Turville-Petre's arguments, English was not internationally prestigious and was writing from the European periphery. The lines:

Mo ferlyes on this folde han fallen here oft

Then in any other that I wot. (ll. 23-24)

demonstrate the poet trying to buy cultural capital by embracing the cultural mainstream's literary ideas (as had been conveyed by earlier French Arthurian literature) of Britain as a land of magic and otherworldliness. This process is itself, problematic, as it both affirms the unique status of England in relation to the centre (in this case Europe), but at the same time it re-inscribes the

marginalising discourse of that centre.<sup>22</sup> This phenomenon becomes increasingly problematic when that discourse is updated by Armitage in the context of twenty-first-century neo-imperialism. By drawing on a sense of globalism through the use of ‘Earth’ in his version of these lines the sense of a peripheral discourse created in the original text is seemingly inverted. The use of ‘history’ (l. 23) enables the term ‘strangeness’ to take on a historical weight, and shifts the sense of ‘here’ as a periphery to ‘here’ as the centre. This is not to suggest that Armitage consciously embeds a neo-imperialist discourse into his version of the poem,<sup>23</sup> but rather demonstrates the ease with which place can become politicised, particularly into forms of nationalism, and particularly when dealing with the reworking of literary texts across time.

The *Gawain*-poet’s construction of ‘England’ also focuses on the constant interaction between its varied environs and social structure and, in this way, *Gawain* examines England from within. The *Gawain*-poet explores in detail ideas of both localism and the place of England as a nation. This seemingly contradictory focus on both the local and the national resonates with Armitage’s own work on a broader scale. While the references to the Anglo-Welsh borderland in the Middle English version of *Gawain* have received much previous scholarly attention,<sup>24</sup> Armitage’s text breathes new life into the local aspects of *Gawain*, providing insights into the poem’s localism through a poetic rather than scholarly interaction with the Middle English. Armitage uses the connections that he makes between his own dialect and speech patterns and those of the

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22 Examples of this phenomenon today can arguably be seen (in a European context) in Celtic and Icelandic nationalisms.

23 This is more an example of how we are all caught up in ideologies which shape our cultural existence, of which we may not always be consciously aware.

24 See in particular Ingham (2001), Knight (2003), and Arner (2006).

original Middle English version of *Gawain* to connect the physical places and environments of the poem to his own part of England, quite literally ‘coaxing Gawain and his poem back into the Pennines’. The significance of the word ‘back’, here, is particularly important. Armitage seems to evoke a sense of historical connection between his own locality and that of the *Gawain* poem. This may be the result of Armitage’s own sense of connection to the poem – through the intimate association he feels with the sounds of the language – but this may also refer to a previous literary connection between the Yorkshire Pennine region and *Gawain*. Ted Hughes started his own translation of *Gawain*, a small section of which was published in the anthology *The School Bag* coedited with Seamus Heaney (Heaney and Hughes [eds] 1997 : 485-92). Hughes’ poetry, like that of Armitage, develops a strong sense of localism specifically that of the West Yorkshire Pennine region, and it is likely that Armitage is here referring, at least in part, to this previous literary connection between this bioregion and *Gawain*.

Through both his adherence to the poem’s subtle references to England’s place on a global scale, and his desire to emphasise the localism of *Gawain*, Armitage’s text marks a significant difference in agenda from that of both earlier (mainly nineteenth-century) medievalism and specifically from other previous versions/translations of the poem, many of which have been more philological in their approach and, therefore, preoccupied with making rigorous attempts to provide an accurate linguistic *translation* of the poem.<sup>25</sup> From the outset, Armitage clearly defines the link between spoken language, written language, and place.

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25 A particularly pertinent example is Tolkien’s translation, which makes use of more archaic forms of syntax and lexis in order to provide a closer linguistic translation.

If ye wyl lysten this laye bot on littel quile,  
 I schal telle hit astit, as I in toun herde,  
     with tonge,  
 As hit is stad and stoken  
 In stori stif and stronge,  
 With lel letteres loken,  
 In londe so has ben longe. (ll. 30-36) (Anderson 1996: 168)  
 (If you will listen to this story just a little while, I will tell it as it  
 is, as I heard (aloud) it spoken by a tongue in [the] town; and in  
 this land for a long time it has been inscribed in stories firm and  
 strong, fixed with truthful lettering.)

So listen a while to my tale if you will  
 and I'll tell it as it's told in the town where it trips from  
     the tongue;  
 and as it has been inked  
 in stories bold and strong,  
 through letters which, once linked,  
 have lasted loud and long. (ll. 30-36) (Armitage 2007: 6)

Armitage's lines emphasise the relationship between the town in which the  
 narrator first heard the tale and the language itself. The language 'trips / from  
 the tongue', suggesting a natural flow of the words from the mouth. This line  
 self-consciously conveys the idea of retelling a story, and as a result it sets  
 Armitage's own voice in dialogue with that of the original. The Middle English

version is more ambiguous in its idea of the town where the narrator first heard the story told. 'As I in toun herde' can refer to both a specific place, and more generally to the fact that the story was heard in an urban, or courtly, rather than a rural setting. Armitage's inclusion of the definite article before 'town', combined with the phrase 'where it trips from the tongue' suggests an emphasis on a specific locality, aligning the sounds of a particular place with the telling of the story. While the original text mentions the experiences of hearing the tale orally, it then leans heavily on its emphasis of the written form, 'with letteres loken / In londe so has ben longe'. Armitage, however, links the final line of this passage back to the oral context of the poem through the aural quality of his lexical choice 'loud'. The written form of 'letters' merges here with the aural nature of 'loud', indicating the significance of the interaction between spoken and written language in both the process of storytelling and in the connection between a particular story and its associated geographies.

Although Armitage's desire to pull *Gawain* towards his own Pennine locality is stated in his introduction as a somewhat offhand comment, which could simply refer to his underlying personal connections to certain dialect words and speech rhythms of the poem, his execution appears much more subtle and effective than this suggests. In the opening scene, where the Green Knight makes his appearance at Arthur's court, his speech is scattered with dialect words. The Green Knight claims that he did not 'allack' (l. 257), he refers to the holly branch as a 'hollin stem' (l. 265), and calls the knights of Arthur's court 'bum-fluffed bairns' (l. 280). It is important to note that these dialect words are not necessarily exclusive to Yorkshire; 'bairn' in particular is found in Scots and other northern dialects, particularly those of the north east. Their presence may, therefore, suggest a more general use of dialect, which could indicate that



Armitage is keen to draw on his own dialect while engaging a readership who may be less familiar with such terms. The specific spelling of ‘allack’ with an ‘a’ rather than an ‘e’, however, is local to the West-Yorkshire region.<sup>26</sup> ‘Hollin’ is also particularly interesting as a Yorkshire dialect word for holly, as it appears frequently in place names across the region, e.g. Hollins Hill in Shipley, Hollinfare in Lancashire, Hollin Park in Leeds. Although not all the dialect words used in the poem are specific to Yorkshire, the use and spelling of ‘allack’ and ‘hollin’ would suggest that dialect does definitely hold some connections to a specifically Yorkshire locality in Armitage’s text. The Green Knight’s speech is also patterned with harsh consonant sounds, as is particularly emphasised in the line ‘So who has the gall? The gumption? The guts?’ (l. 291), where the enforced pauses created by the question marks allow the ‘g’ sound to resonate more fully in the line. The repeated use of the ‘u’ in ‘gumption’ and ‘guts’, and its position after the ‘g’, also draws attention, for those attuned to this sociolinguistically highly meaningful distinction within British English, to the northern pronunciation of ‘u’ as [ʊ] rather than the RP or southern [ʌ or ɜ]. Such sounds are identifiable with those of a West-Yorkshire Pennine accent, while also being associated more broadly with other northern accents. While Armitage makes use of specific West-Yorkshire Pennine spelling of dialectal words, he also appears to be tapping into a wider cultural sense of Northerness and the linguistic stereotypes embedded within British culture. Wales (2006: 29-30) discusses the use of linguistic features as cultural artefacts, noting the tendency for Northern figures to be identified in the media by linguistic stereotypes; an article about Armitage himself which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* (28 August 1998) received the heading ‘*Nowt* wrong with iambic pentameter’ (Wales 2006: 30).

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26 See *English Dialect Dictionary* s.v. ‘lake’.

These linguistic stereotypes often work in association with wider cultural ideas of Northern landscape and culture: for example, the idea that Northern consonant sounds are ‘hard’ and speech is ‘gritty’. These descriptions are often associated with those of the ‘granite and grit of the mountains of the Pennines’, creating a cultural construction of Northern bleak and harshness (Wales 2006: 25). Wales (2006: 25–29) analyses the long held cultural construction of the North of England as an almost separate country to that of the South, and identifies that a key consequence of this idea is that the North is ‘rarely seen as essential to “Englishness” and national identity’;<sup>27</sup> the South becomes the stereotype of an English identity, particularly in a global context.<sup>28</sup> Armitage utilises dialect and, implicitly, accent and/or sound as a form of personal identification with the language of the poem, while also seeming to acknowledge the linguistic stereotypes which culturally have been linked to the environments or, perhaps more accurately, bioregions of the North. This link between language and environment demonstrates how human cultural identities can be constructed through these associations. While *Gawain* may already potentially have ties to the North of England through the dialect of Middle English present in the extant version of the text, the association which Armitage constructs between the poem and his own Northern, Pennine locality demonstrates further his colonization of this part of the literary canon for his own region. Through this process, Armitage is resisting a sense of Englishness in favour of strengthening his sense of localism, while also simultaneously establishing the importance and

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27 Wales (2006: 28) also cites Colls (1998: 197) and Matless (1998: 17).

28 The opening ceremony to the London 2012 Olympic games offers an interesting counterpoint to this idea of a sense of ‘Englishness’ being identified with the South, by way of its engagement with the Industrial history of both the South and the North.

presence of the North to the literary canon.

Previous studies on the Middle English original of *Gawain*, particularly those concerned with postcolonial readings of the text, have argued that the manner and appearance of the Green Knight is placed in opposition to the civility of Arthur's court and its inhabitants. Arner (2006: 88) argues that the text constructs the character of the Green Knight as being 'tied to nature's barbarousness at the frontier'; he appears as a physical manifestation of the 'wilds' of the Anglo-Welsh borderland. More specific connections have also been made by previous ecocritical readings of the Middle English text, which connect the character of the Green Knight with 'the natural world' more generally, and contrast his appearance and actions with those of Gawain.<sup>29</sup> Armitage, however, further develops the creative potential of a specific place, in terms of both its language and its physical environment. Armitage not only assigns the Green Knight more Yorkshire dialect words in comparison to other characters, whose speech tends to be constructed in a more courtly style, but he also connects the environment of the Green Knight's home to the same Yorkshire dialect. This is particularly interesting as it demonstrates the use of dialect words within the narrative voice as well as just specifically that of the character of the Green Knight. As Gawain travels in search of the Green Chapel, the poem provides detailed description of the environments through which he passes. The first section of the journey describes his travels 'thurgh the ryalme of Logres' (l. 691), and then on through Wales and past Anglesey, to cross at Holy Head and come ashore in the lands of the Wirral. The Middle English text dwells momentarily on a description of this land and Gawain's feelings as he journeys through the wilderness, before the final bob and wheel section offers an overview of Gawain's

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<sup>29</sup> See Rudd (2007: 110); George (2010).

current position. The following stanza moves the action geographically, with the opening line ‘Mony klyf he overclambe in contrayes straunge’ (l. 713), suggesting Gawain’s passage through many different topographies. Armitage’s translation takes advantage of this movement into ‘countrayes straunge’, and consciously shifts the language to use more Yorkshire dialect terms and colloquialisms. Gawain ‘scrapes with serpents’ (l. 720) and ‘tangles with wodwos’ (l. 721), while the oaks of the forest are described as being ‘in huddles of hundreds’ (l.); the strong use of the ‘u’ vowels representing the texture and rhythm of Armitage’s own Yorkshire speech patterns; [ʊ] is a close vowel whereas [ʌ] is an open one. The Northern pronunciation of the ‘u’, therefore, has a phonaesthetic effect evocative of huddling, which the Southern vowel sound lacks. This is increased further when Gawain leaves Bertilak’s castle on the final stage of his journey to the Green Chapel. In this section of the poem Armitage constructs connections between the physical environment described in the Middle English version of the text and the Yorkshire dialect. The moors and mountains are described as ‘muzzy with mist’ (l. 2080) and ‘every hill wore a hat of mizzle on its head’ (l. 2081). ‘Mizzle’ describes the phenomenon of mist mixed with drizzle, which is a common weather feature over the high ground of the Yorkshire moors.<sup>30</sup>

The decision not to modernise the term ‘wodwos’, which appears in the Middle English version of the poem, also subtly connects this environment to Yorkshire through its literary reference to the poetry of Ted Hughes, which includes a collection entitled *Wodwo*.<sup>31</sup> It is particularly interesting to note that

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30 The term can be found in Stanley Umpleby’s dialect poem *Ballade of Staitbes*; see Waddington-Feather (1970: 82).

31 Extensive connections have been made between Hughes’ poetry and that of the alliterative tradition, see McCarthy (2008: 41); Ingelbein (2002: 119-21). The eponymous poem of Hughes’ *Wodwo* collection is, itself, an important text for ecocritical study. It constructs the

Tolkien, who works to provide an accurate translation of the poem, chooses to translate *wodwos*, referring to them as ‘wood trolls’ (Tolkien 1979: 33).<sup>32</sup> Armitage on the other hand uses language, dialect, and subtle literary allusions to work with the Middle English poem and carefully draw a connection to his own part of England, without imposing significant changes to the meaning provided by the Middle English version of the poem. The point is not to suggest that Armitage wishes to imply that the *Gawain*-poet had Yorkshire in mind as the place in which the Green Knight dwells, but that Armitage creatively plays with the aspects of dialect and environmental description provided by the text in order to create his own sense of localism. The environmental descriptions in the Middle English text of *Gawain* are in some ways specific in that they provide a sense of locality (by way of referencing place names), but also simultaneously both detailed and vague in their descriptions of the physical environment. The poem provides extensive references to a wide variety of environmental features such as knolls, knarres, mountains, forests, crags, cliffs, streams, and waterfalls, but ultimately these do not appear detailed enough to refer to a specific location. While this level of environmental ambiguity exists in the Middle English text, it is this extensive use of environmental description and the poem’s attention to vivid detail which provides Armitage with the material into which he weaves his own linguistic and geographical identity.

The direction of action towards the reader/audience is one specific way

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moment where the wodwo discovers both itself and what it means for it to exist as part of its environment; see Scigaj (1983: 146) for further discussion. Its riddle-like form, preoccupied with discovery and interpretation, shares many connections with the riddles of the Exeter Book.

32 Tolkien, however, to some extent, deviates from the Middle English as a Middle English audience would have almost certainly thought of *wodwos* as human.

in which a sense of localism is built into the Middle English *Gawain*. As Gawain travels in search of the Green Chapel, the narrative guides the reader along the journey as though he/she were travelling the same path.

Now rides this renk thurgh the ryalme of Logres  
 [...] Til that he neghed ful neghe into the Northe Wales.  
 Alle the iles of Anglesay on lyft half he haldes,  
 And fares over the fordes by the forlondes,  
 Over at the Holy Hede, til he hade eft bonk  
 In the wyldrenesse of Wyrle – wonde ther bot lyte  
 The auther God other gome wyth goud hert lovied. (ll. 691-702)  
 (Now this knight rides through the realm of Logres, until he  
 arrived into North Wales. All the isles of Anglesey he has on his  
 left side and rides over the fords by the headlands over at  
 Holyhead, until he reached the shore again at the wilderness of  
 the Wirral. Few lived there who loved with a good heart either  
 God the Creator or other men.)

It is not only the specifics of place names, but the use of directions and determiners (*the* wyldrenesse of Wyrle) which create a sense of localism in this passage. It is these specifics of direction and locality which allow Armitage to build that sense of his own localism into his poetic translation of the text. Armitage invests these passages with Pennine geography, rhythm, and dialect. The reader/listener is not only positioned within the environment of the text, but is completely surrounded by the sensual qualities of the sights and sounds of the environment that Armitage constructs. It is, therefore, the material qualities of

those environments which are central and allow the reader imaginatively to experience the environment constructed by the text.

Armitage's *Gawain*, therefore, creates a highly specific literary geography by appropriating the sense of localism which is conveyed in the Middle English text. This sense of localism shifts in Armitage's retelling of the story to reflect his own sense of geographical locality. The language used to construct the environments of the poem (specifically in forms such as dialect) interacts with the materiality of specific features of Armitage's own West Yorkshire Pennine bioregion. Thacker's notion of literary geographies provides an important framework for understanding the interaction between Armitage, the *Gawain* poem, and the environments of both the Yorkshire Pennine region of Armitage's home and those of the specific localities mentioned by name in the poem. Armitage's *Gawain*, however, pushes Thacker's definition further. Rather than just understanding the poem in one specific 'material location', Armitage uses the interaction between language and place to alter the locality of those 'material locations'. According to Thacker, thinking geographically about literary (and cultural) texts means developing 'an awareness of how diverse spaces can reflect, produce or resist forms of power' (2005: 60). Armitage's retelling of *Gawain* simultaneously draws the canonical literary weight of the Middle English to the locality of West-Yorkshire, shifting the association of this literary text to his local region, and allowing his own locality to spread beyond its regional place through its presence in a popular new Modern English version of a historical and canonical literary text.

Reading Armitage's *Gawain* in dialogue with the Middle English version of the poem, not only in terms of language but also the physical environments of the poem, provides insights into the way in which both versions construct their

sense of 'place' through the interaction between physical objects and poetic language. Reading Armitage's version of *Gawain* alongside that of the Middle English version of the text draws out the tensions between nationalism and localism. While the two world wars triggered a shift in the way in which poets engaged with the idea of the national, to a certain extent the association has remained in terms of medieval literary scholarship. Reading Armitage's self-consciously localised version of *Gawain* alongside the Middle English version of the poem forces a reconsideration of the presence of the local and the national in both the Middle English text, and invites comparison with earlier Old English poetry. Stylistic features of Old English poetry make it less concerned with building a sense of a localised environment than are later texts such as *Gawain*. Chapter Five considers the association between the sea in Old English poetry and its later appropriation as a source of Englishness for nationalistic agendas of the nineteenth-century. The following section of this chapter, however, explores further the interaction between language and materiality in the building of a literary geography in Hill's *Mercian Hymns*.

### **Literary Geography and Hill's *Mercian Hymns***

Hill's *Mercian Hymns* is perhaps even more obviously preoccupied with the notion of localism than Armitage's version of *Gawain*. In the work of both Armitage and Hill a poetic can be detected that places importance on the merging of past and present. This is central to the process of poetic composition in which both poets, differently, engage with the notion of retelling a story. Unlike Armitage's *Gawain*, however, *Mercian Hymns* is not a straightforward retelling, but is instead a reimagining of the specific aspects of the cultural history surrounding the figure of Offa. This cultural history interacts with Hill's



own experiences. Through this process, the historical environments of Mercia merge with the Midlands of the twentieth century, creating a cross-temporal literary ecology of this specific locality. Hill's literary archive contains notebooks and cards which document the research and drafting of *Mercian Hymns*. This material reveals a process of poetic construction which provides evidence to support this questioning of the concept of translation. This archive material provides insights into the connections between the physical environment, the writing process, and the poetic texts of Hill's *Mercian Hymns*.

The archive sources relating to Hill's drafting of, and research for, *Mercian Hymns* demonstrate a process of poetic composition which is concerned with the transition of the material into a literary text. Hill works to create a poetic ecology by building up his own archive of material evidence regarding the specific locality of the West Midlands (corresponding to the western part, and perhaps heartland, of Anglo-Saxon Mercia), which forms the focus of *Mercian Hymns*. Although both Hill and Armitage explore the material environment of specific localities through their poetic compositions, Hill's work is much more focused on the materiality of individual objects than that of Armitage. The preexistence of a poem from which Armitage composes his own version of *Gawain* imposes certain limitations on the content of his work. While Armitage's *Gawain* creates a dialogue between the time in which the Middle English version of the poem was originally in circulation and the present day, this must be conducted within the parameters of a fairly close translation. Armitage builds his geographical and temporal connections through the use of dialect and narrative style. For Hill, however, this cross-temporal dialogue takes place through the exploration of the materiality of specific objects.

Clark (2010: 68) observes that 'Hill draws fragments of the past and

present together in a kind of atemporal collage'. While this is certainly true of Hill's poetry, this notion of an 'atemporal collage' has arguably even greater relevance when applied to Hill's composition process. Hill is famed for the extensive research he conducts during the process of poetic composition, yet this process is seldom the focus of scholarly attention.<sup>33</sup> Examining the composition process of *Mercian Hymns* more thoroughly reveals an organic process, whereby the material environment is taken into the poet's mind (through his extensive research), and from this grows the poetry of *Mercian Hymns*, the product of that interaction between material environment and poetic imagination. This resonates with Benjamin's ideas of storytelling, but shows a slightly different process from that of Armitage. Evidence provided by Hill's literary archive demonstrates that in the process of preparing material for *Mercian Hymns*, Hill combined historical research on the life and times of Offa with extensive research on the geographical region of Anglo-Saxon Mercia. His notecards demonstrate a wealth of bibliographical information on general aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture, as well as detailed references to topics such as Anglo-Saxon coins which share a direct connection to the figure of Offa.

The Offa of Hill's poetry, however, is not simply a poetic reconstruction formulated from research on this figure and his kingdom. Hill's research expands temporally beyond the boundaries of Anglo-Saxon England, Offa, and Mercia to engage with the environmental and cultural life of the West Midlands around the time in which *Mercian Hymns* was written, and historical events recent to both Hill's childhood and adult life. A diverse range of public figures associated with the Midlands, such as Enoch Powell and Edward Elgar, also populate Hill's notebooks. Magazine and newspaper cuttings discussing their lives and work,

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33 See Bode (1992: 316).

along with numerous pictures, merge with Hill's own self-scrutiny to provide inspiration for the Offa figure of *Mercian Hymns*. While, in a similar way to Armitage's engagement with *Gawain* and Middle English, Hill's *Mercian Hymns* do extensively draw on Anglo-Saxon language and culture and the geography of Anglo-Saxon England, the poems create a more dynamic interaction between the medieval and the modern than a term such as *translation* can truly convey. Rather than the Anglo-Saxon being reconfigured in a modern context, Hill creates a new environment, which is formed by this ongoing interaction between the past and the present.

The environment created in *Mercian Hymns* is both an ecological and literary construction. Hill's notecards demonstrate research into the flora of Worcestershire, through references to texts such as Amphlett and Rea's *The Botanical Life of Worcestershire*. Alongside work on botany, Hill's notebooks show simultaneous research on the ecology of Anglo-Saxon England and the shifting interactions between humans and the wider environment across time.<sup>34</sup> On one page of notebook 10<sup>35</sup> (containing draft material and notes towards *Mercian Hymns*) Hill quotes from Hawkes: 'by the C8th the Saxons [sic] had cut the rich kingdom of Mercia from land which had long been hidden under a dense covering of oak forest and tangled earth'. In the same passage, Hill also underlines the phrase 'they soon began an assault on the forest'. The image of the oak forest and tangled undergrowth appears several times throughout *Mercian Hymns*. The found objects of Offa's coins in 'XI' send the speaker back to the 'Crepitant oak forest'; the clearing of the oak forests is also echoed in the lines 'Gradually, during the years, deciduous velvet peeled from evergreen

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34 Hill draws specifically on the work of Hawkes (1951).

35 Leeds, Brotherton Library, Hill literary archive, notebook 10.

albums'. Hill plays with the physicality of the oak tree, drawing together the character of Offa, the oak forest ecology, and the culturally constructed localities of Anglo-Saxon Mercia and twentieth-century Worcestershire.

These interactions of place and ecology are particularly prominent in hymn 'X', which centres on Hill's construction of Offa's writing desk, 'its brown-oak inlaid with ebony'. The physical process of writing is brought to the fore through the materiality of the oak desk. Hill's notebooks also provide insights into the literary creation of this desk, which further tie it to the cross-temporal Midlands locality that Hill constructs in *Mercian Hymns*. Hill includes in his notebook a passage from William Reed's (1936) *Elgar as I knew him*, which describes in detail the desk at which Elgar would write his scores. The description of the desk and the items on it, when read alongside hymn 'X', show an obvious source of inspiration for the object of Offa's desk constructed in *Mercian Hymns*. Elgar's connections to Worcester (his birth place), and the Midlands more generally, demonstrate how the merging of physical objects, locality, and literary objects are layered into *Mercian Hymns*. Rather than lying on the surface of the poetic text as allusions for a reader to understand and acknowledge, these material objects are embedded within the creative writing and composition process. The passage from Reed included in Hill's notebook says of Elgar's desk that 'this was his environment'. The object of Elgar's desk surrounds him. It contains its own multi-layered 'ecology', linking the oak forests (from which its raw materials originated) with the contents of Elgar's room. The physical interaction between the objects in Elgar's room are reconstructed in Hill's poetry, producing a link between the material object and environment of Elgar's desk and the environment created in the literary text of *Mercian Hymns*. Such insights as these reveal how the poetics of Hill's *Mercian*

*Hymns* are constructed from a complex combination of language, people, place, and material objects. Hill includes a quoted passage from *The Illustrated London News*<sup>36</sup> which refers to the materials used to create musical instruments. It states ‘the names of the materials that go into construction or restoration of the instruments are themselves music to recite: rosewood, olive, ebony, padouk, satinwood, [illegible text], tulipwood inlaid with ivory.’ The phrase ‘inlaid with ivory’ may have provided inspiration for the description of Offa’s desk as ‘inlaid with ebony’; this establishes a further connection between raw materials, objects, and the poetic texts of *Mercian Hymns*.

The self-conscious exploration of objects and environments associated with the writing process (such as Offa’s desk) shares similarities with the scriptorium riddles of the Old English and Anglo-Latin riddle corpus. Hill is less interested, however, in the direct interaction between tools for writing and the process of writing, and instead collates and translates various different textual, visual, and material elements to create a new verbal environment. While the Anglo-Saxon riddles are preoccupied with the intimate interaction between human, tool, and raw materials, Hill is interested in using material objects to build his own literary environments. As noted above, Old English poetry is rarely concerned with the idea of locality, but for Hill this sense of place is essential to building a world in the lines of *Mercian Hymns*.

The influence of medieval language also plays some part in the way Hill constructs the world of *Mercian Hymns*. One of his draft notebooks quotes various different passages from Alison Uttley’s *How Little Grey Rabbit Got Her Tail Back* from her children’s series *Tales of Little Grey Rabbit*. One of the characters in Uttley’s work is Moldy Warp the mole. Moldy Warp has a

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36 Vol. 253, issue 1, issues 6727-6739.

significant influence on the poetry of *Mercian Hymns*, in a variety of ways which are not initially obvious. The etymology of the word *moldywarp* shows that it is cognate with Old High German *moltwerfo*, Icelandic *moldvarpa*, Danish *muldvarp*, and Old Swedish *moldvarp*.<sup>37</sup> It translates into Modern English literally as ‘earth-thrower’. It is interesting to note that although *moldwarp* has cognates with related Germanic languages, it is not attested anywhere in Old English. It does, however, occur later in Middle English, but then remains only as a dialect term mainly in Scotland, Northern England and the Midlands. While *moldwarp* does not, therefore, appear to share an immediate linguistic connection with Anglo-Saxon Mercia, it does share linguistic connections with the Midlands region. This is supported not only by the continuing existence of *moldywarp* as a dialectal term which is active in the Midlands, but the word also shares connections with this region through the literary figure of Uttley. Uttley was brought up and spent much of her life in rural Derbyshire. The character of Moldy Warp in her *Tales of Little Grey Rabbit* demonstrates not only the influence of the language of the locality in which she grew up, but also the influence of the rural ecology of Derbyshire.

Hill’s notebooks, however, suggest that the influence he draws from Uttley’s Moldy Warp are not only linguistic in form. The story of *Moldy Warp the Mole* tells of how Moldy Warp finds a piece of stone with a golden eye painted on it. This artefact triggers Moldy Warp’s curiosity and he sets out on a mission to find the remaining pieces of the picture. His adventure takes him to the home of Badger and he ends up discovering a hoard of treasure. The connections between Moldy Warp and the treasure are played out in *Mercian Hymns*, particularly in ‘Hymn XII’, which contains the line ‘they are scattered to

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<sup>37</sup> OED, s.v. *mouldwarp/moldwarp*.

your collations, moldywarp'. Hill's draft material demonstrates the literary influence of Uttley on his own poetry, drawing literary connections to childhood (a theme which dominates *Mercian Hymns*), the locality of the Midlands through its language, and flora and fauna which inspire Uttley's work and is constructed within its literary context. This resonates with Armitage's decision to keep the term *wodwo* within his version of *Gawain*; it potentially acts as a nod towards the literary figure of Ted Hughes who shared such strong connections with Armitage's own region.

It is not only literary figures who play a significant role in the construction of the world of Hill's *Mercian Hymns*, but his research and draft material demonstrate how other notable figures influence his writing, whereby people, environment, objects, and locality are connected in often surprising ways. The influence of Elgar and the connections between environment and object, originating from a description of his desk, are one example of these connections in action. Another particularly prominent example is Hill's extensive collection of research material relating to Enoch Powell. Like many of the other twentieth-century figures who appear in Hill's notebooks, Powell was born and raised in the Midlands (specifically Birmingham), later becoming MP for Wolverhampton South West in 1950. Several magazine and newspaper clippings presenting images of Powell and descriptions of his character are found throughout Hill's *Mercian Hymns* notebooks. These seem to reveal some connections between the materiality of coins and the human characteristics of both Powell and the constructed figure of Offa in Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. An article clipping by Peter Dunn entitled 'Portrait of Enoch Powell' can be found in Hill's research material. It provides the following description of Powell: 'he seemed, as always, neither elated nor distressed by what he had accomplished – a thin, frail man with that

big white face too large for its body, that bear-trap mouth and pale eyes'.<sup>38</sup> In the same notebook Hill begins to draft what will later become 'Hymn XIII' (the third poem in a trilogy of 'Offa's Coins' poems in *Mercian Hymns*). The draft suggests that inspiration may have been drawn from the description of Powell quoted from the clipping above.

Ancient and ageless the coiffured head. Magnified it comes up  
thick and jutting with curt pass-words, as though out of  
England's well; purged by its own; lustre, cushioned on a legend.  
Drop-scone of twenty grains; cold scald.

The final printed edition of this poem retains much of this description, but the phrasing differs slightly.

Trim the lamp; polish the lens; draw, one by one rare  
coins to the light. Ringed by its own lustre, the  
masterful head emerges, kempt and jutting, out of  
England's well [...]  
coiffured and ageless,  
portrays the self-possession of his possession,  
cushioned on a legend. (Hymn XIII)

The initial description of Powell contained in that magazine clipping provides not only inspiration for the appearance of Hill's Offa, but also depicts visual traits which Hill seems to connect to the material quality of Offa's coins. The emphasis

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<sup>38</sup> No source or date information provided in the notebook for this clipping.



on the prominence of the head being a significant feature of coins, and the paleness of the eyes connecting with the 'lustre' of the coin's metal surface. The sense of 'self possession' present in the face on Offa's coins also matches the description of Powell provided by Dunn. Hill's description of the coins also draws directly on archaeological evidence provided by the coins themselves. The head which is 'coiffured and ageless' refers to the distinctive hairstyle which often characterises portraits of Offa on his coins. Gannon (2003: 31-33) discusses the voluminous hairstyle often present on Offa's coins as consistent with iconography of King David. Gannon argues that evidence can be drawn from the writings of both Bede and Alcuin which supports the idea that parallels existed between Old Testament and contemporary ideals of kingship. These ideals were associated with the figure of King David, and it would therefore not be unreasonable to assume that Offa would wish to show himself as 'the embodiment of the ideal of David' (Gannon 2003: 32). While Offa's coins create a visual connection between iconography associated with the ideals of kingship and the figure of Offa himself, Hill enters into his own process of visual association between Offa and Powell. Human and material object merge in Hill's poetic description of the coins. Both figures share a connection to the specific place of what is now referred to as the West Midlands, but further than this, by drawing a connection between Offa and Powell, Hill pulls *Mercian Hymns* into dialogue with contemporary British politics.

While Powell's political career was complex and consisted of frequent changes of political allegiance and motivations, his nationalism and imperialism was apparent throughout. Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech of April 1968 on immigration proved his most controversial, and, as Wootten (2000: 3) observes, arguably the most controversial in British post-war political history. Powell's

speech was condemned by most politicians, but still received substantial support from a considerable portion of the public. The ‘rivers of blood’ speech passed comment on the idea of immigration which appeared to sympathize with racist prejudices. While Powell’s sympathizers argue that the emphasis on the reference to the ‘rivers of blood’, implies a violent agenda which was not necessarily intended, the speech clearly worked to heighten racial tensions in a way which stirred up the anxieties of those already holding deluded fears regarding immigration. Wootten (2000) provides a compelling argument for the impact of Powell’s speeches on Hill’s *Mercian Hymns*, and further evidence in support of this is certainly provided by the extensive clippings referring to both Powell and the aftermath of the ‘rivers of blood’ speech, which can be found in Hill’s *Mercian Hymns* draft notebooks. Powell’s ‘rivers of blood’ speech contained ‘a curious mix of anecdotes from his constituents, of questionable statistics, of populist assertion and of classical allusion’ (Wootten 2000: 3-4). In many ways this emphasis on classical allusion resembles the tone of Hill’s *Mercian Hymns*. The key connection between Powell’s speech and *Mercian Hymns* is the passage from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, (VI, l. 87) which appears in *Mercian Hymns* XVIII as ‘to watch the Tiber foaming out much blood’ and is referenced in Hill’s notes to *Mercian Hymns* (1971: n.p.) as ‘et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno’. It is alluded to in Powell’s (1968) speech in the following lines:

As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood’. That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon

us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed it has all but come. (Powell 1969: 219)

It is this part of Powell's speech which forms a nationalistic connection between English people and place, invoking a sense of England under threat, which lies in the phrases 'coming upon us *here* [my emphasis]' and 'Indeed it has all but come'. Powell's concerns over immigration, therefore, manifest themselves in an association between the physical land or place of England and its inhabitants. This aspect of Powell's nationalism is perhaps best explored through an analysis of his life outside of his political career.

Powell's aggressively nationalistic agenda was not limited to his political career, but also served as a substantial influence for his own poetry. Powell himself had a particular interest in both Classical and medieval literature and culture. This, however, was not limited to medieval England; Powell co-edited (along with Stephen J. Williams) a version of the Welsh Laws of Hywel Dda.<sup>39</sup> Powell himself had family connections to Wales, with both his parents being of Welsh descent (Shepherd 1996: 68). The fact that Hill's image of Offa appears, therefore, to share significant connections with the figure of Enoch Powell complicates the ideas at work in *Mercian Hymns* regarding nationalism and localism. The *Annales Cambriae* (Annals of Wales) provide brief documentation of Offa's campaigns in Wales, as well as those areas that we would not now define as Wales but were in Powys at the time. References to these activities are also made in Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Offa's campaigns in this region and the history of Wales during this time, however, are notoriously complicated and knowledge on this subject is neither

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<sup>39</sup> Powell and Williams (1942).

detailed nor conclusive.<sup>40</sup> Powell's connections with both England and Wales, and his interest in early English literature and history, make him a particularly interesting influence for the Offa of *Mercian Hymns*. Reading Hill's poetry knowing that the figure of Powell was an influence in its construction grants insights into the construction of locality and environment.

Powell's interest in medieval history and literature had a significant influence on his own poetry. Powell drew a sense of nationalism from mapping what he saw as an unbroken line between himself and those who had lived in England centuries before him. Nairn (1981: 247) observes that Powell's desire was to redefine national identity in terms 'appropriate to the end of empire.' Poem XXIV of Powell's collection *Dancer's End* states:

And I imagined they were ghosts  
Of the old English, who by tower and spire,  
Wherever priest and sexton's spade  
In church or graveyard round about the shire  
Their unremembered bones had laid,  
Now in the warm still night arising, filled  
The broad air with their company,  
And hovering in the fields that they once tilled,  
Brooded on England's destiny.

The poem connects national identity with the earth and the interaction of previous people with that earth. Powell's poem connects people historically to the earth through both their working of the soil in the growing of food, but also in

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<sup>40</sup> See Charles-Edwards (2001: 89).

the act of death and burial. A cyclical connection is established. The earth is provider of sustenance and production, but there is also the sense that bodies return to the ground in death. The poem, therefore, establishes and emphasises the link between people and this land through the idea that people are grown from this land and return into it upon their death. This image bears a striking and troubling connection to that of the 'blood and soil' (*Blut und Boden*) ideology which became associated with Nazism. Connections have previously been made between the philosophies of Heidegger and the blood and soil ideology,<sup>41</sup> exposing a problematic connection between this form of environmentalism and Nazism. Bramwell (1985: 54) summarises the 'blood and soil' ideology as 'a link between those who held and farmed the land and those whose generations of sweat and tears had made the soil part of their being, and their being integral to the soil.'<sup>42</sup> Both Rigby (2004a: 432) and Garrard (2010: 259) acknowledge that, while Heidegger's philosophies drew on a connection between earth and dwelling, he did not subscribe to the association with 'blood', with which the Nazi regime was 'incomparably more obsessed' (Garrard 2010: 259). At the same time, Garrard (2010: 259) indicates that there is a consistent and 'guilty chain of association between Nazism, Heidegger, and ecology' and one that is 'brittle at every link'.<sup>43</sup>

To a certain extent the associations which Powell draws between blood and soil are far more extensive than those of Heidegger, and Powell develops this idea in support of his own nationalistic ideology. Alongside his poetry, Powell's political speeches also drew on the idea of the 'old English'. In his speech to the

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41 See Garrard (2010: 251-52).

42 Garrard (2010: 256).

43 See Chapters One and Two for further critique of Heidegger's place in ecocritical discourse.

Royal Society of St. George he states:

Thus, our generation is like one which comes home again from years of distant wandering. We discover affinities with earlier generations of English, who feel no country but this to be their own ... We find ourselves once more akin to the old English ... from brass and stone, from line and effigy their eyes look out at us, and we gaze into them, as if we would win the answer from their inscrutable silence.<sup>44</sup>

The specific influence of this speech on *Mercian Hymns* is evidenced in Hill's draft notebooks. In one of the *Mercian Hymns* notebooks Hill has pasted an article printed in *The Times* newspaper in 1969 which refers to Powell's speech. The article notes

And worse still, immigration eats at the heart of the new myth which Mr Powell puts forward to captivate the 'corporate imagination' of the British people. For, 'like the sacred olive tree amid the blackened ruins of athens [sic], there still flourishes among us the unity, homegenity and continuity of English life. These things descend lineally to us from the Englishmen of the Middle Ages: "from brass and stone, from line and effigy, their eyes look out at us, and we gaze into them, as if we would win the answer from their unscrutable silence"'.<sup>44</sup>

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44 For a discussion of both this passage and Powell's poem XXIV from *Dancer's End*, see Nairn (1981: 248).

This evidence proves that connections can be drawn between Powell's rhetoric and the coin poems of *Mercian Hymns*. The line from 'Hymn XI' which describes the coins in the ground as 'swathed bodies in the long ditch; one eye upstaring' bears uncanny resemblance to the concluding lines from the extract of Powell's speech quoted above. The material substance of the ground in Hill's poem, therefore, becomes the site of tension between the local, national and, perhaps more distantly, the idea of empire; this tension is also embodied in the material objects of Offa's coins.

In 'Hymn XIII' the coins are dug up from the ground, which the poem presents as 'England's well'. It is interesting to note, however, that Offa's coins themselves echo Roman, Byzantine and Merovingian prototypes (Gannon 2003: viii) and, therefore, complicates the idea of a hoard of these coins being associated directly with the ground as a 'well' of 'Englishness'. In this poem, Hill constructs the ground in terms of its national identity; the earth becomes synonymous with the cultural construction of the land of England. This association of the earth with the national contrasts with the way in which earth is presented in the previous two poems concerning Offa's coins (Hymns XI and XII). All three of these poems depict a similar scenario of the finding of Offa's coins in the ground. Both of these previous poems, however, explore the material qualities of the earth, whereby it is placed in the context of a more specific and local region. 'Hymn XI' traces the history of the location in which the coins are found.

Seasons touched and retouched  
the soil.

Heathland, new-made watermeadow. Charlock, marsh-  
 marigold. Crepitant oak forest where the boar  
 furrowed black mould, his snout intimate with  
 worms and leaves. (ll. 11-16)

The poem explores the changing ecology of that specific place, and emphasises this sense of locality through the use of 'intimate', which conveys not only the interaction between the boar and the ground, but also intimacy of the focus on this specific location. 'Hymn XII' is concerned with the subterranean (it is here we encounter the character of moldywarp). It explores the ecology below the surface of the ground, further emphasising the materiality of this location.

Their spades grafted through the variably-resistant  
 soil. They clove to the hoard. They ransacked epiphanies,  
 vertebrae of the chimera, armour of wild  
 bees' larvae. They struck the fire-dragon's  
 faceted skin. (ll. 1-5)

This passage also draws on the mythological, further connecting creativity and the material while also connecting with the language of Old English through the use of poetic compound nouns such as 'fire-dragon'. 'Hymn XIII' differs from the previous two poems through its focus on the cultural construction of land and nation. The poem describes not only the appearance of Offa's face as it is found on the coin, but also the inscription which accompanies this image '*Rex Totius Anglorum Patriae*' (King of All of the Whole Country of the English).



Through this sub-group of the coin poems, Hill stresses the tensions between material and cultural notions of environment, geography, and place. Hill's poetry emphasises the multifaceted nature of the ground and the varying ways in which it may be conceived in both ecological and cultural terms as discussed in Chapter Three and developed in this chapter in terms of its connections to a political discourse.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has pushed further the interaction between poetry and the ground as explored in Chapter Three, to think specifically about the way in which the literary ecologies through which that interaction between earth and language are constructed can also be developed into ecologies of specific places, or perhaps more accurately, literary geographies. I have argued that the network of actants which make up the ground can be appropriated for political and nationalist agendas. This demonstrates further the implausibility of a Nature/culture divide; literary geographies merge the cultural and the supposed 'natural' in their construction of place and the politics which accompany these ideas.

Hill's notebooks demonstrates extensive research on Mercia or the modern day West Midlands, but this emphasis on locality is also complicated by an underlying connection between both the figure of Offa and nationalism. As is the case in Armitage's *Gawain*, localism does not exist by itself in *Mercian Hymns*, but is continually in a dynamic dialogue with the national and the global. This dialogue is forged by the connection between poetic creativity and the material. Armitage is preoccupied with the idea of story telling and of the narrative voice. It is through the voice of the narrator that the material aspects of his version of *Gawain* are appropriated into his Pennine locality.

Key to understanding the work of both Armitage and Hill is engaging with the processes at work in their methods of composition. This chapter has explored the ways in which both poets engage with objects in their own physical surroundings in order to build specific literary geographies. In the formation of these literary geographies the poems construct ecologies which are also associated with a specific place. Like the concept of bioregions, literary geographies describe the interaction between human and nonhuman actants specific to a certain place or region. They blur the traditional conceptual boundaries of human culture and nature to make us think in terms of how we encounter other objects and how we conceptualise these encounters when we think about place. The composition of both Armitage and Hill demonstrate marked differences in how they construct the literary geographies of their work. For Armitage it is the sounds of language which play a key role in the interaction between the material world and the intellectual creativity of his poetry. For Hill, it is the materiality of objects themselves which is key to this interplay between poetry and physical environment. Both, however, create a strong sense of place within their poetry. The places or geographies that they create are neither based solely on interactions which take place in the physical environment, nor are they based entirely on imaginative creativity, but instead they create *new* geographies, which help us to think about how the past exists in our material present, and by understanding this we might think about the future.

Key to this chapter is the political power of literary ecologies (interactions between things) and geographies (these interactions as conceptualised as a specific place or bioregion) in both Armitage's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. In reference to these two texts the politics at work is not necessarily one of environmentalism, but rather nationalism and its complex

relatives, localism and imperialism. This chapter has explored how literary ecologies (and, by extension, literary geographies) can be used to construct or deconstruct nationhood and ideas of nationalism. Hill's notebooks provide insight into his interest in Powell that may otherwise not be evident. While Hill's politics are difficult to identify and cannot and should not be searched for in his poetry, his preoccupation with Powell becomes uneasy when it is entwined with the images of soil and nationalism which *Mercian Hymns* portrays. It is difficult to distinguish in *Mercian Hymns* whether Hill draws on Powell in order to critique his politics or in subtle support of Powell's views. These connections raise spectres of Nazism which demonstrate how literary ecologies, when worked into the form of literary geographies, can not only complicate and interrogate the idea of nationalism but also co-opt soil into politics. Hill himself makes a link between poetry, soil, and his place of birth:

It is worthy of notice, one feels, that the so-called 'Oxford Poet' is living away from the university for at least six months of the year. So the boy born and brought up in Worcestershire or Yorkshire is still to all intents a local boy. He does not, unless he is very unfortunate, lose touch with his home ground. His roots still ache for their soil. And the poem he writes or publishes in Oxford may well have been conceived during a ramble over the Lickey Hills or round by Bewdley and the Severn.<sup>45</sup>

This comment draws seemingly on a sense of localism rather than nationalism,

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45 Geoffrey Hill for *The London Magazine*, May 1954. See Milne (1998: 116) for discussion of these comments.

but it conveys the same connections between soil and cultural identity as can be seen in the poetry and speeches of Powell and which echoes the problematic links between Heidegger and Nazism.

While Armitage's *Gawain* consciously engages with ideas of nationalism as well as localism and imperialism, this seems less direct and abrupt than Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. However, while on the surface Armitage appears to adopt an almost benign promotion of his own sense of localism, his work is just as politically potent. His attempts to pull Gawain 'back' towards his own Pennine locality, and his method of achieving this through the construction of a literary ecology formed from the language of this region offers more than just a link between language and place. It demonstrates the potential for literary ecologies to carry significant political weight. In this case, Armitage actively attempts to colonise the literary canon for his own Northern locality. This poses a challenge to homogenised notions of England as an image of the rural South.

Thacker's claim that 'to think geographically about literary and cultural texts means to understand them in material locations, locations that can and should be examined historically and with an awareness of how diverse spaces can reflect, produce or resist forms of power' (2005: 60) is valid. While Armitage's *Gawain* and Hill's *Mercian Hymns* present in some ways very different discussions and invocation of power, reading these texts alongside one another emphasises the political potential of literary ecologies when expanded to think more broadly about the political implications of place.

The next chapter explores further the interactions between the sound and shape of poetry and objects of the physical environment. It continues to think about the interaction between past, present, and future and pushes the reading of literary ecologies to think beyond poetry on the page.

## Chapter Five

### Land and Water

The previous chapters have engaged the study of objects with those of more traditional ecocritical approaches to environment, bringing the subtle interactions between actants, both human and nonhuman, to the fore. The idea of crafting, the technology of writing, and the position of objects (both human-crafted and 'natural') in the construction of environments has been discussed and explored in detail. The interaction between human beings and nonhumans across temporally distant texts has revealed how human beings create models of knowledge which affect the way that they exist alongside, and interact with, other entities. Poetry is a key way in which these models of knowledge are expressed and articulated. Key to these models of knowledge are the concepts of environment, place and time. The previous chapter explored the idea of literary geographies, considering the way in which poetry engages with the materiality of place to build and forge interactions between literary texts and physical places. This chapter opens up the ideas of literary ecologies and literary geographies further to think more widely about the ways in which poetry interacts with material objects, altering human interactions with nonhuman objects and exploring human models of knowledge surrounding ideas of place and time. The ability of poetry to converse across time allows for the contemplation of the idea that objects with which we interact often experience lifespans much greater than our own. As the previous chapters have explored, although time is an abstract object, its effects have a physical presence in the environment.

As this chapter turns to larger material actants (stone, the sea and water

more generally) it is appropriate to explore further the connections between temporal and physical space. Lees (2010: 113) notes that ‘poetry can speak to poetry, of course, across the gulfs of periodization and specialization’, and poetry can also provide an historical connection to the nonhuman actants with which we, as human beings, cohabit. The physical existence of these nonhuman actants can act, in some ways, as bridges across the temporal gap between medieval and modern. This chapter examines the widely discussed texts of the Old English elegies, specifically *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, alongside, and in active connection with, the recent Yorkshire *Stanza stones* project (completed in 2012). The *Stanza Stones* project involved the carving of a series of six poems (and apparently a seventh in a hidden location) by Simon Armitage, collectively entitled *In Memory of Water*, onto various stones around the Calderdale watershed of the Pennine region. The project was conducted in collaboration with Ilkley Literature Festival and, as part of the project, the festival produced a suggested trail which can be followed in order to visit each of the stones, as well as a series of suggested short walks for visiting the stones individually. The trail produced by Ilkley Literature Festival begins at Marsden (the birth place of Simon Armitage and location of the snow stone) and ends at Ilkley. Subsequently, an alternative route for visiting each of the stones has been compiled by Mick Melvin who wished to produce a suggested walk which ‘did not stick to recognised footpaths or to existing well-known walking trails’ and that, crucially, ‘considering the walk was motivated by literature, it should visit the places that inspired some of the areas finest writers, Haworth and Mytholmroyd’.<sup>1</sup> Melvin’s walk emphasises the literary history of the area, passing

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1 See <<http://www.stanzastones.co.uk>>. For discussion of Armitage’s literary connections with Ted Hughes see pp. 217 and 223-24.

by the places where writers such as the Bröntes, Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes once lived.

While the *Stanza Stones* project does not actively draw inspiration or influence from early medieval poetry in the same way as the work of Heaney, Hill, and Bunting discussed in Chapter Three, the physical merging of poetry and the material creates a literary ecology which in many, perhaps unexpected, ways echoes and speaks to that of the Old English elegy texts. The way in which people experience the passing of time in the physical environment can be conveyed through the aesthetics of poetic conventions which speak across time. Elizabeth Tyler (2006: 172) observes:

the stability of poetic convention amidst the movement of history brings us back to the aesthetics of the familiar, which can both assimilate the new and allow the old to change, because it rests on a two-way relationship between language and idea: dynamic poetry is created in the space between words (including poetic conventions) and ideas.

This thesis has explored this ‘two-way relationship’ between language and ideas, this is embodied in the concept of the *wordbord* (discussed in Chapter Three) as both the idea that language is stored inside the breast and as a kenning for the mind. I have pushed the notion of this ‘two-way relationship’ further by also considering the impact that material objects have on this relationship and its expression in the form of poetry. This chapter takes this a step further, to consider not only how poetry is created in the space between ‘words and ideas’ but how poetry is created from, in, with, and between ideas and material objects.

Understanding this process provides a different view of how Old English poetic texts engage with the physical environment, one which, in many ways, speaks to some poetry composed today.

### **Human and Nonhuman in the Old English Elegies**

The Old English elegies combine a focus on human thought and emotion with detailed and complex constructions of the physical world. Previous work on the elegies epitomises the trends in discussion of environment more generally in medieval literary studies. Until fairly recently, work has tended to focus on the symbolic and cosmological aspects of these texts, and as a result has overlooked their intriguingly detailed constructions of the physical and material aspects of the environments that they create. Matt Low's (2009) essay on ecopoetics in the elegies, however, marks a shifting perspective in the analysis of environment in this part of the Old English poetic corpus. Low observes a stark contrast between the nostalgic view of 'the natural world' constructed in Renaissance and later elegiac poetry, and that of the Old English elegies. Low makes a strong argument that the Old English elegies contain the characteristics which define what has come to be known as 'ecopoetry', in particular the presentation of the natural world as an 'independent' agent. At the same time, he chooses not to challenge the Nature/culture dualism which is deeply embedded in Old English literary studies, whereby nonhuman agency is often homogenised to that of a supposed 'natural world' which, itself, is seen in conflict and tension with human culture. While Low (2009) argues that this 'natural world' supposedly constructed in the elegies has an agency of its own, his analysis is still preoccupied with the divide between the concepts of *Nature* and *culture*. This chapter, and this thesis more broadly, acknowledges the strong arguments that



Anglo-Saxon worldviews existed with the conceptual dualism between what we may refer to as 'Nature' and 'culture'. At the same time an acknowledgement of the ways in which Old English poetry constructs more intricate and subtle interaction between human and nonhuman entities, which offer a different view of agency to that of the human community/natural world conceptualisations, is long overdue. This chapter, and this thesis as a whole, explores these interactions and seeks to offer readings which challenge, converse with, and supplement those built on traditional ideas of Anglo-Saxon worldviews.

A variety of ecosystems are present across the Old English poetic texts collectively referred to as the elegies. While the material aspects of Old English poetry may be prominent in texts such as the riddles, it is easy to bypass the elegies, perhaps due to their different narrative style and voice. This is also precipitated by the anachronistic imposition of the term 'elegies' on these texts. It is the scholarly tradition to group such texts as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Ruin*, *The Wife's Lament*, *The Husband's Message*, and *Wulf and Eadwacer* together under the title of the Old English 'elegies'; a term which was not introduced into English until the sixteenth century. Both as a collective and individually, these texts have been the subject of substantial scholarly attention. The form of this attention has been broad, encompassing, but not restricted to, structure, manuscript context, themes of time and memory, the presentation of Christian doctrine, and gender studies.<sup>2</sup> Stanley Greenfield (1989: 93) suggests that the appeal of the Old English elegies is their treatment of universal relationships, specifically those between 'man and woman' and 'man and time'. I

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2 For a substantial and broad-scope collection of work on the elegies see Green (1983). For a comprehensive bibliography of Old English elegy scholarship up to the early nineties see Klinck (1992: 307-76).

would also add to these the relationships of an individual to a community and to God.<sup>3</sup> Also crucial to the texts is the interaction between human and nonhuman entities and phenomena. Old English elegiac poems construct complex interactions between air, land, and sea, and play with how these erect and manipulate human conceptualisations of boundaries and borders.

The elegies have been seen as a source for Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards the environment at least as far back as the work of Hanscom (1905). More recently, the work of Neville (1999) provides useful insights into the relationship between human and nonhuman in the elegies, with particular reference to *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Wife's Lament*. Neville (1999: 48-49) suggests that previous work on 'the natural world' in the elegies (particularly *The Wanderer*) has tended to interpret the stormy weather and binding grasp of the earth as pathetic fallacy.<sup>4</sup> In response, Neville argues that she is less inclined to agree with this interpretation, as the use of pathetic fallacy would indicate 'the natural world' as being in sympathy with the human speaker. Neville's own interpretation argues instead that this is a further instance of 'the natural world' acting in an 'actively hostile' way towards human beings (Neville 1999: 49). While this interpretation is interesting in its attribution of agency to the environment as a whole, it also has the effect of homogenising the agency of all nonhuman entities into a single collective action. This has the potential to overshadow key moments in these texts where it is the interaction between different individual entities — human and/or nonhuman, animate and/or inanimate — on which meaning hinges. Work by Wickham-Crowley (2006), Battles (1994) and further work taking place within the field of Anglo-Saxon

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3 See also Green (1983); Desmond (1990); Magennis (2007).

4 See Cook (1996:130). Neville draws particular attention to lines 101-15 of *The Wanderer*.

landscape studies has considered the properties of individual aspects of the environment, for example the land and the sea in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, but these elements are rarely considered in relation to wider discussions of environments.<sup>5</sup>

The instruction to ‘follow the actors’, proclaimed by Latour (2005: 12) in his outline of ANT provides an alternative approach from which to address environments within the elegies (and more widely), and thus begin to free these entities from the restrictive collective of ‘the natural world’. When scrutinised more closely, the concept of ‘the natural world’ appears to exist more as a construct of scholarship than a true theme of the poetry itself. The idea of ‘nature’ or ‘the natural world’ as it is imposed on these texts closely resembles that of the mysterious notion of ‘social force’, a concept which Latour (2005: 4) resists in *Reassembling the Social*, in favour of attributing agency, more equally, to individually identifiable actants within a network. Far from depicting a two-sided battle between the social force of humans and the natural world, the Old English elegy texts contemplate the complex and constantly shifting interactions between both human and nonhuman actants. The poems subtly guide us through these interactions, and the environments in these texts are built step by step from these actants. In order to properly identify these actants and the agency which they possess I follow Latour’s (2005: 17) advice and move slowly and carefully in terms of analysis.<sup>6</sup>

Old English poetic constructions of environment centre on the idea of

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5 See Siewers (2009: 6). For recent and important work in field of Anglo-Saxon landscape studies see Hooke (1998); Michelet (2006); Howe and Wolfe (2002); Hines, Lane, and Redknap (2004). For important work on ecology in Anglo-Saxon texts see Sorrell (1994).

6 On the process of ‘slowing down’ analysis or, as Latour puts it, conducting ‘*slowcology*’, see Duckert (2012: 273–80).

activity and physical interaction. The elegies in particular construct physical environments from the constant interactions between actants working as part of networks. Even when the poems are preoccupied with the notion of restriction, particularly in the form of the constricting effects of cold weather, these occurrences draw intensely on the physical attributes of things and their interactions with other objects. Environments, therefore, are created from these webs of interactions and conversations. Work in the field of Old English literary studies has struggled, to some extent, to fully engage with these complex interactions. Creating a dialogue between these Old English texts and the work of poets of our own time who openly and explicitly engage with material objects and environments in their poetry can help to open up the elegies to readings which acknowledge the interactions between individual actants, while avoiding mapping anachronistic ideas onto these historically distant texts. This dialogue between Old English and twentieth/twenty-first-century poetry enables a reconsideration of how we understand the interaction between the creativity of the human mind and material environments today. Exploring the way through which these two concepts interact is important to developing an understanding of the complex nature of being in and with the world in terms of both human and nonhuman entities, and can open up a discourse for building more sustainable ways of interacting with objects in our own lives.

### **Movement and Stasis**

The conception of environment within the Old English elegies is often discussed in terms of both physical and mental space (Cook 1996: 128). In a discussion of the human conceptualisation of 'space', Michelet (2006: 10) notes that frontiers are necessary for our comprehension of space as 'they allow us to objectify, to cut

out a given expanse in an otherwise unbroken continuum'. Although the construction of boundaries and borders may be necessary in terms of human conceptions of space, it is often the case that human conceptual boundaries begin to take precedence over more ecological analyses within scholarship on Old English poetry.<sup>7</sup> Boundaries and borders have a significant presence within the elegies, both geographically and psychologically.<sup>8</sup> While cosmological motifs such as the concept of exile and the notion of the hall play their part in Old English elegiac poetry, the physical boundaries which convey these themes have a strong presence within the texts, and one which goes beyond simply a symbolic function. In particular the interaction between land and water plays a key role in the conceptualisation of environment and place within the Old English elegy texts. Ingold (1993) argues against the use of the term 'space' in the context of the physical world, arguing instead for his conception of the term 'landscape'. Ingold's notion of 'landscape' does not refer to the material world as a 'picture in the imagination' (Ingold 1993: 154), but instead refers to 'the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them' (1993: 156). Ingold acknowledges the potential to construct boundaries in the landscapes, but stresses that while such boundaries may be constructed from 'natural features such as the course of a river or an escarpment, or with build structures such as walls or fences' it is important to understand that these boundaries do not 'segment the landscape' because the features from which they are identified are themselves an 'integral part' of that

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7 While work by Neville (1999) and Magennis (1996) defines these relationships as complex and varied, they are usually presented as oppositional and often negative.

8 For work on boundaries and borders within Old English poetry see Lionarons (1994); Michelet (2006: 166-69); Wickham-Crowley (2006).

landscape (1993: 156). The Old English elegies appear to convey the notion of boundaries and borders being themselves an integral part of the environments (or landscapes in Ingold's terminology) which they construct and with which they engage. These boundaries and borders are formed from the interaction between the human mind and the physical actants constituting the environments constructed by these texts. They are perhaps more complex to understand than walls and fences, but in this way, they more effectively demonstrate the notion of environment as 'the world as it is known to those who dwell therein' and whose networks of interaction constitute its existence.

Ingold's notion of landscape overlaps with some of the key aspects of Actor-Network Theory. ANT stresses the importance of movement and flow of interactions between actants in a given network (Latour 2005: 132); the founders of ANT have referred to its nature as 'fluid materialism', whereby movement and fluidity are emphasised as the means by which networks are constructed (Miettinen 1999: 176). The contrast between movement and stasis is a key factor in the construction of environments within the elegies. Previous work has discussed the various images of binding, particularly in reference to *The Wanderer*.<sup>9</sup> The wanderer, as a figure who is cut off from his community, sets to the sea seemingly to find a new lord and a place in which to live. In the opening section of the poem, the wanderer declares that there is no-one living with whom he dares to share his heart's thoughts. He notes that it a noble thing to 'fæste bind' (closely bind) (l.13b) the coffers of his heart. He links back, here, to the idea of emotions being hoarded in the breast and to the containment of the soul within the chest cavity.<sup>10</sup> As was explored further in Chapter Three,

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9 See Clark and Wasserman (1979).

10 On this point see also Chapter Three (pp. 138-40). All quotations from Old English texts

concepts of hoarding and enclosing in Old English poetry are complex and varied. The idea of binding the emotions in the breast connects to the wider theme of enclosure which is present throughout the Old English poetic corpus. Previous discussions of the contrasts between the internal and external in Old English poetry have often tended to suggest that enclosures acted as a fixed boundary between human community and the external 'natural world'. Neville (1999: 57) suggests that human society in Old English poetry is deliberately and purposefully separated from 'that which surrounds it'. This sense of separation is certainly evident in the poetry and is emphasised particularly by the concept of exile as an opposite to communal dwelling. However, the motif of enclosure in Old English poetry is about more than just separation and protection. The concepts of movement and stasis are also vital to understanding the interaction between enclosure and the physical world as constructed in many Old English poetic texts. The elegies demonstrate an intertwining of the themes of enclosure and movement. In some contexts, the world outside of enclosure is characterised by a sense of movement, while in other contexts the physical world is gripped in stasis.

The theme of exile is particularly significant to the idea of a continuous shifting between movement/stasis and enclosure/exposure, which plays a key role in the Old English elegies, particularly *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. The wanderer states that he must 'wadan wræclastas' (walk in exile's footprints).<sup>11</sup> *Wræclast* is often translated as 'path of exile', particularly in the context of these

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are from Klinck (1992), unless otherwise stated.

11 All Old English quotations from *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are from Klinck (1992).

Translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

lines of *The Wanderer*.<sup>12</sup> *Wræclast*, however, is a compound of *wræc* (exile) and *last* whose denotations include ‘sole of foot, footprint, track, trace’ (Clark Hall 1984). When read in this light, the movement into and within exile is conceptualised by markings left by the feet on the ground.<sup>13</sup> Exile as a concept, therefore, consists of the merging between the human body and the physical environment. While the notion of exile is conceptualised as a set of footprints, there is no sense of an end destination, or at least not one of this world. Instead, the journey of the wanderer in exile is characterised by his constant and ongoing interactions with other objects, characterised through the wandering in the footsteps of exile. The interaction between human and nonhuman in the conceptualisation of exile is also conveyed by the opening lines of the poem which describe the wanderer as stirring the cold sea with his own hands. The lines ‘longe sceolde / hreran mid hondum | hrimcealde sæ’ (long must he stir with his hands the frost cold sea) (ll. 3b-4) can be read as a metaphor for rowing a boat across the sea, but the specific physical contact between the hands and the water forge a direct connection between the sea and the human figure.<sup>14</sup>

Through this act of movement and propulsion the sea and the wanderer connect in a ‘meshwork’ of interactions.<sup>15</sup> Ingold (2011: 63-94) coins the term ‘meshwork’ as an alternative to the idea of ‘networks’ proposed by the related field of ANT.<sup>16</sup>

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12 See, for example, Dunning and Bliss (1969: 140).

13 See Greenfield (1955: 203-4) for an analysis of the formulaic expression of movement in or into exile in Old English poetry.

14 On this point see Joy (2013).

15 See Joy (2013).

16 For further discussion of the notion of ‘a meshwork’ see Morton (2010b: 29). It is also important to note that while Latour uses the term *network*, he is not entirely comfortable with it suggesting that ‘there is no good word anyway’, but that something is needed to



A meshwork perspective views the world as an infinite number of lines of trajectories which, unlike the network model of ANT, do not interact at fixed points but rather as lines or pathways (Ingold 2011: 63). Thinking of interaction in this way highlights the significance of movement. In her manifesto for the future of being and interacting with other objects, Joy (2012: 171) implores that we not only pay more attention to the other entities around us, but that we actively engage in positive interactions with and amongst them. She suggests that we should make space 'for the arrival of strangers whose trajectories are unmappable in advance' (Joy 2012: 63). In many ways the wanderer takes up this position of a stranger on an 'unmappable trajectory'. His path unfolds *with* him as he traverses not only the sea, but life as a whole. The fluidity of the sea allows the poem to explore the concept of the world existing in a constant state of movement and flux, and this movement and flux is presented as the quality which characterises life itself.

*The Wanderer* (and *The Seafarer* to a certain extent) contrasts life on the sea with that of hall dwelling. The significance of the hall as a symbolic structure of community is a well established concept in Old English literary studies, with the seminal work provided by Hume (1974).<sup>17</sup> Hume summarises the idea-complex of the hall as 'a circle of light and peace enclosed by darkness, discomfort and danger' (64). The ritualistic nature of behaviour within the hall acts as a means of bestowing 'pattern and order' in contrast to the 'chaos' outside the confines of the structure (Hume 1974: 66). The hall is often cast as a dominant structure in both a poetic and literal sense. It stands as a significant

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'designate flows of translations' (2005: 131-32).

17 See also Magennis (1996: 82-103); Pollington (2003). Neville (1999) draws heavily on the concept of the hall as a protective structure separating humans from 'the natural world'.

presence in the landscape, as well as appearing as the ‘focus and centre of people’s communal being’ as presented in much Old English poetry (Magennis 1996: 35). The image of the hall can also act as a powerful symbol for the creative power of God.<sup>18</sup> Magennis (1996: 40) notes that the figure of the hall in Old English poetry merges with that of the city in Christian tradition, ‘Heaven itself is the city in which God’s people will find eternal community’.<sup>19</sup> In the final lines of *The Seafarer*, Howe (2004: 150) observes that the poet ‘uses alliteration to link the significant terms of *ham* “home”, *hyht* “joyful bliss”, and *heofon* “heaven”, which forms an ‘envelope pattern to contain the passage as a whole’:

Uton we hycgan    hwær *we*<sup>20</sup> ham agen  
ond þonne geþencan    hu we þider cumen,  
one we þonne eac tilien    þæt we to moten,  
in þa ecan    eadignesse  
þær is lif gelong    in lufan dryhtnes,

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18 Cf. Neville (1999: 67); Magennis (1996: 40-42).

19 Magennis lists his main source for this theme as Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*. The theme of the hall as a symbol of God’s creative power also occurs in Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica* II. xii, in the famous passage, whereby the king’s counsellor describes the life of men on earth in terms of a sparrow flying into a hall and back out again, into the chaos of the world outside. Neville (1999: 24-25) discusses this passage in relation to the idea of the hall as a place of ‘respite’ from the ‘forces of the natural world’ (25). This is also discussed by Magennis (1996: 129-32). See also Michelet (2006: 55-60) for further discussion of enclosures and boundaries with regard to the theme of Creation.

20 Ms. *se*.

hyht in heofonum. (ll. 117-22)<sup>21</sup>

(Let us consider where we may have our own home and then think how we might arrive there; let us also aspire to meet in that place of eternal blessedness where life is dependent on the love of the lord God, hope in heaven.)

Further to Howe's suggestion, the alliterative use of *ham*, *hyht*, and *heofon*, not only 'envelopes' the passage, but in doing so it also presents heaven in a very physical way, drawing on the tradition of heaven as hall. The alliteration of these words forms linguistic pillars which frame the passage, conveying the essence of a structured building surrounding the sentiment of heaven as a place of ultimate security and stability. While the heavenly hall can be interpreted as a symbol of Christian tradition, and associated with a sense of safety and security, the earthly form of the hall is neither an infallible nor an entirely stable construct.

This contrast between the heavenly and the earthly hall in *The Wanderer* and the *The Seafarer* is characterised by a sense of movement and stasis. *The Wanderer* marks a clear distinction between the relentless movement which defines the state of the world (see ll. 58-110) and the stillness of the final lines, where a wise man is described as sitting apart communing with himself, 'Swa cwæð snottor on mode; | gesæt him sundor æt rune' (this [the man] intelligent in mind sat apart, communing with himself).<sup>22</sup> The position of the man sitting apart suggests a physical distance between himself and the rest of the world as described in the previous lines. The verb 'gesæt' (sitting) also contrasts with the

21 For quotations from the Old English elegies see Klinck (1992). Subsequent quotations from the elegies will be referenced simply by line number.

22 See Bosworth and Toller (1972: s.v. *rune*).

relentless movement which defines the earthly world and is epitomised in the climax of the penultimate section of the poem in the lines:

her bið feoh læne,    her bið freond læne,  
 her bið mon læne,    her bið mæg læne. (ll. 108-9)

(Here life is fleeting, here friends are fleeting, here a person is  
 fleeting, here a kin-member is fleeting)

The repeated use of 'læne' (fleeting) emphasises the transience of an earthly world which is constantly moving towards chaos and decay. At the same time its relationship to *læn* (loan, borrowing, lease, grant) and the verb *lænan* (to lend) also hints at an existing point of stability, the source from which life is loaned. The stability which is embodied in the final section of the poem is entangled in this passage which seemingly conveys the lack of stability surrounding the human experience of life. The change in tone between lines 110 and 111, characterised by the shift between the movement of life towards decay and the clearly defined stillness of the wise man sitting apart, suggests a movement from an earthly world to that of heaven. This is further emphasised by the final line which, in reference to heaven, states 'þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð' (l. 115b) (there, for us all, stands that place of stability). The hall of heaven is defined as stable and still, qualities which are also desirable in the physical structure of a hall. The hall, as a symbol of society and community, is conceptualised as a physical structure of shelter from the constant movement of the world.

In this context, the ultimate hall enclosure is that of heaven, which exists

beyond the transience and flux of life in the physical world. Hume (1974: 66) argues that although its primary purpose is one of shelter and protection, the earthly hall never becomes 'a mere passive symbol of retreat'. This association between the hall and activity is crucial to its poetic construction. The hall as an earthly structure and symbol of community is constantly involved in the active processes of life and the productive process of dwelling. It cannot, therefore, maintain the stability and stillness of the ultimate hall structure of heaven. Hume (1974: 66) states that the hall as both a physical structure and a symbol of societal unity must always contend with other forces, both external and internal, the most feared of which she defines as 'strife'. Neville (1999: 56) agrees in part with the notion that internal forces can threaten the stability of hall life, but she argues that 'the natural world is more commonly represented as standing in opposition and contrast to human society'. Neville argues that it is the opposition between human society and the external world which is a constant threat to the order of the hall, and this destabilisation exists as a result of 'the natural world (. . .) threatening it from the outside', rather than it acting as a symbol of internal tensions (1999: 56). Neville goes on to state, however, that 'this apparent externality may also be deceptive [...] since the representation of the natural world as an external power may be a way of defining threats to society — a way of limiting and distancing them.' These threats to society seemed to be conveyed in the elegies by means of movement.

Thinking about these common motifs of enclosure and exposure in Old English poetry in terms of movement and stasis can help to re-situate the concept of the hall, not as a structure in opposition to a homogeneous 'natural world', but as an attempt to gather together a group of entities in the act of trying to impose a structure on the perpetual movement of life. This sense of

movement is about life, not about ‘the natural world’ versus human society. Lines 48-52 of *The Seafarer* depict this sense of the movement of life:

Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,  
 wongas wlitigað, woruld onetteð;  
 ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne,  
 sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð,  
 on flodwegas feor gewitað.

(The groves bear blossom, the cities grow fair, the fields brighten,  
 the world hurries on; all these urge the eager minded of spirit to  
 journey, that which has a mind to depart far on the floodways.)

Conveyed in this passage is life as on-going process of movement and interaction. The timescale invoked here is much more immediate than that of *The Wanderer*. *The Wanderer* thinks on a timescale where time has/will out run the emergence of the physical world. In both cases movement is crucial in conveying the processes of life and existence with/within the world. In the above passage movement is not contained to the fields and the groves, but leaks through into the cities and halls. While the hall may attempt to act as a protective construct against the movement of time, its walls (both symbolically and physically) are permeable, and are inevitably subject to the same forward motion of being.

This sense of permeability can be better understood when considered in the light of Ingold’s recent work, *Being Alive* (2011). Ingold explores the notion that earth and sky are not fixed strata, but rather merge together in the form of

weather. Ingold (2011: 121) suggests that to inhabit the world is to live *in* weather. He suggests that ‘the relation between land and weather does not cut across an impermeable interface between earth and sky but is rather one *between the binding and unbinding of the world*’. Ingold stresses that these ‘bindings’ are not ‘boundaries’. They do not, therefore, enclose parts of the world, but rather bring them together, or ‘gather’ them up in acts of inhabitation (Ingold 2011: 121). The structure of the hall, in this light, can be read as an *act* of binding, rather than a static place of enclosure. The hall, both symbolic and physical, binds together a group of human dwellers.<sup>23</sup> This sense of binding crucially fits with the use of the hall as a metaphor for Creation, which is conveyed in the image of the hall as roof, perhaps most strikingly through the image presented in *Cædmon’s Hymn* (l. 6). The elegies demonstrate, through the sense of loss at being unwillingly released from this binding, that the bind is tight, but it is also permeable. The elegies are abundant in references to binding (Old English *bindan*),<sup>24</sup> suggesting that it is a motif which should not be ignored or overshadowed by the notion of enclosure. Binding in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* is associated with the spirit or emotions (as discussed above), the effects of winter on the emotions, the connection between the spirit and the sea, and the effect of coldness on body parts and the ground. Each reference documents the gathering together of different entities in an act of interaction and connection. The hall itself binds in a similar way, in that it connects people together in an active process, but just as winter binds the ground with frost,

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23 An exception to this can be found in *The Wife’s Lament*, where the speaker describes her dwelling place as an ‘eorðsele’ (earthen cave) (l. 28). This particular term has been the source of much debate and discussion amongst scholars; see Neville (1999: 75, footnote 85); Anderson (1991: 76); Clemoes (2006: 167).

24 There are six occurrences of binding in *The Wanderer* alone.

which later melts and releases its grip, the binding of the hall is also unbound by the processes of time and life. Ingold (2011: 122) notes that ‘if life binds, then fire unbinds’. Rather than it gathering up ‘the medium with substances’, it releases a substance in a ‘volatile form’. Fire permeates bindings, such as that of the hall, undoing their ties through an act of unbinding rather than a gathering together. Fire interacts by getting between other interactions. It winds its way between the active connections which maintain both the physical structure of the hall and its symbolic sense of community. It is foretold in the opening of *Beowulf* that fire is the only force capable of destroying the mighty hall of Heorot.<sup>25</sup> Fire is associated with the strife of war and thus the greatest threat to the stability of the hall is conflict, which can manifest as either internal or external to the community living in and around that structure.<sup>26</sup> It is in this context that both the ‘idea complex’ (Hume 1974: 64) and the physical structure of the hall demonstrate their ‘leakiness’. Acknowledging these references to movement and connection which Old English poetic texts such as the elegies contain, suggests that these texts are drawing heavily on connections and interactions in the material world, in the construction of their symbolic explorations.

This sense of movement can be read further in both *The Seafarer* and *The Wife’s Lament* with repeated references to ‘yþa gewealac’ (rolling waves) and ‘sealtyþa gelac’ (tossing salt streams). The verb *lacan* (related noun ‘gelac’) is particularly significant in its ambiguity. It is generally associated with things being in motion, thus the verb *lacan* and its Old Norse cognate *leika* refer to the

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25 See ll. 81-85.

26 On this point see Magennis (1996: 75). Regarding this, Neville (1999: 74) directs her reader to Clemoes (2006: 22). Michelet (2006: 57) also touches on the idea of internal destruction.



movement of a boat on water, but are also found in reference to the flight of a bird rising and falling in the air, and the flickering or waving of a flame (Bosworth and Toller 1972: s.v. *lacan*).<sup>27</sup> While it is difficult to assign a precise translation to *lacan*, it is interesting that each of the contexts listed in Bosworth and Toller (1972: s.v. *lacan*) document its use in relation to the movement of an object on or in the elements of water, air, or fire. The movement in these contexts is fluid, repetitive, and often continuous. The physical qualities of the sea in the elegies allow for this sense of movement to be carried further. The physical movement of the sea loosens the binding which the wanderer has placed on his thoughts and emotions. In the opening section of *The Wanderer*, the speaker laments that he must take his heart and ‘feterum sælan’ (bind it in fetter) (l. 21b). Neville (1999: 112-13) interprets the wanderer’s binding of his emotions as a form of exercising control over his mind in a chaotic situation. This seems consistent with the notion that enclosure (of all varieties) is associated with stillness, or a slowing down of the constant flow of movement that is the physical world. Enclosures in Old English poetry, however, are leaky.<sup>28</sup> The thoughts and emotions of the wanderer are unable to stay contained within the fetters of his breast, but rather surge forth and join in the perpetual motion of the waves:

Cearo bið geniwad

þam þe sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe

ofer waþema gebind werigne sefan. (ll. 55b-57)

(Cares are renewed for he who must often send a weary spirit over

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27 *Lacan* and Old Norse *leika* can also denote play or dance (Bosworth and Toller 1972: s.v. *lacan*).

28 I borrow this term from Ingold (2011), see also Joy (2013).

the binding of waves.)

In this passage the act of binding switches from the heart to the waves. This seemingly oxymoronic statement — the notion of the rolling waves as ‘gebind’ (binding) — transforms the connotations of binding from that of restriction to interaction and connection.<sup>29</sup> This sense of connection is troubling to the wanderer as it reconnects his mind with the perpetual flux of life. This triggers a passage of lament for the passing of his companions, and a deep reflection on the gradual movement of the world into an apparent state of decay and disorder. Following this binding of the wanderer’s spirit with the waves, the language of the poem shifts into a passage characterised by repetition. The alliteration, which is a standard feature of Old English poetry, becomes all the more prominent in the subsequent lines. During lines 73-80 *w* is the alliterating phoneme in every other line:

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle    hu gæstlic bið  
 þonne ealle þisse worulde wela    weste stondeð,  
 swa nu missenlice    geond þisne middangeard  
 winde biwaune    weallas stondaþ,  
 hrime bihrorene.    Hryðge þa ederas;  
 woriað þa winsalo.    Waldend licgað  
 dreame bidrorene;    duguþ eal gecrong  
 wlonc bi wealle. (ll. 73-80a)

(The wise man must realise how spiritual it will be when all the

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<sup>29</sup> Joy (2013) conducts a similar reading of the lines ‘ond ic hean þonan /wod wintercearig ofer waþema gebind’ (ll. 23b-24 ) of *The Seafarer*.

wealth of this world stands waste, as now here and there,  
 throughout this middle enclosure, walls stand blasted by wind,  
 beaten by frost. The buildings crumble. The wine halls topple,  
 their rulers lie deprived of joys; the proud old troops all fell by  
 the wall.)

There is much debate surrounding how *gæstlic* should be translated in this passage. Dunning and Bliss suggest that while the usual meaning would be 'spiritual' context suggest that 'ghastly' is more appropriate here. I have opted for the translation of 'spiritual' as this seems more appropriate to the later wisdom that the speaker expresses in regards to the absence of material objects. In her discussion of the *w* alliteration in this passage, Cornell (1981: 294) observes that the words in which the sound appears are 'further joined by a similarity in connotative meaning', whereby 'all of them refer to a comitatus world', which she suggests is familiar and comforting to the speaker. While this passage does invoke elements and entities of the hall life of which the wanderer is no longer a part, it seems that the alliteration of the *w* phoneme does more than just symbolise this past sense of unity by way of a repeated sound. The specific use of the *w* phoneme connects this passage to the end of the previous section of the poem where the spirit of the speaker is sent out and binds with the waves. The use of the *w* alliteration in alternate lines creates a rolling rhythm which mimics that of the sea. The words of the wanderer are binding with the motion of the sea and following in the pathway of his spirit. The language of the breast board leaks out into the wider physical world and joins in its perpetual motion. Poetic language recreates the movement and physical qualities of the rolling waves invoked in the previous lines. It is the physical properties of the liquid sea with

which the poem connects and binds together words and material substance. The point is not to suggest that this binding of human body, poetry, soul, and sea is held up by the text as an ideal, but more that this divide between positivity and negativity is irrelevant. The poem explores what it is to be both *in* and *with* the world. The exploration of these ideas is facilitated by drawing on the material qualities of physical actants. Material ecosystems, therefore, play a key role in the construction of the text. While the sea may also carry symbolic and allegorical weight within the text, its materiality is at the fore of these poetic constructions. The poetic networks of the elegy texts are thus engaged with the network or, in the light of Ingold, *meshwork* connections and interactions of ecosystems that are present in the material world.

#### **Movement and Stasis in the Context of the *Stanza Stones***

Though its composition is temporally distant, the (2012) *Stanza Stones* project carries some striking similarities in its explorations of being in the material world to that of *The Wanderer*. The project consists of a specially commissioned series of poems by Simon Armitage, each based on a state of water: ‘Dew’, ‘Rain’, ‘Beck’, ‘Mist’, ‘Snow’ and ‘Puddle’. The poems are carved on stones throughout the Calderdale watershed and can be experienced through individual short walks or collectively as part of the *Stanza Stone* trail. This project incorporates the human creativity of poetry, language and the skill of carving, with the physical materials of stone and water, as well as the wider environment of the Yorkshire region. By its nature, the project is a self-conscious exploration of both poetry and the physical environment working as an assemblage. The format of the project as a trail invites readers, or participants, to experience poetry and the material environment in both a physical and intellectual manner. In this way, it

appears to differ greatly from the transmission and reader/listener experience of the Old English elegy texts. The interactions between human being, poetry, and physical environment that the project encourages, however, in many ways speak to those interactions which are constructed in the elegy texts. They also bear strong comparison to those of certain Anglo-Saxon inscribed objects such as the Franks Casket and Ruthwell Cross. The elegiac tone of the riddle inscribed on what is often referred to as the front of the Franks Casket describe the object (a whalebone) from which the casket was made. Like many of the Old English and Anglo-Latin riddles, the runic inscription does not only encourage the answer 'whalebone' but also evokes the presence of the whale itself. This object emerges from the assemblage of whale, bone, sea, poetry, human craftsmanship, to name only a few of its actants. James Paz (2012: 139-51) discusses the relationship between movement and experiencing/reading the casket. He observes that reading the casket as a 3D object, which can only really be experienced by physically moving around it, produces a different reading to those who treat the panels individually and statically. At the same time, the casket does not tell us how to move around it and how it should be interpreted, and therefore remains a riddle. Equally, the way in which we read and experience the Ruthwell cross emphasises not only the varied ways in which we might interact with the object, but how these interactions change across time. The movement of the cross inside, for instance, changes not only the physical positioning and context of the cross, but also directly affects our ability to read and interact with it. The cross itself experienced significant damage and was (badly) reconstructed during the nineteenth century and was moved inside to become part of the 'specially built, cannily economical and maddeningly inappropriate addition to Ruthwell Church' (Farrell and Karkov 1992: 36). Its new location, a sunken pit with what is almost

certainly its front side facing a wall rather than out into the church, possesses several challenges to interacting with the object and therefore changes our experience of reading its texts and images (Farrell and Karkov 1992: 36).<sup>30</sup>

While the *Stanza Stones* project takes the format of a trail, which directs the reader/participant on a journey of interaction and contemplation with/of water, in a similar way to the Anglo-Saxon inscribed objects of the Ruthwell Cross and Franks Casket it does not instruct the reader/participant on how they must interact with the stones. During my own experience of following the *Stanza Stones* trail I witnessed a variety of different responses. Sometimes, when a number of groups reached a stone at the same time, individuals would hover in the distance waiting to experience the stone individually; at other times, people would gather and read the poem together. Some people would stop to enjoy the objects of the environments surrounding the stones, have their lunch, take a picture, sketch, write, think. At other times people would pass by the stones which act as a waymarker for their everyday activities, dog walking, a daily run, access to farmland. Key to these interactions are the ideas of both movement and stasis.

The location of each of the stones forms part of the inspiration for the contents of the particular poem which is inscribed on that stone. The 'Mist' stone is located on Nab Hill on Oxenhope moor. The position of the stone relates to the subject of the poem 'Mist'. The elevated position of Nab Hill increases the likelihood of an encounter between a human reader, the poem stone, and mist in its material form. The final stanza of the poem seems to capture the essence of merging with the physical properties of water in a strikingly similar way to that of *The Wanderer*:

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30 For further work on the Ruthwell cross see (Orton, Wood and Lees 2007).

Given time  
 the edge of your being  
 will seep  
 into its fibreless fur;  
 you are lost, adrift  
 in hung water and blurred air,  
 but you are here. (ll. 20-26)

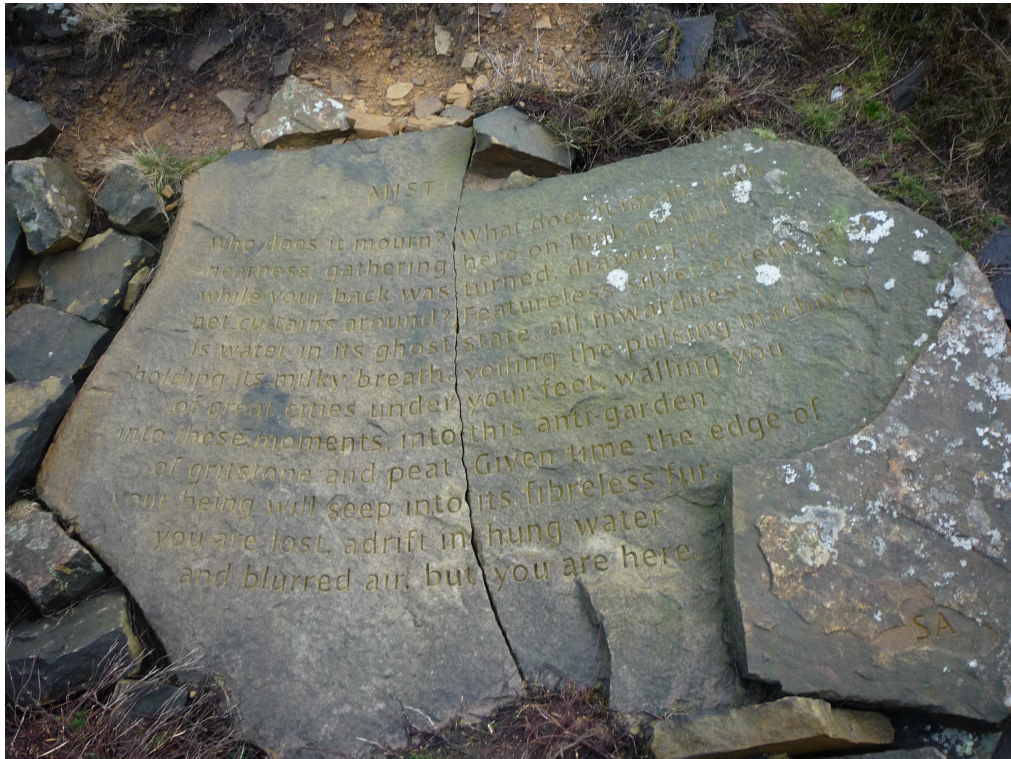
The final line 'but you are here' grounds the reader, emphasising existence and embodiment. While the reader may seep into the mist — seemingly 'lost' — this merging between droplets of water suspended in air and human form binds together these entities in their physical presence in that moment in time, space, and world. As in *The Wanderer*, the 'leakiness' of enclosure is emphasised. The poem describes 'the edge of your being' as seeping into the mist. This action is also met and equalled by that of the mist's 'creeping' which appears in the first stanza:

Who does it mourn?  
 What does it mean,  
 such nearness  
 gathering here  
 on high ground  
 while your back was turned,  
 drawing its net curtains around?  
 Featureless silver screen, mist

is water  
in its ghost state,  
all inwardness,  
holding its milky breath,  
veiling the pulsing machines  
of great cities  
under your feet,  
walling you  
into these moments  
into this anti-garden  
of gritstone and peat. (ll. 1-19)

The mist creeps around and the body seeps into it in a remarkably similar way to the merging of spirit and waves in *The Wanderer*. The stone itself plays a key role in this interaction. It is not only the material on which the poem is written which is important, but its physical qualities and location are also key to its participation in the experience as a whole. The stone, like the boats on which both the wanderer and the seafarer find themselves, is the object which mediates a specific moment of interaction between the water (sea or mist) and the human object. It is the act of rowing which forges a physical connection between the hands of the wanderer and the sea. The mist stone acts in a similar way. The stone brings the human participant into contact with the surrounding mist, both in terms of textual content and material phenomenon. It is an agent in bringing together the actants in this meshwork of human being, mist, stone, and poetry.





**Figure 3.** The 'Mist' Stone



**Figure 4.** The 'Mist' Stone and Surrounding Area of Nab Hill

The 'Mist' stone invokes the loneliness that water in its vaporised state can conjure in a person. As it draws closer it surrounds the human figure with its presence, obscuring from his/her view the trappings of human society, 'veiling the pulsing machines / of great cities'. This act of surrounding is conceptualised in the poem as an 'anti-garden'. This motif of enclosure or binding resonates with that of enclosure/binding in the elegies and elsewhere across the Old English poetic corpus. Rather than forming a surrounding of structure and community such as that for which the idea-complex of the hall stands in Old English poetry, the creeping mist veils the objects of human society from view and creates a disconcerting feeling of isolation. The 'anti-garden' of the 'Mist' stone poem speaks to the similar notion of the anti-hall motif in Old English poetry.

The concept of the anti-hall is constructed as an inversion of the symbolic and physical structure of the Anglo-Saxon hall as a centre of society and protection.<sup>31</sup> The anti-hall is often 'pictured as a negation of one or more normal hall characteristics' (Hume 1974: 68), or in some cases it appears as 'an internalization of the usual hall enemies' (68). Discussion of the concept of the anti-hall has been dominated by analysis of Grendel's mere and the dragon's *beorg* (barrow or mound) in *Beowulf*.<sup>32</sup> The underground dwelling place in *The Wife's Lament* is another structure which has been considered in association with the concept of the anti-hall.<sup>33</sup> The anti-halls presented in *Beowulf* are the dwelling places of creatures which pose an obvious physical threat to the in-dwellers of

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31 See Hume (1974: 68).

32 See Michelet (2006: 78-85).

33 See Hume (1974: 70-71); Battles (1994); Desmond (1990: 586-87).

human society. The cave in *The Wife's Lament*, however, is figured more with a sense of lost community and the image of an exiled individual, rather than an alternative dwelling which acts as a harbouring place for resentment towards humanity. Hume (1974: 68) notes that often a phenomenon such as bad weather is 'not kept at bay by the anti-hall's walls, but is made part of the internal conditions'. Graves are also frequently associated with the concept of the anti-hall; Hume comments that the bodies within these are often 'subject to seeping damp and worms'.<sup>34</sup> Anti-halls, therefore, appear as more permeable structures which tend to bind together elements which are not appealing to human desire and feeling. The anti-hall is a poetic construction which actively explores the merging of human feeling and the physical world. This is not to suggest that the structure of the anti-hall is human feeling manifested in material structure and substance, but rather the interaction between the two is constructed as a new physical connection, an extension of the ecosystem(s) already present in the text. The anti-hall can perhaps best be understood as a combination of what is present and what is absent. Armitage invokes this absence in the poem for the mist stone. The poem asks of mist, 'who does it mourn?' Mist shrouds other objects from view, obscuring the human figure in the act of engaging with the stone. At the same time, mist is itself a ghostly presence, a lingering shadow of its former state, that of liquid water.

### **The Anti-Hall**

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34 For examples of grave associated dwelling places which have been discussed in terms of the anti-hall concepts, see the dwelling place of the dragon in *Beowulf* which is a burial mound; the grave of the speaker's lord in *The Wanderer* ll. 22-23 & 83-84; potentially the earthen chamber in *The Wife's lament*.

While the idea-complex of the anti-hall is inseparably bound to human emotion, it is equally bound to material substance. The anti-hall is as much (if not more) about what is *not* there, what is lost, and/or what cannot be seen or felt, as it is about that which is fully present in any given moment. Previous work on the anti-hall has implied that it is used in order to ‘suggest a state of mind’ (Hume 1974: 70),<sup>35</sup> but arguably the anti-hall is more than just a symbol or poetic realisation of inner human turmoil and grief. The anti-hall complex invokes a sense of darkness within our human minds. This darkness resonates with a kind of dark ecology, an ecology of loss and of fear.<sup>36</sup> The notion of a dark ecology is based on the idea that we are embedded within environment, we, ourselves, are part of it. Morton (2010c: 252-53) suggests that when we think about the destruction of environment we are confronted with a loss on a scale we cannot comprehend. Morton comments on this phenomena in a wider discussion of the genre of the elegy. Morton states that in the traditional form of elegy, ‘the person departs and the environment echoes our woe. In ecological thinking, the fear is that we will go on living while the environment disappears around us’ (Morton 2010c: 253). *The Wanderer* seems to touch on this sentiment in its lament for the absolute decay which the physical world will eventually suffer. This destruction is associated with the perpetual movement of time. It is also contextualised in a Christian worldview, rather than in the modern context of our own acknowledgement of our impact as a species on the ecological crisis. Even so, the connection and interaction between human emotion and the physical world is conceptualised in a strikingly similar way.

The Old English idea-complex of the anti-hall deals with loss, darkness,

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35 See also Magennis (1996: 141-42).

36 The term ‘dark ecology’ was coined by Morton (2007: 140-205).

and absence in a slightly different way to the lament for the future of the world as presented in *The Wanderer*. It does, however, invoke similar sensations of loss and absence. The anti-hall behaves in the opposite manner to that of the usual hall of Old English poetry. The boats on which both the wanderer and the seafarer find themselves dwelling have been characterised as anti-halls, where care and woe are the defining traits.<sup>37</sup> While the later elegy traditions demonstrate a sense of Nature enacting mourning for an individual, in the Old English elegies mourning is more a collaborative event.<sup>38</sup> Lines 45-55 of *The Wanderer* depicts a strange and much discussed scene where the wanderer, in a dream-like state, experiences visions of his past hall companions, which are in fact the seabirds with which he cohabits his marine dwelling place. Upon the realisation that the physical figures he thinks are his hall companions are actually seabirds, the birds themselves swim away. In this moment where the wanderer believes he can see his old companions before him, he longs to reach out to them:

sorg bið geniwad

þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð:

greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað -

secga geseldan swimmað *eft* onweg,

fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð

cuðra cwidegedda. (ll. 50b-55a)

(Sorrow is renewed when the memory of men (kinsmen) passes through the mind: he greets them with great mirth, looks upon

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37 See Hume (1974: 70-71).

38 See Joy (2013) for a particularly interesting discussion of the notion of a blue ecology – one of a shared sense of depression and feeling.

kinsmen eagerly - they swim away again. The floating spirits  
bring few well known voices.)

When the wanderer believes he is in the presence of his old companions, it is the movement conveyed by the verbs *swimmað* (infinitive *swimman*) and *fleotendra* (infinitive *fleotan*) which gives away the identity of these figures. Both terms are associated with the movement of an object on water.<sup>39</sup> The figures, therefore, maintain their avian qualities while they are mistaken for hall companions. While the physical qualities of the birds are conveyed by the verbs *swimmað* and *fleotan*, they remain constantly out of reach from the wanderer. The gliding action of the birds on the water, combined with the hallucinatory state of the wanderer, imbues this scene with a ghostly atmosphere. The birds are physical entities, but they also possess a strangeness and unknowable quality. The wanderer shares his immediate living space with them, but even so, unlike his old hall companions, they remain elusive. In his own ecocritical reading of this passage, Low (2009: 9) argues that a contrast exists between the dream world of the wanderer and ‘the cruelty of the natural world’. Low emphasises this contrast in order to suggest that the Old English elegiac texts contrast substantially with the nostalgic views of Nature often presented in the post-Renaissance elegy tradition. While this is an important distinction to make, it does not move beyond the contrast and separation between human and nonhuman which has dominated and restricted discussion of environment in the elegies to date. Reading this passage in a way which engages more closely with the interaction between all objects as individuals which collectively form this environment, can arguably offer further insights into this scene, and the anti-hall motif more generally.

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39 See Owen (1950: 162).

The sense of elusiveness constructed in ll. 50b-55a of *The Wanderer* is a particularly potent aspect of the anti-hall complex, and is, perhaps, best conceptualised in the form of Morton's strange strangers.<sup>40</sup> Morton (2010c: 275) states that 'our encounter with other beings — and with our being as other — is *strange strangeness*', suggesting that all life forms are 'strange strangers', which are simultaneously independent beings and also part of other beings in the form of a meshwork of life and existence. This concept is particularly significant for thinking further about the interaction between the human mind/creativity and the physical world. In the mist stone poem, mist is conceptualised as 'water / in its ghost state'. Water in its most common liquid state is here both brought to mind, but also absent. Mist is the suspension of water droplets in the air. This absence of movement contrasts with the flowing state of water in its liquid form. In the mist stone poem, the suspension of the waterdroplets is conveyed through the phrase 'water in its ghost form'. Mist is conceptualised as a suspension of the life of water. The mist of the poem, therefore, exists as both a recognisable phenomenon, but also as a shadowy form of water, existing in a free flowing, yet also suspended state. The poem hints at the idea that one can never know an entity in its entirety at any one moment or in any one interaction. This idea is perhaps most clearly expressed in Harman's (2002) *Tool Being*. When we encounter mist, we are encountering a quality of water, but its other qualities retreat from us out of sight and reach. We only experience in mist the qualities which affect ourselves, its ability to obscure the visibility of other objects and to surround our bodies. In his discussion of the way in which objects encounter each other, Harman offers the example of a poisoned trout lake. He explains that 'poisonousness is not a static feature sitting around in the lake just waiting to be

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40 See Morton (2010c: 275).

discovered, but a relational property that requires the trout no less than the lake' (Harman 2002: 224). The cloaking ability of mist, therefore, exists only in relation to our own perception of it. This idea that objects can never be experienced in their entirety is conceptualised as a withdrawal.<sup>41</sup> Armitage plays with these different states of water throughout the *Stanza Stones* poems. The title of the *Stanza Stone* poem collection, *In Memory of Water*, connects to this notion that objects are always partly withdrawn. Water can never truly be conceptualised in its entirety, so any one interaction with it will always be haunted by other qualities and states of that water which lurk just beyond experience.

The bird companions of *The Wanderer* seem to explore this notion of withdrawal in a remarkably similar way to that of the mist stone poem. The bird/hall companions are simultaneously constructions of the wanderer's mind and physical beings present on the sea. The repeated use of *geond*- in consecutive lines of the above passage poetically constructs this interaction between the wanderer and the birds. *Geond* as a preposition on its own has the meanings of 'through, throughout, over, as far as, amongst, in, after, beyond' (Bosworth and Toller 1972 : s.v. *geond*). In the above passage *geond* is compounded with the verbs *hweorfan* (to change, go, return, depart, wander, roam, hover about) and *sceawian* (to look, consider, survey). The compounding of *geond* with these verbs not only adds a prepositional element, but also conveys a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity in relation to the action of the verb. These compounds are not hapax legomena – *geondhweorfan* is found elsewhere in prose, and *geondsceawian* is

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41 Heidegger introduced the notion of withdrawing objects in his work on tool-being.

Harman's (2002) work reinterprets Heidegger's ideas of tool-being, expanding them further to create his own object-oriented ontology. See also Harman (2012) and Morton (2012).



unique to *The Wanderer* in terms of poetry, but found elsewhere in prose – but *geondhweorfan* usually appears in reference to movement through a physical place rather than the mind.<sup>42</sup> The construction of these figures and their interaction with the wanderer is a product of this ambiguity, unknowability and strangeness.

In her outline of the anti-hall complex, Hume (1974: 70) states that the concept of the anti-hall is often used to give ‘emotional power to gloomy states of existence’; thus the ‘anti-hall is used to suggest a state of mind’ rather than being a part of the ecology of a given environment within Old English poetry. The invocation of an anti-garden in Armitage’s mist stone poem, however, originates from the physical and material surroundings of the environment in which the poem stone exists, combined with the state of mind of the reader. When reconsidered from this perspective, the anti-hall complex invoked by the wanderer’s vision of his old hall companions appears as the result of the physical entities surrounding him, as well as his own state of mind. The visions which the wanderer experiences are not examples of the environment in this poetic construction responding to the wanderer’s loneliness, but rather demonstrate a mutual interaction between the wanderer’s grievous feelings and the physical entities of the seabirds. To the wanderer, these creatures are both familiar and strange, comforting and distressing. Just as the mist stone poem constructs the sensation of being both lost, but also present in a physical location and moment (‘but you are here’), *The Wanderer* explores these same feelings of loss and grief, combined with being present in the physical world. The objects of the physical world are both influenced by, and responsive to, the wanderer’s presence, constantly present but also withdrawing into the unknowable.

When read in the light of object-oriented ecomaterial conceptions of

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42 See *Beowulf* II. 2017.

environment and objects, and explored alongside the explicit materially-oriented work of the *Stanza Stones* project, the anti-hall of Old English poetry arguably exists as much more than a manifestation of a human emotional state. The anti-hall of *The Wanderer* is rather a construction of environment which acknowledges and is tuned into the complicated messiness of the material world. Morton (2012b: 217) notes that relations between objects are ‘vast, complex, entangled, nonlocal, atemporal, sliding hither and thither, beset with irony and illusion’. *The Wanderer*, as a poetic composition, is constructed in the form of this entanglement and messiness. The human abstract concept of exile and the feelings of loss, loneliness and grief which accompany this state are not simply made manifest in the environments of the poem. Instead, these human emotions merge with the realism of the physical world to produce a poetic construction which articulates the sense of that strange strangeness which all objects experience when they encounter one another.

### **Land Meets Water**

Understanding the complex interactions between objects and human emotions/perception in the elegies is key to gaining further insight into the poetic construction of environments within these texts. This chapter has already examined how the emotional states which exile imbues in human beings affect the interaction between themselves and other objects in the environments of the texts. Exploring further the notion of exile and the way it is physically manifested in the environments of the poems is also important to extending these insights further. The notion of boundaries and borders is crucial to the human concept of exile, but boundaries and borders are also constructed from the physical qualities of the environments in these texts. Previous work on the elegies has tended to

comprehend the interaction between physical geographical objects such as land and sea in primarily symbolic terms. Sebastian Sobecki (2008a: 45) expresses concern that reading the sea as a material phenomenon in Old English poetry can deny the symbolic multiplicity of the sea in Old English writing, which he suggests is strongly indebted to the Bible and patristic writings.<sup>43</sup> While it is crucial that the symbolic weight that the sea carries in this body of work is not overlooked, it is also important to understand the ways in which these texts explore spirituality *through* the materiality of the sea and its interactions with human beings.

The object-text poetry of the *Stanza Stones* project has already, in this chapter, demonstrated the ways in which the objects present in the environments of the elegies speak to similar environments today, allowing us to view the temporality of the lives of certain nonhuman objects as much greater than our own. Previous work on land and sea in both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* has argued strongly for the exclusivity of these two environments, often supported by references to Christian tradition regarding the symbolic function of the sea. The sea is associated with both life and, perhaps more commonly, death.<sup>44</sup> Scholars of

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43 Sobecki also cites Neville (1999: 139-77) who provides extensive discussion of the symbolic function of the sea in Old English poetry.

44 Cf. Whitelock (1950); Holton (1982: 208). Holton draws on the teachings of Gregory and the ship burial of Baldr in the Old Norse *Snorra Edda*. Holton draws attention to both Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, I, Met. 2, Pro. 3, and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* to provide evidence for the sea as a symbol of life. While Neville (1999: 43) emphasises the challenges which nonhuman entities and phenomena pose to humans in Old English texts, she is clear to argue that Old English poets do not link demonic forces with the natural world, but rather reserve the 'moral concept of "the devil"' for its own environment. Neville (1999: 54-55) also argues that the sea can act as a symbol of the forces (in particular of human conflict) that are capable of destroying society. She specifically makes

medieval environmental and landscape studies have, to some extent, supported the concept of a division between land and sea as defined by the presence of human community and the inability of people to map a cultural presence onto the sea.<sup>45</sup> Opposing arguments are made which highlight the significance of the interplay between land and sea.<sup>46</sup> Arguments for the separate nature of land and sea often place the concept of the sea on the verges of tangibility. Howe (2008: 63) argues that *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are poems which construct a 'disjunction' between 'the tangible and the ineffable, the material and the spiritual', as the physical setting of the poem, supporting this argument with his interpretation of the concluding lines of *The Wanderer*. He reads the *her* in these lines as the sea, which he suggests constructs a sense of 'radical emptiness', expressing the Wanderer's state of mind.

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

Eal þis eorþan gasteal idel weorþeð. (ll. 108-10)

(Here treasure is transitory, here a friend is transitory, here man  
is transitory, here kinship is transitory, all this foundation of the

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reference to the sea as it appears in *Maxim I*, ll. 50b-58a.

45 Howe (2008: 70) suggests that the emptiness felt by the speaker in *The Wanderer* could only have been conceived on the sea rather than land. This is due to the inability of human habitation to ever be a reality or even possibility in a sea environment. Siewers (2009) comments on the construction of the sea in early Irish literature as contrasting to that of Old English.

46 See Wickham-Crowley (2006). Wickham-Crowley discusses the permeable nature of the land/sea boundary through her combined literary and archaeological analysis of meeting points of land and water.

earth will become worthless.) (Howe 2008: 68)

While in Howe's reading the sea is an entity which lies on the edge of tangibility, the opening lines of the poem seem to work against such a suggestion. The wanderer is forced 'hreran mid hondum | hrimcealde sæ' (to stir with his hands the frost-cold sea) (l. 4), and 'wadan wræclastas' (to move in exile's footsteps); these are actions which suggest physical contact and engagement with the sea. The wanderer's position as a figure of exile is conveyed through his physical connection and interaction with other objects. The term 'wræclastas' is a poetic compound which occurs elsewhere within Old English poetry, namely *Beowulf* (l. 1349), *The Seafarer* (l. 55), and *Solomon and Saturn* (l. 119).<sup>47</sup> In *Beowulf* the term refers to the movement of Grendel on the murky edges of society. It precedes a description of the land which both Grendel and his mother inhabit. This place is characterised and defined, in physical terms, as a meeting place between land and water.

Hie dygel lond

warigeað, wulfhleoþu, windige næssas,

frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream

under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,

floed under foldan. (ll. 1357-61) (Klaeber 2008: 47)

(That grimy land they occupy, wolf-inhabited slopes, windy headlands, perilous fenpaths, where a mountain stream goes downwards under the headlands' mists, the underground flood)

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47 Details obtained from *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*.

Grendel's mere, in a similar way to that of *The Wanderer*, demonstrates the blending of both water and land in association with the motif of exile. The association of the concept of exile with the environment of land/water meeting points does not have to limit the reading of these environments to only symbolic expressions of mood and emotion. The physical act of inhabiting (indicated in the above passage from *Beowulf*) and the emphasis on action and interaction with the material world in order to convey the notion of exile suggest that places where land and water meet in Old English poetry are also important as material environments. This is further supported by some place-name evidence. Hall (2006) suggests that there is evidence that certain Old English place-names make associations between water and monsters. Such connections suggest that for Anglo-Saxon people physical places had an association with marginality and remoteness from society which was conveyed through the names they gave to these specific places. Such engagement between the physical environment and the symbolism of a place-name does not provide conclusive evidence that Old English poetic texts were equally interested in the materiality of the environments they constructed, but certainly adds further weight to the idea that symbolism and materiality may well be working as combined and interactive concepts within these texts.

While the study of literary ecologies has expanded dramatically in recent years, there is some suggestion that discussion of land has been given a privileged position over water. In his article promoting the sea and maritime culture as an important phenomenon for the progression of cultural studies, Mentz (2009: 1000) comments 'most major studies of literary ecocriticism to date have engaged pastoral and terrestrial themes', noting that both North American and British

studies in literary ecologies have been largely ‘dry’.<sup>48</sup> This is a sentiment which is echoed by Wickham-Crowley (2006: 102) who observes during her analysis of land/water intersections: ‘in some ways I am still privileging the land over the water, examining projections of viable land defined by watery incursions. Anglo-Saxon practice and imagination does manifest the valuing of water in other ways.’ It is important, therefore, to develop a line of enquiry which takes seriously the phenomenon of water in all its forms. Considering water in terms of its interrelationship with land, humans, and other natural forces and beings widens the scope of literary ecology and helps to reconsider the unchallenged characteristics which scholars have previously placed on water within Old English poetry. Regarding the presence of water within *Beowulf*, Ball (2009) emphasises its chaotic nature. She argues that the unclear distinctions between landlocked water and the sea serve to emphasise the ‘undefined edges between the borderlands and the disordered chaos of the water’.<sup>49</sup>

The intersections of land and water and their connotations are crucial to the world of the text in both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. Cliffs are the most prominent example of an area where land and water meet within Old English poetry and more specifically the elegies. Most work on the characteristics of cliffs in Old English poetry, however, discusses their presence only as a natural defence

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48 A thought provoking and exciting challenge to the largely ‘dry’ studies in literary ecologies is Lowell Duckert’s (2012) thesis on early modern waterscapes.

49 This is a view which Mentz (2009) also holds in relation to early modern literature. He notes that ‘for many early modern writers the land is orderly and human; the sea chaotic and divine’ (1001); see also Lutwack (1984), who states that ‘the sea’s formlessness has always represented the ultimate disorder in man and universe. The sea is the least assailable of terrestrial places: in its depths human existence is impossible, on its surface no human trace remains’ (47).

for the land against the sea, further conveying the idea of the human in constant conflict with the nonhuman. Michelet (2006: 56) states ‘dry lands, the home of men, need to be enclosed and protected against external assaults’, suggesting that cliffs fulfill this need by ‘towering high in Old English descriptions of the natural world, they fence in a definite space and protect it from the outside, from the sea’. Previous discussion of cliffs has also focused further on positive or negative responses to these natural phenomena. Neville (1999: 36-37) compares the Seafarer’s response to the landscape to that of an Irish poet contemplating the sea. She notes that ‘while the Old English poet is reminded by the cries of the sea birds of the human society that he lacks, the Irish poet revels in “the voice of wondrous birds”’.<sup>50</sup> While Old English poets seemingly construct a negative response to cliffs, seeing beyond such interpretation is also crucial in gaining a full understanding of the importance of cliffs and shoreland in these poems.

It is the cliffs in *The Seafarer* which are the home to the birds which play such an important role in the poem. They are both a physical link between land and sea and the stimulation for the seafarer’s thoughts of earthly life. The passage of the birds on the cliff has frequently been interpreted as emphasising the inadequacy of Nature as providing a substitute for the community of hall life. Magennis (2007: 305) makes a particularly interesting statement in his discussion of the birds as a substitute for the entertainment of hall life in these lines. In reference to lines 18-22 he notes ‘the speaker juxtaposes what he ironically refers to as the “entertainment” (*gomen*) of the kind of *desolate* [my emphasis] seascape

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50 Neville takes the lines of Irish poetry from poem VI in Jackson (1935: 9). For further work on the comparisons between Early Irish and Old English poetic constructions of ‘the natural world’ see Siewers (2009).



he has experienced with attractive social images of laughter and drinking'.<sup>51</sup>

While these lines obviously mark an absence of human community, to label the 'seascape' as 'desolate' neglects to acknowledge the diverse ecosystem which the poem presents on the borderland of the coast. Neville (1999: 36) also notes that

any suspicion that the Seafarer finds the beauty of the natural landscape an inspiring replacement for human company is eliminated by the last line which specifies that he is "miserable" and missing "protecting kin".

She contrasts the attitude of the seafarer with the happiness that Guthlac experiences in his contact with the birds.

Swa þæt milde mod    wið moncynnes  
dreamum gedælde,    dryhtne þeowde  
genom him to wildeorum wynne,    siþþan he þas woruld  
forhogde.

(Thus that gentle mind separated himself from the joys of mankind, served the lord, took the wild beasts as joy for himself, after he despised this world) (Neville [trans]1999: 36)

While the seafarer's encounter with the birds does not bring a great sense of joy,

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51 This linking of the seascape with desolation is a sentiment which is shared by Neville (1999: 38); Howe (2008: 71), in his reading of *The Seafarer* notes that 'the setting of *The Seafarer* is in some sense even more vacant than that of *The Wanderer*'. This sense of vacancy is based on a lack of human cultural life rather than an absence of nonhuman entities.

the passage marks a significant interaction between land and sea. The speaker notes:

stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð  
isigfeþra. (ll. 23-24a)

(storms beat the cliff, where the icy-feathered tern answered them.)

The speaker observes the independent actions of the storms and the tern, and conceptualises this reaction of one to the other as a dialogue. It is this dialogue which then propels/returns the seafarer's thoughts to those of land; this is emphasised by the use of 'forþon' (for that reason, and so, then) in line 27.<sup>52</sup> The interaction between bird and storm joins land and sea, in both a physical sense and in the mind of the seafarer. The cliffs become a place of joining, of call and response, and of meeting and colliding of different ecosystems and different mental spaces.

In a similar way to *The Wanderer*, the interaction between land and sea in *The Seafarer* appears alongside the motif of navigation, forming its own ecology of exile. The opening section of the poem notes that the seafarer dwells 'wræccan lastum' (footprints of exile) (l. 15b). This is followed by a detailed description of a coastal ecosystem.

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52 It is difficult to determine the exact meaning of 'forþon' in this poem; it occurs again in l.

39. It could either be interpreted as 'because', or 'therefore/thus', each referring to a form of looking back or forward, but neither can be confirmed. For the most comprehensive list of possible meanings of the term see the *DOE* s.v. forþon.

þær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ,  
 iscaldne wæg. Hwilum ylfete song  
 dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor,  
 ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,  
 mæw singende fore medodrince.  
 Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð  
 isigfeþera, ful oft þæt earn bigeal  
 urigfeþra. Nænig hleomæga  
 feascaftig ferð *refran*<sup>53</sup> meahte. (ll. 18-26)

(I heard nothing there but the sea making noise,  
 ice-cold waves. Sometimes the swan's song gave me mirth, the  
 gannet's melody and the curlew's cry for the laughter of men, the  
 seagull's call for mead-drink. Storms beat the cliffs there, where  
 the tern answered, icy-feathered. Often the eagle cried, dewy-  
 winged. No sheltering kinsmen [family] could bring consolation  
 to my miserable soul.)

The fixation of the seafarer on the substitution of birds for hall companions  
 echoes the similar passage in *The Wanderer*, again constructing a type of  
 inversion of the hall motif, or anti-hall scene. At the same time, the poem  
 directly connects this ecosystem of human, birds, sea, cliffs, to the paths-of-exile  
 (*wræccan lastum*) motif. Those who dwell externally to the main body of human  
 society are also often associated with areas where land and water meet. While  
 work in this area has been dominated by studies which are centered around  
 Grendel's mere and *Beowulf* in general, several other examples exist throughout

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53 Ms. *feran*.

the Old English poetic corpus. Notable examples are the cliffs against which the speaker's lover resides in *The Wife's Lament* (ll. 47b-50a), and the 'hrimcælde sæ' (frost-cold sea) (l. 4b) that the wanderer must stir while he 'wadan wræclastas' (wades in exile's path) (l. 5a).

It is also interesting to note that line 23 of *The Seafarer* ('Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, | þær him stearn oncwæð') does not fit the metrical structure of both the majority of the rest of the poem and Old English alliterative verse more generally. Old English alliterative verse tends towards a structure of four syllables per half line. Line 23 is a hypermetric, containing six metrical syllables, rather than the usual four. While the presence of hypermetric lines is not uncommon, it is also important to consider closely the implication of such variation on the text. The break in the standard metrical pattern causes the pace to be momentarily interrupted. This interruption occurs at the moment where the speaker describes the beating of the storm against the cliffs and the action of the birds responding to this action. The metrical structure, therefore, appears to be conveying the action of the storm beating the cliff, the poetic line drawing its metre from the jarring impact of water crashing on rock.

This interaction between land (and stone in particular) and water is conveyed in remarkably similar ways in Armitage's Beck stone poem. Like *The Seafarer*, the role of birds as mediator between land and sea is crucial to 'Beck'.

It is all one chase.

Trace it back: the source

might be nothing more

than a teardrop

squeezed from a curlew's eye. (ll. 1-5)

Armitage invokes the curlew as a bird specifically found in both coastal and moorland regions, drawing an even closer connection between the bird images of *The Seafarer* and those of the beck stone poem. The Pennines in particular are home to some of the greatest breeding numbers of curlews. They are usually found in the Pennine region between April and July; coastal numbers peaks in January and February.<sup>54</sup> The curlew acts as mediator between the moorland source of the beck and its estuary, forging a connection between the high ground of the moorland and the sea. The curlew can also be read here as a metaphor for a cloud, another object which is itself formed from the water of the sea and carried over the high ground to weep its water droplets onto the land. The image of a 'teardrop' develops a sense of lingering loneliness and delicateness, which is mirrored in the final lines where the water passes over the rock as the tears of the 'waterfall's face'.

Where water unbinds  
and hangs  
over the waterfall's face,  
and just for that one  
stretched white moment  
becomes lace. (ll. 24-29)

These lines, in a similar way to the 'Mist' stone poem, draw on the imagery of binding and movement. The water becomes lace, and stretches itself over the face

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54 See <<http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/C/Curlew/index.aspx>>.

of the waterfall like a veil. This image parallels that of mist ‘drawing its net curtains around’. Here, however, stillness is connected with the idea of unbinding, inverting the notion of the act of binding being connected with constriction and confinement of movement. The action of unbinding, here, creates a moment of suspension, but the delicacy and sense of suspension caused by the unbinding of the water over the face of the waterfall is contrasted with the fierce and violent action of the water after hard rain.

The unbroken thread  
of the beck  
with its nose for the sea,  
all flux and flex,  
soft-soaping a pebble  
for over a thousand years,  
or here  
after hard rain  
sawing the hillside in half  
with its chain. (ll. 13-22)

The action of the beck ‘sawing the hillside in half’ presents a strikingly similar image to the action of the storm beating the cliffs in *The Seafarer*. Armitage’s beck stone poem engages with the interaction between land and water through the process of the action of one on the other across time. While it is this interaction between land and water that is at the fore in the poem, the positioning of the stone on which ‘Beck’ is carved draws the written text of the poem directly into this action. The stone on which the poem is inscribed lies in

the beck itself and, therefore, is subject to the same erosion as the land through which the beck passes. The beck stone forms part of the waterfall's face over which the water momentarily hangs (see figure 6). When the water flows strongly, more of the stone becomes obscured by this watery veil, making the poem increasingly difficult to read. The text is blurred by the waterfall's tears; the elegiac tone conveying that same strange sorrow of the inevitable passing of time.

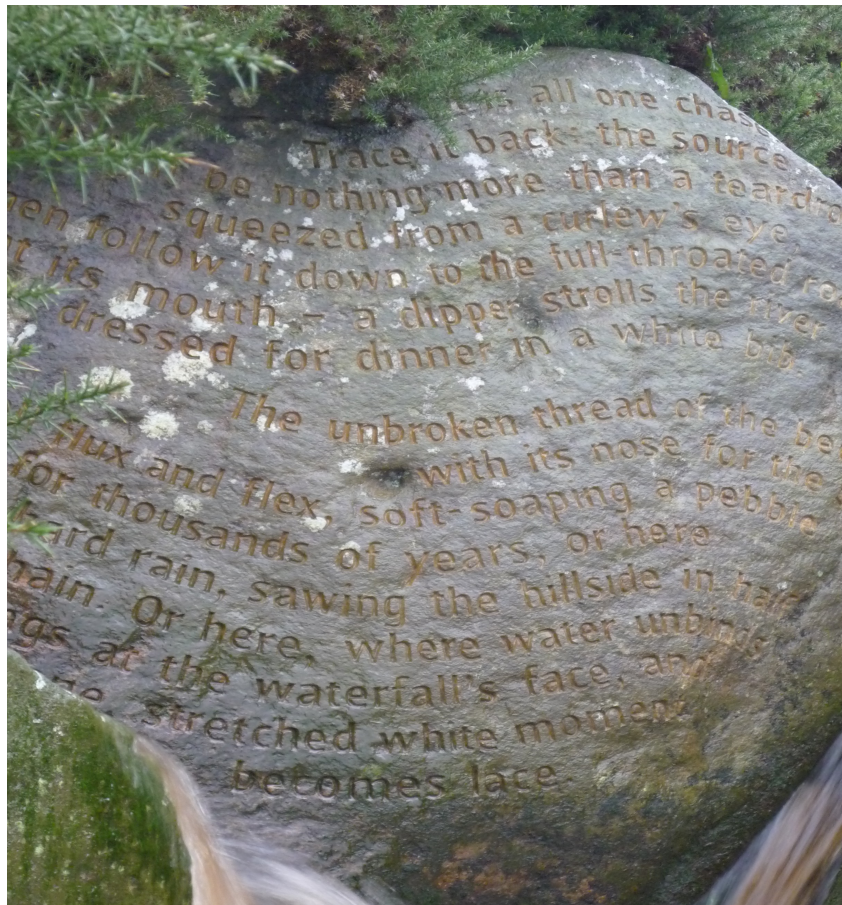


Figure 5: The 'Beck' Stone Poem



**Figure 6: The 'Beck' Stone in its Setting**

The sound of water (in the form of snow) also plays an important part in the formation of Armitage's snow stone poem. Like the interaction between storm and cliff in *The Seafarer*, Armitage engages with the aural interaction between snow and the land on which it has fallen. Rather than the raging of a storm against a cliff, it is the silencing effect of snow which dominates Armitage's poem.

The sky has delivered  
 its blank missive.  
 The moor in coma.  
 Snow, like water asleep,



a coded muteness  
 to baffle all noise,  
 to stall movement,  
 still time.  
 What can it mean  
 that colourless water  
 can dream  
 such depth of white?  
 We should make the most  
 of the light. (ll. 1-14)

The opening lines of the poem convey the silencing, stilling, binding effect of snow. Lines 4-8 slow the pace of the poem through the reduction of syllable from line to line, concluding with the two syllables of line 8, 'still time'. This binding and silencing nature of snow stills the movements of the moor, seemingly placing it into a 'coma'. The layout of the poem as it is presented in the printed anthology which accompanies the trail is as above, but the layout of the text on the stone differs from that of the printed edition. The text of the snow stone poem is carved onto two separate stones with a gap between them and a separate smaller stone above bearing the title 'Snow'. The text is carved in full lines across both stones, as can be seen in figure 7. Line three as quoted above is split between the two rocks dividing the line between 'the moor' and 'in coma' (see figure 8). This physical division, emphasises that shift in pace, and lines 4-8 as presented above follow the words 'in coma', spreading across the same line of the right hand stone and ending at 'still time', again physically conveying that stillness of time through the physical gap; the reader must shift

their eyes (and potentially their body) to the left hand stone in order to continue with the next line.



**Figure 7: The 'Snow' Stones**



**Figure 8: The 'Snow' Stones - Division Between Lines**

Yet this stilling of movement becomes the focus of contemplation for the human reader, as the poem contemplates

What can it mean  
 that colourless water  
 can dream  
 such depth of white?  
 We should make the most  
 of the light. (ll. 9-14)

This moment of contemplation, the pause provided by the binding effects of snow, is characterised in terms of both the spoken and written language of snow:

Snow, snow, snow  
 is how the snow speaks,  
 is how its clean page reads.  
 Then it wakes, and thaws,  
 and weeps. (ll. 19-23)

Snow is all encompassing, its words are itself. It provides an apparent blank canvass. Armitage refers to whiteness of snow as a 'clean page', which brings to mind the stark contrast between the blackness of ink and the whiteness of the page with which many of the Anglo-Saxon scriptorium riddles are preoccupied.<sup>55</sup> Once again though, when the snow melts and turns back into liquid water, the movement is presented as weeping. The thawing of the snow, releases the moor

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55 See pp. 122-25.

from its bindings and the movement of water, reflects the ongoing movement of time. The text of the final words is broken between the two stones so that 'it wakes' is carved on the left and 'and thaws, and weeps' on the right. The break between the stones in the final line provides a final suspended moment, before the text continues and the snow thaws.

Armitage's 'Mist', 'Beck', and 'Snow' stone poems each convey an elegiac tone, emphasised further by the poems' collective title, *In Memory of Water*. The sense of loss which the poems convey is often associated with time. The interaction between water in its various states and land or stone allows for the contemplation of time as a concept which provides moments of pause and contemplation, but is inevitably one in which we conceptualise as movement. The *Stanza Stones* poems as poem/stone objects emphasise and highlight the notion of meshworks of being. The poems contemplate how water in its various forms interacts with the other objects in these meshworks of being. Their presence draws the human reader into these meshworks, gathering them up in moments of binding and unbinding. The final section of this chapter considers how the interaction between land and water is bound with social notions of home and exile. It considers how the physical interactions between land and water affect human social identities in terms of both time and place.

### **Exile and Home**

The notion of exile is perhaps the most significant factor in the human conception of boundaries and borders in the Old English elegies. Exile, however, cannot exist as a concept in its own right, but can only be figured in relation to the notion of home. The concept of home in the elegies is a complex matter. According to the *Dictionary of Old English*, the term *eðel* can denote 'home',

‘homeland’, or ‘ancestral domain’. This term appears throughout the elegy corpus.<sup>56</sup> It most frequently seems to denote a sense of homeland or ancestral domain, rather than a domestic dwelling place or physical structure. Although Old English contains at least fourteen synonyms for home, with varying connotations (Howe 2004: 147) — some suggesting homeland and others a physical structure — *eðel* appears to be one of the most widely used across the corpus of (so called) elegiac poems.<sup>57</sup> The presence of *eðel* suggests that home is frequently figured as an area of land rather than a specific building. This relationship between the concept of home and the physical land can most clearly be seen in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. In these poems the boundary which the subject has crossed into exile is figured as the border between land and sea.<sup>58</sup> In her work on the boundaries of land and water in Anglo-Saxon contexts, Wickham-Crowley (2006: 85) suggests that Anglo-Saxons had a way of thinking that ‘considered land/water intersections as a habit of perception or vision, coloring and marking more than the physical environment’. While Wickham-Crowley develops important points regarding the intersections of land and water, within the context of the elegies, I would argue that physical environment also

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56 For *eðel* see: *The Wanderer* l. 20; *The Seafarer* l. 60; *The Husband’s Message* ll. 26 & 35; *The Rhyming Poem* l. 74; *Resignation* l. 108. See the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*.

57 *Eard* is also a very common, semantically related term used across the elegies to denote either the idea of a homeland or just a specific dwelling place. *Eard* appears more frequently as a compound, see *The Wanderer* ll. 3 and 28 (as compounds *eardstapa* and *eardgeard*); *The Seafarer* l. 9; *The Husband’s Message* l. 4.

58 See Nagy (2007). This work explores the boundaries between home and exile, and land and sea. Although the analysis does discuss environmental concerns and how these may be figured alongside discussions of Old English poetry, it draws a familiar dichotomy between humans and the ‘the natural world’.

plays a key role in the way the poets conceived of these boundary relationships. The subject in *The Seafarer* contrasts his life on the sea with those who spend their days on land.

þæt se mon ne wat  
 þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,  
 hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ  
 winter wunade wræccan lastum. (ll. 12b-15)

(That man does not know, to whom existence on dry land is fairest, how I dwelt, wretched, on the ice-cold sea all winter on the paths of exile.)

Crucial to this passage is the use of the term *foldan* in contrast with the *sæ*. While *foldan* can have several slightly differing meanings, such as ‘ground’, ‘the earth as surface’, ‘the floor of a body of water’, ‘the earth as a place of burial’, ‘the ground as productive/suitable for cultivation’, ‘a land/country’ (*DOE*), all these meanings emphasise the physical nature of the land as a solid surface. While this contrasts with the sea as a non-solid surface, the place of exile is still clearly defined in a physical sense by the use of the word *lastum*. This passage emphasises the relationship between home and exile, not exclusively in terms of community and removal from that community, but by the clear physical areas of the land and the sea. The sea is not figured with any sense of inhabitation or ownership, it is a pathway and place of transition, but one that is inseparably linked to the land.<sup>59</sup>

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59 On occasion, land is also depicted as being outside of ownership claims, a particular example being in *Guthlac A* l. 217 where Guthlac goes ‘eþelrichte feor’ (far from the law of hereditary

Wickham-Crowley (2006: 102) notes that, for the seafarer, ‘the sea becomes a road, or a bridge, to new experiences and peoples’. The sea is the pathway between the land from which he is removed and the ‘elþeodriga eard’ (l. 38) (the country/dwelling-place of strangers). This land to which the seafarer wishes to travel can be interpreted as either another earthly country or, perhaps more likely in the context of the rest of the poem, the ‘moten’ (meeting place) of ‘etan eadignesse’ (ll. 119-20) (eternal blessedness) as is defined at the end of the text. Even when figured as a place of eternal blessedness, this concept is presented as physical land and (assuming the ‘elþeodriga eard’ refers to the later ‘moten’ of ‘ecan eadignesse’) the genitive case of ‘elþeodriga eard’ constructs this land as specifically owned.<sup>60</sup> The sea acts as a physical space which is free from such ownership. In addition to Old English poetic sources, the archaeological record also supports the importance of the sea (and travel by water more generally) as key to cultural exchanges in Anglo-Saxon England and wider early medieval Europe. The British Isles functioned as distinct marine cultural zones or ‘contact zones’, divided into distinct coastal regions such as those on both sides of the Channel and the North sea shores (Loveluck 2006: 140). Archaeological evidence indicates that much of these coastal regions were inhabited, and many as year round places of significant activity. Coastal environments were hubs of industry producing significant quantities of finished goods and goods for trading such as fish, salt, livestock, wool, and textiles (Loveluck 2006: 161). While these coastal communities occupied a marginal position in relation to inland dwelling communities, they held key access to

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land). For further work on this see Hall (2007).

60 A similar sense of the solidity of the spiritual land can be found at the end of *The Wanderer* where this realm is conceived of one of ‘fæstnung’ (stability).

products which had been exported over long distances (Loveluck 2006: 161).<sup>61</sup> The sea and rivers also acted as a key method of communication for both trade and agriculture (Pelteret 2010: 21). The relationship between land, sea, and Anglo-Saxon people, therefore, was also defined by the exchange of material objects and the production of goods for trading. The people who inhabited these coastal regions were both distant from inland communities, yet strongly connected through their significant trading position.

### **Land, Sea and Temporalities**

Wickham-Crowley (2006: 105) suggests that, in an Anglo-Saxon context, water forms a connection ‘between the past, present, and future’. This is further explored in work on the Anglo-Saxon migration myth which considers the creation of an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity through the medium of the migration from mainland Europe to Britain.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, the idea that an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity was forged through the process of migration is itself a cultural construction. Sobecki (2008a: 45-46) observes that ‘many of the earlier accounts of the supposedly triumphant march of sea throughout Old English literature spring from the isolationist nationalism of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century approaches to Old English culture as expressive of

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61 Suggested evidence for a number of coastal sites as places of goods exchange and trading has been suggested by imported pottery and coin finds at several sites, see Loveluck (2006: 144). Further evidence for the year round and seasonal occupation of coastal sites is indicated by finds of imported animal and crop remains (Loveluck 2006: 150).

62 For specific work on the Anglo-Saxon migration myth see Howe (1989 and 2008). Williams (1998: 104) investigates ideas of migration and identity in reference to monument reuse in Anglo-Saxon burial practices. Siewers (2003), discusses the idea of the sea as a ‘reimagined Germanic ancestral past’ (38). See also Michelet (2006: 198-231).



the quintessence of Englishness'. As was discussed in Chapter Four, nationalist agendas have previously had a significant impact on the way in which Old English literature and Anglo-Saxon culture has been used as a source for constructing a sense of nationalism and 'English identity' which, in part, assisted in fueling the march of imperialism. The extensive and strong presence of the sea in Old English poetry has served as an effective tool in this construction of seafaring and colonizing 'Englishness'. Exploring further the interaction between the spiritual and the material in the elegies of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* offers a challenge to these interpretations of Anglo-Saxon culture. It is the physical qualities of the contrasting solidity of land and the fluidity which, in Old English poetry, mark a difference between what is conceptualised as a homeland and what is external to this. Understanding this relationship between land and sea allows the interpretation of movement between one area of land and another (as it is presented in the Old English elegies) to move away from ideas of nations and migration imposed by later cultural agendas.

The conceptualisation of the sea as a pathway or road is a motif whose existence has longevity. It speaks as clearly to us, today, as it would have done to those who experienced the elegies in the time in which they originally circulated. Wickham-Crowley (2006:103) notes that the most common method of sea navigation was to stay close to the coastline, dropping anchor and camping ashore at night. Both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* invoke the notion of a journey, through the interaction of time, space, land, and sea, seemingly capturing the sense of the Old English term *siþ* which has connotations of movement through both space and time. The passage of time is marked by the implication of journeying on the sea, and links to the suggestion made by Wickham-Crowley (2006: 205) that the sea in an Anglo-Saxon context provides

links between the past, present, and future.

The merging of geographical and temporal space is also conveyed in *The Seafarer* through the repeated use of the adverb *forþon*. Liuzza (2006: 19, footnote 4) in his notes to his translation of the poem describes the repeated presence of *forþon* (normally meaning ‘therefore’) as ‘notoriously difficult’.<sup>63</sup> In the context of the poem, which is ambiguous in its movements of time, it can point either forwards or backwards. Liuzza addresses this problem by translating *forþon* in the vague form ‘and so’, but even this hints at forward momentum, and consequently loses some of the temporal ambiguity loaded in the word. In *The Seafarer*, *forþon* appears predominately before reference to past, future or imminent sea travel, specifically in line 27 and 58.<sup>64</sup> Sea travel, therefore, is connected poetically with temporal space, just as it is connected to movement across geographical space.

The common navigational technique of hugging the coastline, where possible, provides a clear link between the concept of navigation, sea travel and the association between exile and areas where land and water meet. Even when the sea stretches out to where the land is no longer in sight, navigation and steering remain a key factor in the positioning of a human being as part of the meshwork constituting that environment. The transition between coastal ‘exile’ and the deeper parts of the ocean is figured poetically through the use of specific kennings. Lines 58-64 of *The Seafarer* depict a similar scene of the spirit/mind of the human character travelling across and binding with the open sea to that of *The Wanderer* lines 55-57.

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63 Dunning and Bliss (1969: 52) discuss the difficulties of *forþon* in relation to *The Wanderer*.

64 *Forþon* also appears in line 72.

Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,  
 min modsefa mid mereflode,  
 ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,  
 eorþan sceatas; cymeð eft to me  
 gifre ond grædig, gielleð anfloga,  
 hweteð on *hwælweg*<sup>65</sup> hreþer unwearnum,  
 ofer holma gelagu. (ll. 58-64a)

(So now my mind disappears over my thought enclosure,  
 My spirit is with the sea, it wanders widely over the whale's home  
 to the corners of the earth, and comes back to me hungry and  
 greedy. The lone flier calls out, incites my heart without  
 hindrance to the whale's path, over the open sea.)

The kennings 'hwæles eþel' (whale's home) and 'hwælweg' (whale's path) are metaphors which refer to the sea. They are representative of a much larger sea kenning tradition which draws on a variety of different animals who inhabit the sea.<sup>66</sup> Kennings work by taking two elements — in this case the whale and the pathway — and compounding them in order to provoke the reader/listener to discover the metaphorical link between the two.<sup>67</sup> Jones (2006: 66) notes that 'the kenning is a radiant node, from, through, and into which the reader's intelligence must rush to make the necessary bridges.' The reader must enter into the perspective of the whale in order to bridge the gap between *hwælweg* and *weg* and arrive at the answer of *sea*. Through the use of the kenning *hwælweg* the poem,

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65 Ms. *onweal weg*. See Klinck (1992: 81).

66 Other animals in the sea kenning tradition include birds (particularly swans) and fish.

67 See O'Donoghue (2010: 66) and Jones (2006: 66)

therefore, moves the reader more deeply into the environment it is constructing than may appear on the surface. Although kennings are a common feature of Old English poetry, they have the effect of provoking the reader/listener to think *in* that environment in order to understand the text. In the above passage from *The Seafarer*, the kenning *hwæl weg* (whale's path) indicates a transition from coastal ecosystem to deeper water. It is at this point that references to exile cease within the text; *hwæl weg* takes the place of *wræclastas* (exile's path). This not only suggests changes in the environment, but suggests that deeper open water (the home of the whales) is not connected with exile in the same way as the coastal ecosystem. It is also important to note here the absence of apposition, which further supports a disconnection between open/deep ocean and the motif of exile. Apposition is another extremely common feature of Old English poetry, occurring several times in *The Seafarer*.<sup>68</sup> If the deep ocean, figured in this context as *hwæl weg*, was connected to exile in the same way as that of the coastal ecosystem of lines 18-26 of the poem, then it would not be unreasonable to expect these two concepts to appear in apposition. While the absence of such apposition cannot be said to prove this disconnection, it does add further weight to the argument for more complex constructions of the theme of exile in relation to the environments constructed within these texts.

The evidence which points to the connection between coastal ecosystems and the motif of exile in Old English poetry, strongly suggests that environments are acting as something more ecological than just symbolic within these texts. It also strongly suggests that the various ecosystems constructed within these texts should not be reduced to an homogeneous form such as the

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68 Examples being: 'cearselda fela, / atol yþa gewealc' (care's dwelling-places, terrible tossing of the waves'; 'hean streamas, / sealtyþa gelac' (high streams, tossing waves) (ll. 34b-35a).

term 'Nature' denotes. The consistent use of the idea of pathways and navigation is also crucial to understanding further the extent to which Old English elegy texts construct complex meshwork environments of being within these poetic texts. The notion of a pathway is perhaps the most significant way in which the poems explore the existence of humans as part of the physical world. *The Seafarer*, in particular, draws on the semantic field of navigation in its constructs of environments and human interaction with other objects. While exile is figured as a pathway, closely linked with a coastal ecosystem, and the deeper ocean is presented as the whale's path, this semantic field is also associated with the mind of the seafarer. Line 109 of the poem makes the claim that 'stieran *mon* sceal strongum mode' (a man must steer with a strong mind). This action of steering connects the actions of the seafarer's mind with the physical environments of the coast (exile's path) or the deeper sea (the whale's path). The metaphor of steering the vessel of the mind is associated with the familiar trope of life as a sea voyage, and is found in patristic sources and more widely across the Old English literary corpus (Harbus 2012: 47).<sup>69</sup> The sea, therefore, undeniably has a spiritual significance within both *The Seafarer* and elsewhere within Old English poetry, but this spiritual significance is built from the material qualities and human interaction with these qualities.<sup>70</sup>

The fluidity of water lends itself to metaphors about life, but its viscosity also plays a substantial part. The sea sticks to the seafarer, but at the same time also retreats from him. This sticking and retreating enables the traveler to move

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69 Harbus (2012: 47) notes that almost the exact phrase which appears in *The Seafarer* is also found in *Maxim's I*: 'Styran sceal mon strongum mode' (l.50a)

70 Magennis (1996: 127) also makes a point of noting that the sea in *Beowulf* has no allegorical dimension, demonstrating that the sea, as it appears in Old English poetry, is not exclusively associated with spiritual significance or allegory.

within it, steering his body with his mind, while still never truly experiencing the sea as an object in its entirety.<sup>71</sup> Joy (2013) notes, in reference to both the wanderer and the seafarer, that no matter how much their souls may ‘strive to be loosened from their bodies, those bodies inhere nevertheless in the blue oceanic lines and inky materiality of the poet’s “rustling tenses”.’<sup>72</sup> As noted previously, the sea in Old English poetry is commonly associated with the past, present, and future simultaneously. The ‘rustling tenses’ are conveyed literally in *The Seafarer* through the repeated and ambiguous use of *forþon*. Like stone, the sea is an object which has a longevity far beyond our comprehension. Its scale and constant movement are obvious qualities on which the sea-as-life metaphor draws. Harbus (2012: 49) suggests that it is the sea’s ‘expansive dimensions and directional freedom’ which provide an appropriate metaphor for the depiction of the ‘freewheeling imagination’ in Old English poetry.

Water also triggers the human imagination in the *Stanza Stones* poems. The ‘Rain’ stone concludes:

Let it teem, up here

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71 In a post for his blog, *Larval Subjects*, which discusses the concept of hyperobjects developed by Morton, Levi Bryant uses the analogy of swimming in a pool to explain our interaction with, and experience of, hyperobjects: ‘everywhere the cool water caresses our body as we move through it, yet we are nonetheless independent of the water. We produce affects in the water like diffraction patterns, causing it to ripple in particular ways, and it produces effects in us [...] yet the water and the body are nonetheless two objects withdrawn from one another acting vicariously.’ See <<http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2010/11/11/hyperobjects-and-ooo/>>, post date: 11.11.10.

72 Joy borrows the term ‘rustling tenses’ from a poem by Ben Lerner (2009) entitled *Doppler Elegies*, published in *Jacket* magazine (2009, issue 38).

where the front of the mind  
 distils  
 the brunt of the world. (ll. 19-22)

The verb 'teem' is applied, here, to both the action of the rain and human thoughts, merging the physical qualities of the water with human emotion and intellectual creativity. The use of the term 'distil' also invokes the process of the water cycle: the evaporation of water from the sea and its condensation and then the resulting precipitation. The poem suggests that the specific location of the 'Rain' stone (Cow's Mouth quarry near Littleborough) facilitates the process of human thinking, where the action of walking in places such as this enables human beings to 'distil' their thoughts and think not only on this place, but also on the rest of the 'world'. The poem interacts with the place in which it is carved. The walk to the 'Rain' stone is along part of the Pennine way trail. The poem draws on this idea of walking and movement as key to the interaction between human beings, the rain, the stone, and the other objects constituting this environment. The poem also links rainwater back to the sea.

Be glad  
 of these freshwater tears,  
 each pearled droplet  
 some salty old sea-bullet  
 air-lifted out of the waves,  
 then laundered and sieved,  
 recast as a soft bead  
 and returned. (ll. 1-8)

Like the salt water that is sieved and teems as rain, human beings visit this area in order to experience interactions with different objects/meshworks of objects (human and nonhuman, living and nonliving) to those, perhaps, elsewhere in the surrounding urban environments. Cow's Mouth quarry is a particularly popular place for rock climbers; the physical process of climbing the rocks or walking also allows the opportunity to focus the mind. As the physical vastness of the sea facilitates the imagination in Old English poetry, the physical qualities of the rocks which allow human beings to climb also impact on the human mind. The physical process of climbing and interacting with the rocks focuses the attention of the human being on the materiality of these objects, clearing the mind of thoughts and concerns of life away from these objects and this environment, and facilitating the active processes of imagination.

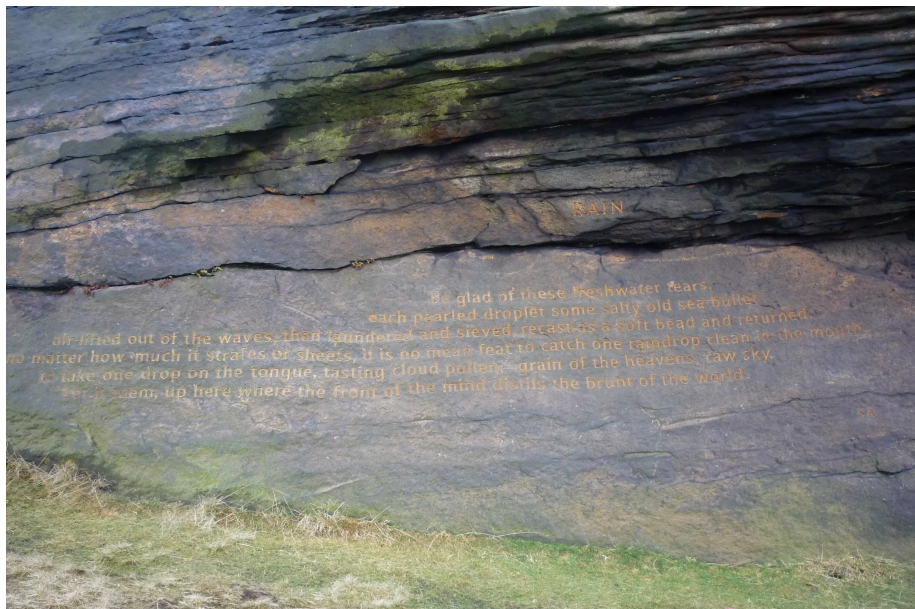


Figure 9: The 'Rain' stone





**Figure 10: Cow's Mouth Quarry**

### **Conclusions: 'Beyond the Chronological Compass'**

This chapter has challenged previous interpretations of environment in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as primarily about the symbolism associated with spiritual ideas. This is not to suggest that spirituality does not play a large part in the interaction between human and nonhuman in these texts, but rather that the material qualities of both human and nonhuman entities are key to the concepts and ideas which the poems explore. This chapter has also indicated that the motifs and themes present in these two Old English poems speak to those of poetry today, not only by way of content and subject matter but through the aesthetics of their poetic conventions. This reveals something incredibly important about the way in which human beings think about the world in which they exist. It emphasises that while worldviews and cultures may shift and change over the course of time, there is something in that way that human beings interact physically and intellectually with nonhumans which carries across the cultural shifts of time. This is particularly emphasised by the way in which human beings interact with objects (such as water and stone) whose existence takes place on timescales much greater than the individual human life.

It is significant, here, to return briefly Bunting's *Briggflatts*, the final section of which contains an invocation of the stars, in a passage that appears to convey the imagery of navigation in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*:

Furthest, fairest things, stars, free of our humbug,  
 each his own, the longer known the more alone,  
 wrapt in emphatic fire roaring out to a black flue.  
 Each spark trills on a tone beyond chronological compass,  
 yet in a sextant's bubble present and firm  
 places a surveyor's stone or steadies a tiller.  
 Then is Now. The star you steer by is gone,  
 its tremulous thread spun in the hurricane  
 spider floss on my cheek; light from the zenith  
 spun when the slowworm lay in her lap  
 fifty years ago. (V, ll. 86-96)

The passage conveys the sense of life as a journey and intertwines the notion of the object of a star as physical object by which to be guided, and the star as metaphor for another human life for which the narrator longs. These two perspectives do not conflict, but rather work together to convey the experience of life in the physical world. This same sense of intertwined meaning can be drawn from both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. Objects (both human and nonhuman) navigate through life on the 'unmappable trajectories' that Joy (2012: 63) describes. The Old English elegies, just like the *Stanza Stones* project, create their own literary ecosystems. These are more than just symbolic of human feeling, and demonstrate a more complex construction than a divided human and

'natural' world. The elegies create their own ecologies of exile, through and in which the characters of the wanderer and the seafarer must interact and navigate. When observed more closely, similar interactions take place in our own human experiences today: in the wandering of the walker experiencing the Stanza Stones, in the semi-biographical constructions of Bunting's *Briggflatts*, haunted by loss and grief, in the constant action and interaction which constitutes existence.

## Conclusions

### ‘Then is Now’ - Basil Bunting, *Briggflatts*

This thesis demonstrates how Anglo-Saxon poetry engages with the ecology of environment – the intricate interactions between human beings and nonhumans on a physical as well as conceptual level – by tracing the interactions between objects. It argues that these poetic explorations of environment continue to resonate in poetic texts today. It also argues that the self-conscious exploration of the technological process of writing emphasises ecological interactions between human and nonhuman objects, whereby agents interact in the formation of literary ecologies. I argue that paying closer attention to the interactions between humans and other objects in twentieth-century poetry brings to the fore intimate connections between past and present. By building on previous work in the field of medievalism which has explored the role of medieval language and culture in postwar poetry, and by engaging with current methodologies of New Materialism, this thesis shapes its own sense of literary ecology, crossing temporal boundaries and boundaries between writing and environment.

The idea of technology is central to this thesis. The semantic analysis of present-day English *technology* and Old English *cræft* in Chapter One provides evidence for how both these terms integrate material and intellectual creativity and interaction; this provides a base for the further exploration of these ideas in the subsequent chapters. By examining the linguistic evidence that Old English *cræft* and Modern English *technology* are semantically similar, this first chapter establishes a connection between the past and the present through the language

of creative processes. Chapter One not only considers the links between Old English *craft* and Modern English *technology*, but also the interaction between the material and the nonmaterial. It suggests that the material and the intellectual work in an intertwined state in creative processes, and must therefore be considered collectively. This establishes a methodology for thinking about the concept of writing, and poetry more specifically, as both a material and intellectual process.

The second chapter builds on this conceptual foundation to consider the concept of writing as it is explored in the poetic medium of the Anglo-Saxon riddles. This chapter acknowledges that while work has begun to tap the connections between Old English poetry and Anglo-Latin literature, Old English texts are still all too often read in isolation from the Anglo-Latin literary corpus. Drawing on recent work which has emphasised and evidenced the connections and interactions between these two bodies of literature, this chapter pushes these connections further to develop a deeper understanding of the interactions, similarities, and differences between these sets of riddle texts. I argue that the scriptorium riddles create literary ecologies which construct dynamic assemblages of interaction between human and nonhuman objects. This chapter challenges anthropocentric Heideggerian notions that humans 'dwell' and 'be' in the world through poetic language. Instead, it argues that an approach to the riddles informed by the methodologies of Actor-Network Theory and by Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome it is possible to read Anglo-Saxon scriptorium riddles as presenting both human beings and nonhumans as acting with agency within these writing assemblages. This chapter critically assesses the limitations of Actor-Network Theory, which is usually considered to be more of a descriptive tool rather than a theory in its own right, developing it to explore

how the riddle genre creates and constructs these assemblages through processes of simultaneously revealing and obscuring the actors involved. The theoretical frameworks offered by Actor-Network Theory and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome suggest a more dynamic approach to the analysis of these networks, encouraging the development of less linear and hierarchical conceptualisations of environment.

Having investigated how the Anglo-Saxon riddles create their own literary ecologies of the interactions between objects which form assemblages of writing, the thesis turns in Chapter Three to examining how poetic engagement with objects and assemblages can relate across time. The theoretical frameworks established in Chapter Two are developed further in this third chapter to consider alternatives to linear conceptions of time in the development of literary ecologies. This chapter considers the work of Heaney, Bunting and Hill, and the way in which their poetry engages with the past through the interaction between objects and the ground. It is argued that while each of the poets is interested in the ability of objects to trigger an interaction with the past, they construct these interactions in differing ways, through the environs of their poetry. The chapter demonstrates how Heaney's work engages with the past through the idea of archaeology; the ground is excavated for objects which trigger movements into the past. The interdisciplinary impetus in Anglo-Saxon studies to bring together archaeological and textual evidence has been strong – Heaney's work is indeed a reflex of this – but scholars have nevertheless struggled to create a really productive dialogue between relics of Anglo-Saxon material culture and poetry. My work on Heaney explores new ways to develop such an argument. I argue that, for Heaney, objects and poetic language can intertwine to trigger a movement into the past. Heaney's work taps into the Old English poetic notion

of the *wordhord*, whereby language is conceptualised as a hoard inside the breast or as a kenning for the mind. Opening up this notion of the *wordhord*, I explore the interaction between language and materiality implied by the concept of the hoard and by the idea of hoarding more generally. The hoarding of treasure is a common motif in Old English poetry which has received much previous discussion, but much of this has centred on the human emotions hoards evoke and their symbolic value within the poetry. I argue that while hoards and hoarding in Old English poetry certainly carry symbolic weight, in order to fully appreciate their function, it is necessary to appreciate how Old English poetic texts also explore the nonhuman agency of objects associated with hoard assemblages. The thesis scrutinises the archaeological aspects of Heaney's poetry. While the medieval influence on Heaney's poetry has been a frequent topic of discussion, approaching his work through a critical dialogue rather than a simple source study allowed for more rigorous examination of the archaeological metaphors, contexts and references at work in his poetry.

Chapter Three also examines how Hill's *Mercian Hymns* uses objects to forge a dialogue with the past. The analysis of *Mercian Hymns* demonstrates that while the poems do, at times, adopt similar archaeological motifs to those of Heaney's work, the objects of Hill's poems tend to exercise their own agency by winding their way to the surface. I explore how Hill builds a literary ecology based on the bioregion of Anglo-Saxon Mercia (or the West Midlands of today), but one that is varied in its sense of temporality. I argue that *Mercian Hymns* constructs the activity and process of hoarding and the assemblages of hoards in a way which speaks to that of the hoard motif in Old English poetry. These similarities extend not only to interactions between human beings and hoarded objects, but also the role of the ground itself. Chapter Three also explores how

Bunting's *Briggflatts* constructs these interactions, in ways which differ again to those of Heaney and Hill. I argue that language and sound play a key role in not only how Bunting connects with the past, but also how he constructs the interactions between human beings and nonhumans with *Briggflatts*. To a greater extent than the work of Heaney, and even that of Hill, *Briggflatts* engages with objects on the surface of the ground. The final section of Chapter Three examines how Bunting constructs a series of bioregions through the interaction between objects and language across time. I argued that it is this interest in language and sound which allows Bunting to construct his own literary ecology which quite literally 'speaks across time'.

Examining the idea of hoards and hoarding in dialogue with the work of Heaney, Bunting and Hill alongside that of Old English poetry (specifically the Exeter Book riddles and *Beowulf*) reveals the agency of nonhuman as well as human actors in these networks of objects, and offers a new perspective on the hoard motif. These insights demonstrate that these poetic texts can not only speak and have relevance to one another across their temporal distance, but also that reading them in conversation with one another can provide insights into both sets of texts. This chapter explores how objects, human beings and the ground (and its constituent parts and inhabitants) interact within the poetry of Heaney, Hill and Bunting, to form their own literary ecologies constructed through the poetry.

The fourth chapter examines in greater detail the poetic connections between past and present, and how poetry can construct its own literary ecologies around the idea of human/nonhuman interactions and object networks of a specific locality. This chapter explores further Hill's *Mercian Hymns*, alongside Simon Armitage's little studied (2007) translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green*



*Knight*. This chapter investigates the concept of translation, suggesting that Armitage's version of *Gawain* engages in a more dynamic retelling of the story than is perhaps conveyed by the term 'translation'. Armitage engages poetically with the language of his own locality (that of West Yorkshire) and actively tries to construct a literary ecology which merges the *Gawain* story with the language of Armitage's own locality and the materiality of the Pennine bioregion.

Examining Armitage's version of *Gawain* alongside the Anglo-Saxon poetry which is the touchstone of this provides insight into the differing poetic styles regarding the construction of human and nonhuman interaction between Anglo-Saxon and later medieval poetry. This analysis demonstrates that these interactions are constructed in significantly different ways in earlier and later medieval poetry. By bringing these insights to the fore, this chapter demonstrates the usefulness of reading and examining Modern English retellings of medieval narratives as a methodology for gaining further understanding of differences between different medieval literary constructions of human and nonhuman interaction.

Chapter Four also considers how Hill's *Mercian Hymns* presents, in some ways, a similar engagement with the notion of locality to that of Armitage's *Gawain* translation, while also presenting a different construction of dynamic storytelling and translation. While Armitage seeks to pull *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* into his own locality through linguistic and dialectal connections between his poetic language and the physical objects of the Pennine bioregion, the literary ecology constructed by *Mercian Hymns* is itself documented in the physical objects of Hill's notebooks. The second section of this chapter takes the material evidence of Hill's notebooks as its source material, and demonstrates how engaging with the material objects of Hill's draft material can provide insights

into his construction of human/nonhuman interactions which would otherwise not be identifiable. I examine the 'collage effect' created by Hill's research process, which is then poetically recreated in the form of the *Mercian Hymns* text. I argue that the bioregion which Hill (alongside other human figures who are referenced in his research) inhabits plays a key active role in the construction of the literary ecology formed in *Mercian Hymns*. In a similar way to Armitage, it is the merging of language and the physical entities and interactions which take place in his locality which combine to form the ecology of *Mercian Hymns*. Key to this chapter is the argument that postwar medievalism has begun to move away from ideas of nationalism, to associate connections between the medieval with a sense of localism. Through this process, both Armitage and Hill create dynamic literary geographies which are formed from the historical presence and interactions of objects, language, and literature from their own specific bioregions. This chapter explores how literary ecologies and literary geographies have the potential to politicise soil in order to both construct or deconstruct ideas of nationalism. This demonstrates the potential for literary ecologies to be politically charged in additional ways to environmentalism

Developing from, and informed by, the insights provided by the preceding chapters, the final chapter analyses how material and literary ecologies mix, in both Old and modern English poetry. The previous four chapters explore the interactions between humans and nonhumans and the way that poetic language and the physical processes of writing inform the formation of these literary ecologies. Chapter Five takes the idea of the interaction between the material and the poetic further, and examines how literary ecologies can be constructed both on and off the page. This chapter argues that the physical interactions between humans and nonhumans which form the ecologies of the

Old English elegies (specifically *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*), present remarkably similar interactions to those explored within certain materially engaged poetry of today. This chapter explores the interactions which take place in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* alongside the recent Yorkshire *Stanza Stones* project. The nonhuman in Old English elegies is often treated as the homogenised concept of ‘the natural world’, as previous studies have tended to focus on the idea of environment as a reflection of the human state of mind. This final chapter uses material, environmental poetry of today to demonstrate how the texts of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are exploring similar interactions. This challenges the idea that the environment in these texts acts as a reflection of the human mind, and instead argues that the poems construct a meshwork of interactions between human and nonhuman objects of the text. These interactions speak across time to the poetry and stone work of Armitage’s *In Memory of Water*, providing insights into the way that human beings interact with other objects across timescales much greater than a human life span. This chapter brings together the concepts of technology, material objects (both human and nonhuman), the physicality of writing, and the intellectual creativity of the poetic text to demonstrate how literary ecologies are not only constructed and contained within the lines of texts, but can also leak out into the material world, providing new potential for object interaction.

### **Challenges and Future Directions**

These chapters collectively explore the interaction between material and literary ecologies. The thesis argues that Old English poetry constructs more varied and ecological interactions between human beings and nonhumans than has previously often been suggested. Methodologically, the thesis engages with the

concept of literary ecologies and has been informed by the critical field of ecocriticism. It also explores intersections between ecologically-oriented literary study and the methodologies of several approaches which are associated with the concept of New Materialism. Across the five chapters, I examine how poetic texts can engage with the material world in a variety of different ways, many of which have not been recognised in previous work, and how these interactions can speak across time, informing our understanding of the way in which human beings interact with other objects. This thesis also demonstrates how reading Old English poetry alongside twentieth/twenty-first-century work can not only inform further understanding of Old English constructions of environment, but also help to shape the notion of literary ecology itself.

This thesis builds on a current emergent area of research in medieval studies which is interested in and engaged with the idea of exploring more material aspects of environment in Old English poetry, but it also adds new direction to this work by engaging with interactions between human beings and nonhumans across time. It challenges the boundaries of study in medievalism, to suggest that the ecological interactions constructed within medieval poetic texts can often speak to those of poetry today, whether it is poetry which engages directly with the medieval or not. Medievalism, therefore, is an important area of research which can both contribute to and be developed by the methods and insights provided by this thesis. In this thesis, I focus on the role of poetry in exploring the insights provided by medievalism; the age of the poetic medium has allowed me to compare and contrast texts across time. Medievalism, however, is diverse in the mediums in which it is active. The popularity of film and computer games in mainstream entertainment culture make them particularly fruitful area for further exploration of the ways in which we reimagine the

interactions between human beings and nonhumans in a medieval context, and how these reimaginings sit alongside our own interactions with our environments today.

Being able to identify moments of convergence, where poetic texts can talk to one another across time, and seem to be presenting similar methods and experiences of interaction between human beings and other objects, has significant impact for both the way we might read the environment in early medieval poetry, and also for the way in which we view our own interactions with other entities today. In this way, this thesis works to shape a different kind of ecologically-oriented analysis, one that is sensitive to communications between objects not just in a specific place but also across spaces and times. It pushes Chisholm's ideas of 'literary ecologies' further, suggesting that the 'sensations and figures' which poetry can create can go beyond the page and beyond passive analysis. Through the formation of literary ecologies and an understanding of those created in literature historically, poetry can be mobilised politically to actively explore and engage in interactions which help us to understand our position in the world, and adjust the way in which we engage with other objects with which we cohabit, locally and globally. This thesis demonstrates how understanding literary ecologies can draw our awareness to the way in which poetry can contribute to the building of ideologies (such as nationalism) within which we may become entangled, though not always consciously.

This also thesis challenges some of the philosophical models on which aspects of ecopoetics have been built. Heidegger's conceptualisations of 'being and dwelling in the world' and the 'saving power' of poetry have proven problematic but have still previously dominated ecocritical scholarship. Many of Heidegger's ideas regarding 'being and dwelling' originate from his own sense of

medievalism. This thesis uses the interaction between medieval literature and culture, medievalism, and wider ideas of human and nonhuman interaction today to provide alternative arguments for the role of poetry in relation to environmental issues to those of Heidegger. Rather than acting as a voice for so called 'Nature', this thesis has argued for a more dynamic, interactive and non-hierarchical interaction between poetry and other entities. Poetry can act both as a medium through which environments can converse, meet, and exist across time, and also a medium through which new interactions between things are forged. Arguing for, and evidencing, the potential of poetry in this way shapes an ecocritical approach which diverges from the more traditional lines of ecopoetic thinking.

This thesis has not just sought to 'apply' the critical frame work of ecocriticism to Anglo-Saxon literary texts; rather, it has engaged with materiality and poetry and developed a methodology for using the interaction between the two as a way to gain further understanding of the interaction between human beings and nonhumans historically, alongside those of today. This research has the potential to be developed through further engagement with Anglo-Saxon material objects, in particular the Ruthwell cross and Franks Casket.<sup>1</sup> I briefly discussed the reading of these objects in Chapter Five, but there is scope for further work exploring both the interaction between text and image, the networks of interactions involved in the making and experiences of these objects, and how the materials from which they were constructed shape how they are experienced across time.

My own previous research has examined the way in which object voices

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1 This would resonate with the work on 'place' in the Ruthwell cross in Orton, Wood and Lees (2007).

are constructed through riddle texts and inscriptions on artefacts.<sup>2</sup> This work, alongside research in medieval environmental studies, has the potential to provide useful and important research which could inform further studies related to poetic engagement with the material world. A key area of research which could speak to future work is the study of ekphrasis. Work in this area contemplates the interactions between the thought processes, poetic description, and material objects.<sup>3</sup> Such work would be useful to studies of literary construction of environment not only in Anglo-Saxon literature but also of related literary cultures such as that of Old Norse or maybe even medieval Hebrew or Arabic.<sup>4</sup>

The difficult yet potentially extremely fruitful study of the relationship and interaction between literary and archaeological studies has been particularly important to my methodology. Where possible, this thesis has reached out into archaeological, historical, and environmental study. This work contributes not only to each of these fields individually but demonstrates the insights which can be gained from engaging with other areas of research alongside that of literary studies. Working in this way provides readings of Anglo-Saxon environment in poetic texts which are more in tune with the everyday interactions between human beings and nonhumans. This facilitates readings which acknowledge both the spiritual or symbolic and the material aspects of the construction of human and nonhuman interaction in Anglo-Saxon poetic texts. It prevents circular readings whereby Anglo-Saxon worldviews are evidenced by literary texts and then reread into the same body of literature, and instead examines the movements between overarching religious doctrine and worldviews and the

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2 See Price (2010).

3 See specifically the work of Olsen (2009).

4 See Yehuda HaLevi riddles in Cole (2007).

everyday interactions between human and nonhuman. The limitations of such cross-disciplinary work in regard to this thesis, however, must also be acknowledged. The scope of this thesis and my own disciplinary training has to some extent imposed its own limitations. However, further collaboration with colleagues working in other areas of research would no doubt increase the potential of such cross-disciplinary work and is a natural direction in which work on literary studies of environment is currently progressing and should continue to progress. While developing collaborative work with these areas of study would almost certainly yield further important insights into constructions of environment, it would also face similar problems to those which this thesis has come up against. Perhaps most significant is the tension which arises from attempting to produce more ecologically-oriented readings of texts and/or physical objects crafted by human beings, while also being aware that human creativity has played a significant role in their production. This thesis has tried to tackle this problem by embracing the human creativity of poetry, while also suggesting that constructions of environment created within and by the poems examined are also collaborative works, which are as much a product of the agency and qualities of nonhumans as they are of the human mind.

Much of the theoretical work outlining approaches in the field of New Materialism has been dedicated to the development of terminology which more accurately conveys the sense of non-hierarchical interaction which this thinking advocates and strives to both achieve and promote. This thesis adds its own small contribution to this ongoing terminological work by challenging the use of terms such as 'the natural world', particularly in relation to medieval literary studies. Its work in this area has not just been about terminology, but has argued that the use of such terminology has developed boundaries which, in turn, have been



imposed on the texts of study. The use of such terminology has had significant impact, particularly in terms of Old English, on the way in which environment has been read as either an antithetical concept to that of human culture or as a symbolic reflection of aspects of human thought or feeling. Breaking down this terminology has enabled me to suggest new methods of approaching the construction of environment in medieval poetic texts.

I have, however, also faced my own terminological problems over the course of this thesis, particularly surrounding the term 'environment'. I have been conscious to ensure that the word 'environment' does not simply act as a replacement term for 'Nature' or 'the natural world'. The word 'environment', in this thesis, has been used to refer to all entities in a specific system or network of interactions. I have used the term 'environment' to assist in the movement away from the sense of a nature/culture dualism, and this movement is developed further by the notion of literary ecologies. The concept of literary ecologies describes the process whereby literature can form its own connections with other material entities, in order to form new ecological interactions. This thesis has presented a methodology for considering and exploring the world around us in a way which thinks in terms of timescales outside of our own human lifespans. The five chapters of this thesis have examined the diverse and dynamic interactions which take place, encompassing human literary/poetic creativity and material actors. It has argued for poetry as one way in which we can try to understand these diverse and dynamic interactions across significant timespans.

### **Where Now?**

Understanding and developing work which engages with medieval literature in conversation with poetry of today is crucial to developing a less teleological view

of the interaction between humans and nonhumans across time. I do not wish to suggest that allegory and symbolism are not present in Anglo-Saxon poetry, nor that Anglo-Saxon poetic texts exploit symbolic constructs of the nonhuman in the same ways as poetry today. Cultural contexts play a large part in the formation of these poetic constructs, and are certainly, therefore, intertwined with cultural change across time. This thesis, however, has been interested in the materiality of environment as it is constructed, explored, and engaged in poetic interaction. While human behaviour changes over time, as do environments and the other objects which constitute them, the physical qualities of objects often change and develop on different timescales to those of our own human lives and cultures. Being able to engage with the material and ecological aspects of Anglo-Saxon poetry, while also appreciating the presence and significance of symbolism and allegory, provides a method of examining these texts which is in tune with the similarities between our interactions with our environment today and those of Anglo-Saxon people. Reading in this way challenges, for example, the way that we interpret the much studied, and, for the twentieth century, poetically influential, Old English poem *The Wanderer*. While we may acknowledge the early Christian symbolic meaning of the sea as representative of earthly transience and therefore a reflection of a particular Anglo-Saxon worldview that may or may not resonate with those present in our own lives, reading more closely the ecological aspects of the poem reveals experiences and interactions which can speak to our own – and which can help us to understand the poem’s diachronic appeal. As the wanderer stirs the sea with his hands (literally or metaphorically by rowing) he interacts with its fluidity, its coldness, its wateriness, and the sounds and words of the poem also become actors in this interaction. When we place our hands in the sea today, we experience these same

physical and sensory qualities, while we may choose to interpret this interaction and those qualities in varying symbolic and emotive ways, the physical qualities resonate with those expressed in the lines of *The Wanderer*. Likewise, when Armitage's 'Mist' poem muses on the effect of the evaporated water 'veiling the pulsing machines / of great cities', the constituent parts of those cities may differ from those of Anglo-Saxon England, but the veiling effect of water, its physical ability to surround you, yet at the same time remain permeable, are the same qualities which create similar ecological interactions in both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. We can, therefore, engage with the materiality of the past not just through physical material objects, but also through the poetic exploration and engagement with these objects and environments. Poetry is not just a voice standing at the end or edge of what is often thought of as 'Nature', speaking for it, reminding us that we as human beings can and must 'save the world' through the acknowledgement of this/these voice(s). It is a thing which, like all things, is constantly interacting in a network of other things. It forges its own interactions with human beings and nonhumans alike, creating a network of human intellectual creativity, physical creativity, communication and exchange between the actants in an ecological system.

This thesis argues for a different way of thinking about the construction of environment in Anglo-Saxon literature. It also suggests that reading Anglo-Saxon poetic texts alongside those of British postwar poetry allows us to think more critically about how the poetry of today conceptualises the past. I have explored the differences between these chronologically distant bodies of work, but have also emphasised their similarities and points of connection. Reading poetry from a more ecologically-oriented perspective means tuning into the interactions between all things, and understanding the way that texts create their

own literary ecologies through the interactions between humans and nonhumans in both the technological and intellectual processes of producing poetry and in the content of those poetic texts themselves. This thesis has interrogated previous ideas regarding the role of poetry in saving the world, particularly regarding ideas of eco-poetics developed from the philosophies of Heidegger. Instead, I have suggested that alternative models exist which indicate methods through which poetry promotes, facilitates, and forges less hierarchical and destructive ways in which human beings interact with nonhumans. The merging of spiritual, scientific, and technological models of knowledge which are embodied in the Anglo-Saxon riddles provide a model for an engagement between science and art which draws awareness to the specific objects which form the network of any object, the place of human beings within that network, and wider networks with which those actants interact; the motif of hoards and hoarding promotes the agency of nonhuman objects; the building of literary geographies enables poetry to reveal and challenge the way that power structures can utilise the interaction between human and nonhuman in reference to specific places; and the points of connection between the Old English elegies and poetry which is produced in forms other than just on the page, demonstrate certain fundamental feelings and sensations experienced by human beings in contact with certain nonhuman objects, which speak across extensive timespans.

This thesis aims to challenge the way that we read interactions between human beings and nonhumans in both Anglo-Saxon poetry and the poetry of today, but it also aims to address the place of poetry in a time of anthropogenic crisis. Ecocriticism has done much for this cause so far, as has been discussed extensively at various points throughout this thesis, but rethinking the concept of eco-poetics as a rhizomatic, interactive and creative process between human and

nonhuman, and how this might differ from the problematic concept of poetry 'speaking for nature', derived largely from Heideggerian philosophies, pushes our understanding of the active potential of poetry further. Poetry can be a medium through which we as human beings do not try to speak *for* Nature, but rather speak *with* and *to* all things.

Bruno Latour ponders in *Reassembling the Social*: 'where should we start? As always, it is best to start in the middle of things, *in medias res*' (Latour, 2005: 140); but this 'middle' is where this thesis ends. In order to think about the construction of environment in Anglo-Saxon poetry, we must remember that it is, like all poetry, inherently intertwined with the physical world. If we are truly to understand the potential which poetry has for 'saving the world', then we must embrace thinking in this way, not in one time or another but across times, in amongst communications and interactions; in the middle of things.

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