Performance in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Imagination

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Declaration of the Author

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Steven John Alan Breeze

Abstract

This thesis proposes a distinct, poetic conception of 'artistry' (the collective term incorporating performer, performance, and musical instrument used in the thesis) in early medieval England. Through stylistic and aesthetic analysis of Old English poetry, informed by oral-formulaic and post-oral-formulaic theory, and theoretical strands such as Peter Clemoes on the relationship between thought and language and Michael Drout on tradition, the thesis accepts that representations of artistry are principally idealised, generalised, symbolic constructs. They reveal concepts significant in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination. Cultural understanding of artistry is expressed in wisdom poems from the period, and reflected in narrative poems. In *Beowulf*, artistry is shown to be intrinsic to the poem's construction, interperformativity, and narrative cultural contexts. In addition to brief, oblique depictions, in which singing and harp-playing is commonly referred to, the dominant type of artistry is storytelling. The thesis thus challenges the primacy typically afforded the 'oral poet', questioning the supposition that the poems routinely represent the performance of analogous poetic material.

Idealisation is challenged in non-poetic material, indicating that the significance and popularity in society of the kinds of secular artistry represented in poetry is influencing Anglo-Saxon cultural behaviour, leading to admonition among certain members of the clergy. The extant literature of a closely related culture, Old Norse Eddic poetry, does not contain such representation, which appears unique to the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination in the early medieval period. After the demise of Old English poetic form, aspects of this this distinct representation lingered, a sub-tradition of which is discernible in Laȝamon's *Brut*. Artistry in post-Conquest poetry is disconnected from a poem's wider narrative events and its architectonics. It becomes a crystallised, formulaic component with routinised referentiality, partly the result of the transition from oral to textual transmission. Artistry becomes a tradition of the archaising, retrospective poetic imagination.

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Abbreviations

ANQ: *American Notes and Queries*

ASNSL: *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*

ASPR: The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. by G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, 6 vols (New York, NY: Columbia, 1931-1953)

CLAMS: London Centre for Late Antique & Medieval Studies

DOE: *The Dictionary of Old English: A to H* online, ed. by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2016) <https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/>

EETS: Early English Text Society (o.s.: Original Series, s.s.: Supplementary Series)

EHR: *The English Historical Review*

ELH: *English Literary History*

FMLS: *Forum for Modern Language Studies*

JEGP: *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*

MED: *The Middle English Dictionary* online (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013)

MLR: *Modern Language Review*

MLQ: *Modern Language Quarterly*

NGD: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie, 20 vols (London: Macmillan, 1980)

OED: *The Oxford English Dictionary*

PMLA: *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America*

RES: *The Review of English Studies*

RGA: *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*

SCA: Society for Creative Anachronism

TSSL: *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*

VPAE: Vaughan Papers in Adult Education

VSNR: Viking Society for Northern Research

Tables

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Figure 1: Jubal playing a frame harp, from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11.

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Figures 3 and 4 are reproduced from Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology: Sutton Hoo and Other Discoveries* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1974), plates 39 and 40 respectively.

Poem Titles, Orthography, Editions, and Translations

Titles of all Old English poems are taken from the ASPR.

Unless stated otherwise, all translations of Old English are my own.

Unless stated otherwise, all passages of Old English poetry follow the orthographic conventions in the ASPR, ed. by G.P. Krapp and Elliott V. K. Dobbie (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1931-1953), except those from *Beowulf*, which follow *Klaeber's* Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, ed. by R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008), diacritics omitted.

All Old English riddle numbers follow the convention in *The Exeter Book*, ASPR III, ed. by G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1936).

Unless stated otherwise, all Old Norse Eddic poetry and its translation is taken from Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, in three volumes: *Volume I: Heroic Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), *Volume II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), *Volume III: Mythological Poems II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011). The numbering of stanzas also follows Dronke's edition.

All translations from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are from *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), and *The* Odyssey *of Homer*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967).

All passages and translations from Laȝamon's *Brut* are from *Laȝamon: Brut, or, Hystoria Brutonum*, ed. by W.R.J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg (Harlow: Longman, 1995).

Line references to *The Canterbury Tales* are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Chapter 1 - Introduction: Aims, Scope, and Methods

The introductory section of the Old English Exeter Book poem *The Order of the World*, which provides moral guidance by encouraging awareness of the evidence of God's creations, stresses the importance of being able to impart knowledge through song or storytelling. The narrator believes this skill to have been common in the past, but now to be a dying art:

> Wilt þu, fus hæle, fremdne monnan,
> wisne woðboran wordum gretan,
> fricgan felageongne ymb forðgesceaft,
> biddan þe gesecge sidra gesceafta
> cræftas cyndelice cwichrerende,
> þa þe dogra gehwam þurh dom godes
> bringe wundra fela wera cneorissum!
> Is þara anra gehwam orgeate tacen,
> þam þurh wisdom woruld ealle con
> behabban on hreþre, hycgende mon,
> þæt geara iu, gliwes cræfte,
> mid gieddingum guman oft wrecan,
> rincas rædfæste; cuþon ryht sprecan,
> þæt a fricgende fira cynnes
> ond secgende searoruna gespon
> a gemyndge mæst monna wiston. (1-16)

Will you, willing man, welcome the stranger, give words of greeting to the wise seer, question the far-wanderer about the first creation, ask that he speak of the spacious creations, of their life-renewing natural powers which every day, through God's power, bring many wonders to the race of men! Each is a sign, a clear symbol to one who through wisdom holds the world fully in his mind's grasp, the man contemplating that which in time past, through musical skill, men often expressed with compositions, those resolute; what these men could rightly speak, best of mankind, who always inquire, understood fully, and always had most in mind: the web of mysteries.[1]

Craig Williamson quotes and translates the first seven lines of *The Order of the World* in the first epigraph to his recent monumental translation of the entire Old English poetic corpus, surely chosen because they allude to one of the fundamental concerns of Anglo-Saxon poetry and its creators: communication among men by means of

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[1] Translation adapted from Bernard F. Huppé, *The Web of Words: Structural Analyses of the Old English Poems: Vainglory, the Wonder of Creation, the Dream of the Rood, and Judith* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1970), p. 29.

performing artistry, particularly concerning the ultimate creator, God, His work, and the fate that He ordains.[2]

In *The Order of the World*, the narrator asks his addressee, whom he describes as a *fus hæle*, 'striving man', 'willing man', to welcome and ask questions of a *wis woðbora.* This 'wise bearer of *woð*' ('poetry', 'song', or 'eloquence'), has knowledge of the Creation together with other *wundra*, 'wonders', 'marvels', and *gieddingas*, 'lyrics', and an ability to communicate this wisdom. The narrator then states that in previous ages, musician-storytellers expressed such knowledge through *gliwes cræft*, 'musical skill'.[3] These figures are perceived of as belonging to a former time, and their present scarcity means that the knowledge and ability they held is now highly valued. Critically, it is through the communication through performance of knowledge concerning *searoruna gespon*, the 'web of mysteries', that we can endeavour to propagate, and understand, the wonder of God's creations.

The first purpose of this thesis is to argue that in Old English poems, artistic performers, together with their performances, are regularly represented in ways similar to that of the *woðbora* in *The Order of the World*. That is, they are complex constructions, often depicted nebulously and in an idealised manner, and they reflect traditional concepts present in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination. Robert DiNapoli argues that *The Order of the World* 'provides us with the only extended depiction we have of the Anglo-Saxon poet, a depiction compounded of dramatized self-portrait and

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[2] *The Complete Old English Poems*, trans. by Craig Williamson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), p. v.

[3] Huppé translates '*gliwes cræft*' as 'power of harp': Huppé, p. 29, which would suggest an association between vocal performance and harping, and contribute to resolving a crux concerning the use of instruments by different kinds of Anglo-Saxon performer, which is discussed in this thesis. This translation is questionable, however.

a reconstructed memory of the poet's putative forbears in his craft.'[4] Neil Isaacs similarly, and entertainingly, argues that

> this is a poem about a poet talking to a prospective poet about poetry and then creating a sample poem which demonstrates the proper subject for poetry and makes a statement about poetry by using poetic creation as submerged point of reference for the Creator's Creation.[5]

However, the allusion to the *woðbora* is characteristic of the way in which Old English poets often introduce performers. Rather than referring explicitly to a poet, of the kind who produced *The Order of the World* and the rest of the Old English corpus, or a reader of scripture, they suggest something more figurative, intricate and elusive. In many poems, particularly *Beowulf*, this suggestiveness results from the fact that typical rather than individual performances are often described. It is also a consequence of the nature of the Old English language as it is applied creatively in poetry: equivocal, economical, comprising creative ambiguity, and inviting diverse interpretation, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. Such a style reflects the fact that performers and their performances carry fundamental yet often enigmatic cultural associations for Old English poets. This is particularly the case in relation to a representation of the past, often part-historical, part-legendary, which is a common preoccupation of their poems; artistry and its performers are represented as being an idealised aspect of such quasi-history. Additionally, performers are regularly shown to have a social role, though they are not always given a specific linguistic identifier in relation to that role. The ability and knowledge that they hold, which is required to perform effectively, is often emphasised, whereas precise detail regarding performance practice is not. The assumption of DiNapoli and Isaacs that poetry is necessarily the performance mode of concern in *The Order of the World* ignores the references to storytelling and music, the

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[4] Robert DiNapoli, 'The Heart of the Visionary Experience: *The Order of the World* and its Place in the Old English Canon', *English Studies*, 79:2 (1998), 97-108 (p. 97).
[5] Neil D. Isaacs, *Structural Principles in Old English Poetry* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1968), p. 71.

wide semantic ranges of Old English terms relating to artistry, and artistry's diversity in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination. Such views exemplify the implicit understanding that poetry necessarily contains within it representations of its own medium, an assumption that should be questioned. Moreover, artistry in the poetry is vital and integral; just as the performers alluded to in *The Order of the World* are shown to be important both for the flourishing of society and for disseminating understanding, so artistry in general is essential for the successful operation of societies within poetic depictions and narratives. This method of idealised, associative representation continued in rather more uniform manner after the end of the Anglo-Saxon period in texts such as Laȝamon's *Brut*, a quasi-historical chronicle of Britain written in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, which will be considered in Chapter 8.

In the narrative poem *Beowulf*, which contains the most detailed and multiform depictions of secular artistry in the Old English poetic corpus, such symbolic representations operate in complex ways. However, *Beowulf* is not the sole store of such representation, and artistry can be seen as both a theme and a meme in the Old English corpus, comparable for example with the 'beasts of battle' theme.[6] The artistry theme often appears in the narrative space between perilous encounters, situated among other signs of belonging and pleasure, such as feasting and drinking, gift giving, and other ritual and entertainment.[7] As will be shown, such episodes also appear in poems outside the Old English poetic tradition, including Laȝamon's *Brut*. However, whereas artistry is a relatively routine and uniform component in the *Brut*, the artistry theme does not function solely as an isolated, formulaic element in *Beowulf*, in which artistry introduces narrative sections and events, and associates them, acting as a concatenating

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[6] 'Theme', 'meme', and other terminology relating to oral-formulaic theory is discussed from p. 31.

[7] For analysis of the components of the feast in Old English poetry, see Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 60-103.

device enabling the association of at times disparate, digressive narrative elements. Some of this interconnectedness can be seen as what Ward Parks defines as 'interperformativity', which 'comprehends those dimensions of a performance residing in its relationship with other performances'.[8] Through digressive stories, Parks argues, 'the *Beowulf*-poet situates his story of Beowulf in a world of songs'.[9] Artistry also initiates plot development, for example when it initiates Grendel's wrath (86-88).

The second purpose of this thesis is to argue that a change of focus is needed. Given that literature, especially poetry, is the product of creative action, having a close relationship with the imagination as well as cultural thought, it is surprising that consideration of artistic performance episodes in poems as a stylistic category has been overlooked in favour of attempts at historical understanding; poetic material has commonly been used as evidence concerning cultural practices. DiNapoli's attempt to discern information about the Anglo-Saxon poet from *The Order of the World* is typical of this critical direction. Margaret Clunies Ross argues as recently as 2016 that the performing *þegn* in *Beowulf* is an alliterative poet of the Germanic tradition, and that the passage describing him, considered from p. 148, can 'tell us a good deal at second-hand about the role of [alliterative] poetry in early Germanic-speaking societies.'[10] However, an analysis focusing on the creative aspects of representation can be a productive alternative to an anthropological approach which attempts to deduce historical truths from a poetry often oriented away from contemporary realities into pre- or pseudo-history, into gnomic statement, or into symbolic idealism, addressing matters such as the heroic code, and philosophical concerns such as contemplation of transience and loss. The representation of artistry in this poetry tells us little about Anglo-Saxon

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[8] Ward Parks, 'Interperformativity and Beowulf', *Narodna Umjetnost*, 26 (1989), 25-35 (p. 26).
[9] Parks, 1989, p. 32.
[10] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 12-32 (p. 13).

performance practices, but reveals much concerning the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination and creativity, particularly the domain of associative meaning within which writers operated. Any examination of artistry should consider this world. The poetic imagination and its creative application may have less tangible properties than historical outward behaviours and norms, but more solid evidence concerning them is to be found in the extant poetic artefacts.

The expression of imaginative conceptions and the operation of symbolism in relation to artistry are particularly significant in *Beowulf*, a poem as concerned with psychological rumination on cultural behaviour as with representing its hero in action. Artistry in the poem reflects this emphasis, presented as it is in such a laconic and equivocal yet suggestive and associative manner. For example, events pertaining to such rumination are often recalled within verbal acts by characters in *Beowulf*, in the form of storytelling speeches. Consequently, some instances of artistry are mediated through the creative articulation of a character's knowledge and memory in performance, helping concurrently to construct the poem's digressive, interlaced character. Analytical focus on poetic technique and creativity is thus useful for interpreting these instances in a manner that avoids reducing them merely to static, crystallised expressions of established and reified cultural memory.

The third purpose of this thesis is to argue that representations of artistry in Old English poems embody a stylistic method which generates semantic relationships between poetic representations of artistry, and wider society and culture as it was envisioned in the poetic imagination. In particular, they possess what John Miles Foley describes as 'traditional referentiality', and alternatively 'metonymic referentiality', which he believes to be a feature of all oral and oral-derived poems.[11] The theory of

[11] John Miles Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 6-8; Foley, 1991, p. xv.

referentiality as developed by Foley is outlined from p. 39. The complexities concerning the extent to which some poems in the Old English poetic corpus were orally circulated before being committed to manuscript has been a significant concern of critics, particularly oral-formulaic theorists, and is a matter for discussion unlikely to be resolved.[12] Yet the style of Old English poetry is such that analysing it using Foley's theory of referentiality can enable greater understanding of the ways in which poetic technique was utilised in the development of associative meaning in the Anglo-Saxon period, whatever the circumstances of a particular poem's origin.

Key to such referential composition is the creative use of Old English poetic language. This thesis considers the language used in the representation of artistry, together with the ways in which linguistic components were employed as literary tools, so as to reveal the way their application by poets signifies the place of performers and their performances in their imaginations. For example, *woðbora* is predominantly a poetic term, featuring in non-poetic material only once, as a gloss for *rethoribus* in the dative plural form *woðborum*.[13] Bernard Huppé translates the occurrence in *The Order of the World* as 'wise seer',[14] though in his commentary he additionally asserts that the term as employed in the poem 'carries all the connotations of the word as it is attested in Old English verse – poet, prophet, astronomer'.[15] As well as being used to describe performers, *woðbora* refers to the prophet Isaiah in the Exeter Book poem *Christ* (302), and also to one who has knowledge of a comet in *The Death of Edgar* (33) from year 975 of the Worcester and Peterborough versions of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

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[12] A useful overview of the formative critical discussion regarding oral origins is Alexandra Olsen, 'Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies', *Oral Tradition*, 1:3 (1986), 548-606 (particularly 550-57).
[13] In London, British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra A III. See Thomas Wright, *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies I*, 2nd edn, ed. by Richard P. Wülcker (London: Trübner & Co., 1884), p. 500.
[14] Huppé, p. 29.
[15] Huppé, p. 36.

(manuscripts D and E). Huppé therefore relied on contextual information, together with the use of the term across the corpus, to discern *woðbora*'s semantic range in poetry. In addition to translating with emphasis upon context and wider application to suggest meaning, it is also fruitful to analyse a word's structure and etymology for information concerning its origin and senses. This is particularly pertinent in relation to compounds, as they can readily provide evidence of the fusion of two concepts in the mind of at least one person, poet or otherwise, from the period. The compound *woðbora* hints at a primary sense: one who 'bears' *woð*. However, *woð*, as with many Old English terms relating to artistry, has multiple meanings: 'sound' or 'noise', but also 'music', 'poetry', 'song', 'voice', or 'eloquence'.[16] Unfortunately therefore a primary meaning cannot be specified in this instance, though support from contextual information can aid interpretation. *Woðbora* could have lost its earlier meaning by the time *The Order of the World* was composed. However, this does not undermine the fact that at some point in the past it was thought that certain individuals had particular knowledge, and the potential to express that knowledge through music, poetry or storytelling - they bore it - and this notion was crystallised into the language. Subsequently, other senses could have been applied to the term, enabling a poet to make creative use of its diverse meanings and associations. Such semantic dispersal is a common characteristic of performance in Old English poetry.

The fourth aim of this thesis involves adopting a comparative approach to consider whether the representation of artistry in the poetry considered in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 can be understood as a conception confined to the Old English tradition and the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination. This comparison is undertaken in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. Chapter 6 considers non-poetic material from the Anglo-Saxon period to determine

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[16] See *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. by Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1882-98), p. 1268.

whether attitudes towards the kinds of performer, performance and instruments that appear in the poetry are reflected in wider Anglo-Saxon culture. Chapters 7 and 8 consider related poetic traditions. A case study of Old Norse Eddic poetry is undertaken in Chapter 7, developing the understanding that, although similar ways of representing artistry exist in various literatures, the certainty of the artistry 'meme-plex' successfully proliferating across traditions is not dependent on their comparable themes or subject matter, or their formal or linguistic similarities.[17] Then, in Chapter 8, the representation of artistry in Laȝamon's *Brut* is analysed to evaluate whether it can be perceived as forming part of an imaginative tradition extending beyond the Anglo-Saxon period. At times the representation of artistry can usefully be seen as an analogous aspect of comparable literary forms or genres, and this thesis suggests that it is a conceptual tool that can cross linguistically-bound literary traditions and types of poetry: there are 'deep associations'. However, the artistry device operates in complex ways, and representation can vary within a tradition and indeed within individual poems. Critics commonly homogenise artistry, and its performers in particular. However, despite attempts to understand the representation of artistry as functioning to indicate a particular view of performers and their performances, its application is manifold, particularly in *Beowulf*, a poem which provides evidence that despite the routine associations artistry often has, a poet can utilise it variously and resourcefully within an individual work.

Contexts

Despite being a comparative study, the principal material studied in this thesis is part of the corpus of vernacular English poetry largely retained in manuscripts dating to

[17] For discussion of the term 'meme-plex', see p. 32.

approximately the turn of the first millennium.[18] This diverse corpus largely exists as the result of what has come to be known as the English Benedictine Reform, which was initiated in the tenth century following reform in Western Europe, flourishing particularly under King Edgar (959-75).[19] Two consequences of the Reform are significant in relation to the Old English poetic corpus. First, it 'regenerated artistic and intellectual activities', as Catherine Cubitt puts it, particularly as a result of changing material and social conditions, along with an emphasis on education within monasteries.[20] This enabled the production of the manuscripts in which almost all extant Old English poetry was committed. The Reform also intensified the relationship between Latin and vernacular writing. The language and associated texts of the Church combined with the intellectual urge to compose manuscripts in Old English, part of the aforementioned renewed importance of education in the culture of Reform. Although the Old English poetic corpus contained diverse subject matter, some of which was likely originally produced and transmitted orally, it was nevertheless committed to manuscript within a culture of textual transmission in monastic contexts.

One significant resultant interrelationship is the development of ties of influence between Old English and Latin poetry. A corpus of Latin Anglo-Saxon poems was produced alongside the vernacular corpus, and some poets and scribes were possibly bilingual.[21] The vernacular corpus was partially the product of a complex linguistic and

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[18] See Gunhild Zimmermann, *The Four Old English Poetic Manuscripts: Texts, Contexts, and Historical Background* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1995).

[19] A brief overview of the Benedictine Reform in England can be found in Michael Lapidge, 'Monasticism', in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes, and Donald Scragg (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 327-29 (pp. 328-29). The key text of the reform was the *Regula S. Benedicti*, which also exists in an Old English translation, the only early medieval vernacular translation. See Mechthild Gretsch, 'Benedictine Rule, OE', in Lapidge et al., pp. 64-65.

[20] Catherine Cubitt, 'The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 6:1 (1997), 77–94 (p. 77).

[21] The Anglo-Latin corpus is outside the scope of this thesis. See Emily V. Thornbury, 'Anglo-Latin Poets (pre-1066), Minor', in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, 4 vols, ed. by Sian Echard and Robert Rouse(Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), I, pp. 105-08;

cultural milieu, and some poems significant to this thesis emerged from such linguistic, literary, and poetic relationships. In some cases they date from earlier than the period of Reform, pointing to the influence of Alfred (871-99) and his concern that the vernacular be used in the recovery of educational standards.[22] For example, the translation of Boethius' prosimetrical *Consolation of Philosophy* into the vernacular was composed between 885 and the middle of the tenth century, meaning that a late date for its composition would place it only at the very beginnings of the English Reform.[23] Moreover, the Old English *The Phoenix* is partially a translation from Lactantius' Latin, though revised in the process of translation and influenced by other sources. Significantly, its allusions to aspects relevant to this thesis: music and performance, are amplified as part of this revision. Despite being contained in The Exeter Book, a significant artefact in the history of the Benedictine Reform, the Old English *Phoenix* was likely composed in the eighth or ninth century.[24] We thus have a corpus of poetry that owes its survival, but not necessarily its composition, to the Benedictine Reform's intellectual culture, particularly the practice of manuscript production.

One possible Latin influence, particularly on *Beowulf*, was Virgil, especially his *Aeneid*. The significance of Virgil within monastic settings means that he could well have influenced vernacular poetry. Campbell argues that 'Virgil was the best known of

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Michael Lapidge, 'The Anglo-Latin Background', in *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, ed. by Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 3-37.

[22] See Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 220-42.

[23] *The Old English Boethius*, 2 vols, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), I, p. 8.

[24] The date of composition of the Old English *Phoenix* is unknown; the eighth and late ninth century have both been proposed. See Carol Falvo Heffernan, 'The Old English "Phoenix": A Reconsideration, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 83:3 (1982), 239-254 (p. 239); Dora Faraci, '*Phoenix*', in Lapidge et al., 2014, p. 372.

all poets in the Anglo-Saxon monasteries'.[25] Andersson sums up the wariness among critics when its influence is considered, even while the cultural circumstances seem to make it likely: '[t]he very act of writing something like a secular epic in the Germanic world seems contingent on Virgil. Yet a really credible case for an imitation of the *Aeneid* has never been made'.[26] A determined formative argument for such influence was made by Frederick Klaeber.[27] Of particular interest in Klaeber's argument is his identification of the relationship between *Beowulf*, 89-98 and *The Aeneid*, I, 740-6,[28] which both contain accounts of a creation myth being performed. Since Klaeber, the Virgil-*Beowulf* connection has been made by numerous critics.[29] An extensive consideration of this connection is outside the scope of this thesis.

Also outside the scope of this thesis is a detailed comparison of Old English poetry, again *Beowulf* in particular, with Homeric epic. It should be noted, however, that the depiction of performers and their performances, especially in *The Odyssey*, bears remarkable similarity to that found in the Old English corpus, particularly *Beowulf* (see below, from p. 143). Critics, particularly the oral-formulaicists, have acknowledged the generic similarity of the works, if only because they apply the same theoretical analysis to them. Although it would be unwise to see classical Greek poetry as a direct

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[25] Alistair Campbell, 'The Use of *Beowulf* in Earlier Heroic Verse', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. by Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 283-92 (p. 283).
[26] Theodore M. Andersson, 'Sources and Analogues', in *A* Beowulf *Handbook*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 125-48 (p. 139).
[27] Frederick Klaeber, 'Aeneis und Beowulf', *ASNSL*, 126 (1911), 40-48, 339-59.
[28] Klaeber, 1911, p. 343. North also discusses the connection between these passages, and notes the critical heritage of comparison: Richard North, *The Origins of* Beowulf*: From Virgil to Wiglaf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 12-13.
[29] The most extensive discussion of the connection is Tom Burns Haber, *A Comparative Study of the* Beowulf *and the* Aeneid (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1931). John Nist rejected the whole notion strongly, if briefly: John Nist, Beowulf *and the Classical Epics*, *College English*, 24:4 (1963), 257-62. An overview of the relevant criticism is Andersson, pp. 138-42; also, more recently, North, 2006, pp. 7-15 (North offers his own discussion and evidence for Virgil's influence: 2006, pp. 66-131 (Chapters 3 and 4)). Alistair Campbell's argument for the influence of Virgil is noted below, p. 213.

context, further study of the stylistic relationship between Old English and Homeric epic together with possible passage of influence, however subtle or indirect, seem appropriate.[30]

Another context that should be acknowledged concerns Old English poetry's form. The remarkable consistency of the corpus' metrical grammar is one aspect, but its relationship with the forms of other traditions is also significant. The rules of Old English poetry derive from Continental poetry of the Anglo-Saxons' ancestors, and are related to the Old Saxon, Old High German, and Old Norse poetic traditions.[31] These traditions all feature the alliterative long line, with relatively minor differences between their respective metrical rules. Given the formal and stylistic relationships, it is reasonable to assume that artistic performance was represented similarly in these traditions. However, Chapter 7 argues that the representation of artistry in Eddic poetry is very different to that in the Old English tradition. Therefore, while the metrical characteristics of Old English provide evidence for its relationship with other poetic traditions, the thematic content of those traditions can differ.

A final context emerges as a result of the consequent influence of Old English poetry's metrics. Chapter 8 argues that Laȝamon's *Brut* shows evidence of influence from the Old English poetic tradition, while the rules of alliteration and line length observed by Old English poets are relaxed. More striking in metrical terms are the poems of the fourteenth century so-called 'alliterative revival'. There seems to be some kind of association between Old English and late medieval alliterative poems. Possibly there was an unbroken tradition of composition and transmission, though this notion is

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[30] For a comparison of *Beowulf* with Homeric epic, mostly an opinion on their relative qualities, see James R. Hulbert, '*Beowulf* and the Classical Epic,' *Modern Philology* 44:2 (1946), 65-75.

[31] For an overview of the form of Old English poetry, and the relationship and differences with its related poetic traditions, see Greenfield and Calder, pp. 122-33. Detailed studies of Old English metre include R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Metre* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Geoffrey Russom, Beowulf *and Old Germanic Metre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Thomas A. Bredehoft, *Early English Metre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

largely seen as improbable. Derek Pearsall observes that we have 28 lines of unrhymed alliterative verse from between *c*1275 and *c*1350, and from c.1350-c.1425 we have more than 40,000, and thus 'something clearly did happen'.[32] What happened is unclear, however. Whether later poets were conscious archaisers, were influenced indirectly by earlier poetry, or were indeed operating in a tradition which had continued, the evidence for which has not been retained, is unclear. Thorlac Turville-Petre questions the idea of a single 'miraculously preserved' tradition inherited by Middle English poets, preferring instead the idea that successive traditions, each with looser metrical regulation, somehow influenced the one after.[33] Thomas Cable meanwhile sees alliteration as a 'superficial feature', convenient for the classification of temporally and culturally disparate works, but not in itself an important, consciously unifying characteristic, not a tradition of which a poet purposefully intended to be a part.[34] While a detailed discussion is outside the scope of this thesis, the post-Anglo-Saxon tradition of the representation of artistry is considered in the Conclusion to this thesis, from p. 302.

Artistry Defined

When analysing the representation of artistry within an Old English poem, it is often not possible to translate relevant words or interpret relevant passages specifically enough to determine a confident understanding of descriptive details, including the characteristics and technique of the performer and the type of performance being depicted. For example, it is frequently unclear whether vocal performances are executed unaided or accompanied by instrumentation, or whether a distinction between sung or spoken

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[32] Derek Pearsall, 'The Origins of the Alliterative Revival', in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981), pp. 1-24 (p. 1).
[33] Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1977), p. 17.
[34] Thomas Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 132-33.

delivery can be drawn. The lack of clarity is exacerbated by the nature of the performing arts. Unless 'performed' in the mind, storytelling, singing and playing an instrument are acoustically-communicated acts, mediated through the body in recital and experienced aurally and visually, inter alia. It is partly because of the impossibility that such intangibility can be translated to the mode of language during the process of being depicted in poetry that descriptive terms relating to artistry are particularly imprecise.[35] For example, line 1063a of *Beowulf* reads *þær wæs sang ond sweg*. This can be translated as 'there was song and music' with little reservation. However, even were this straightforward translation fundamentally acceptable, it is unclear whether the concepts 'song' and 'music' were the same for the poet as they are for a modern reader. Indeed, they are likely not to have been. Modern English 'song' is *sang*'s reflex, but *sang* could refer to something as general as 'noise' or as specific as 'psalm'.[36] Moreover, although certain sections of Anglo-Saxon society had the use of Latin and thus the term *musicus*, Old English, like many world languages, did not have a cognate for Modern English 'music', which entered the language in the Middle English period.[37] A modern reader is thus unable to ascertain with confidence that an Old English identifier for performance refers to a song, story, poem, piece of music, or some combination of these elements.

How a specific performance was undertaken, and how it would have sounded, is even less certain, despite the recent popularity of attempts to recreate medieval performance practices. This point is pertinent both to episodes of artistry within an Old English poem and to the extant oral-derived poems from the poetic corpus. A significant movement has developed which attempts to interpret medieval poetic material and the

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[35] Concerning the equivocal nature of Old English words relating to the product of a performance, albeit focusing on poetry, see Haruko Momma, 'Old English Poetic Form: Genre, Style, Prosody' in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature 500-1150*, ed. by Clare A. Lees (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 278-308 (p. 288).
[36] See below (p. 86).
[37] A development of Anglo-Norman *musike*, derived from Old French *musique*. *OED* [online], 'music, *n.* and *adj.*', <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124108> [accessed 23 May 2016].

artistry depicted in medieval literature and illustration utilising performance poetry, storytelling, music and drama. Additionally, luthiers have reconstructed musical instruments from the period, including reproductions of specific archaeological finds, for research and commercial purposes. A prominent organisation involved in such interpretation is the 'Society for Creative Anachronism' (SCA), which, according to the front page of its website, is 'dedicated to researching and re-creating the arts and skills of pre-17th-century Europe'.[38] Given the lack of concrete evidence concerning performance practices, as argued in this thesis and elsewhere, such re-enactment of Anglo-Saxon artistry relies on a certain amount of conjecture in relation to literary, illustrative and archeological material.[39] The SCA itself acknowledges that it recreates the Middle Ages 'as they ought to have been' rather than as they were.[40]

The modern reader cannot even be sure if poets had a type of performance in mind, for their poems or the episodes of artistry within them, intelligible to an early audience as an intrinsic aspect of their referentiality. After all, even the categorisation of modern genres of performing art is an imprecise exercise. One might recognise 'poetry' when one reads or hears it, for example, yet poetry is not a precisely defined concept, and much literature, art and performance can be described as being 'poetic'. The *OED* offers both general and more specific definitions for the terms 'poet' and 'poetry'. Performers who appear in Anglo-Saxon poetry conform to the general definition for

[38] Society for Creative Anachronism [online], <http://www.sca.org> [accessed 18 July 2016]. See Michael A. Cramer, *Medieval Fantasy as Performance: The Society for Creative Anachronism and the Current Middle Ages* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2010).
[39] Criticism highlighting the lack of evidence include: Roberta Frank, 'The Search for the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 75 (1993), 11-36; Jeff Opland, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: A Study of the Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980).
[40] 'What is the SCA?', Society for Creative Anachronism [online] <http://welcome.sca.org/about/> [accessed 4 September 2017]. Concerning the recreative adaptation of medieval texts, see Benjamin Bagby, '*Beowulf*, the Edda, and the Performance of Medieval Epic: Notes from the Workshop of a Reconstructed "Singer of Tales"', in *Performing Medieval Narrative*, ed. by B. Vitz, N.F. Regalado, and M. Lawrence (Cambridge, Brewer, 2005), pp. 181-92.

poet: ‘an imaginative practitioner of any of the fine arts; a person working with creativity and imagination in any art form’.[41] At times they could additionally exemplify the more specific definition: ‘a writer of verse distinguished by particular insight, inspiration, or sensibility, or by remarkable powers of imagination, creativity, or expression; a writer of fine poetry’,[42] notwithstanding ‘writer’ being anachronistic in relation to Old English poetic representations. Moreover, those performers could be seen as producers of ‘poetry’ in terms of the general definition offered by the *OED*: ‘imaginative or creative literature in general; fable, fiction’,[43] and possibly the more specific entry: ‘composition in verse or some comparable patterned arrangement of language in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given intensity by the use of distinctive style and rhythm; the art of such a composition.’[44] However, the terms ‘poet’ and ‘poetry’ did not enter English until the fourteenth century, and it should not be assumed that Anglo-Saxon conceptions of performers and their art should be defined as such. Whilst it can reasonably be stated that the principal forms of performing artistry depicted in Old English poems are what would in Modern English be described as music, singing, storytelling, and the recital of poetry, it is difficult to pinpoint or distinguish these categories in each instance, much less build up a picture of what a specific performance might have been like.

This thesis argues that the performers imagined in many Old English poems were not primarily conceived of as poets, and the products of their artistry not principally poetry. In other words, while the Anglo-Saxons were keen to create a diverse body of what we perceive to be poetry, using the Germanic alliterative long line,

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[41] *OED* [online], ‘poet, *n.*’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/146521> [accessed 29 March 2017].
[42] *OED* [online], ‘poet, *n.*’ [accessed 29 March 2017].
[43] *OED* [online], ‘poetry, *n.*’ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/146552> [accessed 29 March 2017].
[44] *OED* [online], ‘poetry, *n.*’ [accessed 29 March 2017].

they were not necessarily intending to represent the performance of that poetic form, as has often been understood to follow inevitably. Speaking of the *Beowulf* poet's mode of performance, Roberta Frank points out that:

> [his] depiction of two anonymous Danish scops reciting stories from Germanic legend (853-97, 1068-159) indicates only that one Englishman, in whatever century he lived, believed that sixth-century Danes were likely to behave that way, not that song was *his* medium of exchange.[45]

Things are even less certain, however; we do not know whether song definitely is the medium of exchange being depicted in these instances from *Beowulf*. As Frank (possibly unwittingly) proposes, they could have been recited spoken-word. Indeed, the artistic mode is likely to be storytelling in both of the passages referred to by Frank, a mode discussed in Chapter 5. Moreover, attempting to classify performers who appear in the poems is also problematic. The question of whether such characters were conceived of as poets, the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of musicians, storytellers, or some combination of these, has largely been avoided by critics who have assumed them to be 'oral poets'. The terms used to describe such figures will be discussed in Chapter 2.

There is little possibility of consensus on what Anglo-Saxon poets envisioned many of their specific terms relating to artistry to describe, particularly as their intention may have been creative ambiguity. The multiple connotations of *woðbora*, exploited, according to Huppé, in the *Order of the World*, is one example of Anglo-Saxon poets' ability to utilise a term's diverse semantic range. The *woðbora* example also exposes another dilemma faced when attempting to deduce intention in a specific instance: the meaning of some words varied during the Anglo-Saxon period across time, space, and register. The fact that it is unclear when many Old English poems were composed thus exacerbates the translation problem. There are numerous Old English terms for

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[45] Roberta Frank, 'Germanic Legend in Old English Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 82-100 (p. 85) (Frank's emphasis).

performers and performances, and this thesis does not aim to delineate their meanings. Rather than contribute to the attempts at deciphering a poet's semantic intention behind each occurrence of a word, which may be intentionally ambiguous, Chapter 2 surveys the use of significant words that appear in relation to artistry across the poetic corpus. This is undertaken in order to introduce the vocabulary relating to artistry as well as to determine likelihoods, yet, as Chapter 2 concludes, many terms for performers and performances had broad semantic fields. For this reason, and because of intentional ambiguity, and the fact that they often refer to a conventionalised or imaginary literary type rather than a specific historical type, attempts to offer a 'correct' translation of each relevant word in any given instance will be secondary to highlighting the broad interpretability and applicability of terms.

In this thesis, relevant passages will be considered using three Modern English aggregate concepts which comprise 'artistry': 'performer', 'performance' and 'instrument'. This approach helps to avoid becoming mired in the semantic possibilities pertaining to an individual Old English word in each occurrence. Considering this topic through present-day categorisations can also facilitate the analysis of the literary and creative representation of an individual performer or performance more readily. It is an approach that eschews commencing with attempting to reveal the definitive interpretation of key words in a passage and, as a result, considering episodes of artistry as, for example, socially classified acts by someone with a particular role, linguistically defined at the outset and perceived by critics, but not necessarily intended by the poet. It also reflects the understanding that terms can encompass diverse forms of artistry, different types of performer and performance. They are not inevitably references to Anglo-Saxon poets. Conceiving artistry collectively under such general definitions also serves to inform the focus and scope of the analysis undertaken in this thesis, which also

considers episodes in which terms specifically related to performers and their performances do not appear.

The definition of ‘performance’ applied in this thesis is an amalgamation and development of *OED* entries for the verb ‘perform’[46] and the noun ‘performance’:[47] to present music, poetry, or story, through singing or spoken word, with or without instruments, especially for an audience, or to imagine such an act. Performance can either refer to a personal or collective experience, involving psychological or physical action in the form of singing, music, storytelling, prayer, formal address, or lament. It can therefore be a private, solitary act involving creative expression of thought, as well as a public, social act. The concepts ‘artistic performer’ and ‘artistic performance’ derive from these definitions, encompassing particularly the notion of a relationship between performer and audience, who may not be physically present - in the case of a prayer to a deity, for example. The concepts cover the verbal, musical, visual, and bodily expression of cultural phenomena, including heroic ideals, history, fate, the future, myth, and wisdom.

Along with performers and their performances, this thesis is also concerned with the musical instruments used in the production of artistic performance which appear in Old English poems. At times, such instruments are introduced without either a performance context or reference to a performer. They operate as independent symbols, rather than as functional plot devices or elements in naturalistic description as they do in Eddic poetry (see Chapter 7). Moreover, as with performers and their performances, there are considerable issues of interpretation concerning the specific instruments being referred to in Old English poems, partly because of their symbolic nature. As argued in

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[46] *OED* [online], ‘perform *v.*[1]’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140780> [accessed 23 May 2016].

[47] *OED* [online], ‘performance, *n.*’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140783> [accessed 23 May 2016].

Chapter 8, interpretation becomes more straightforward in the post-Conquest *Brut*, because of changes to the vocabulary, and also because of the more routine manner in which they are represented, but the Old English poetic tradition represents instruments relatively enigmatically. Terms relating to musical instruments will be considered in Chapter 2.

Theory and Method

Responding to Frank's recommendation that the search for the Anglo-Saxon oral poet be called off owing to a dearth of concrete evidence, John D. Niles countered with the conviction that the search for this elusive character is nevertheless worth pursuing.[48] This thesis is not limited to the oral poet, or *scop*, the Old English term by which he has generally come to be known. Indeed, it argues that figures who could be defined as oral poets appear less than has been commonly assumed. Nevertheless, a consideration of the two principal reasons given by Niles as to why he considers the search worth reopening is an appropriate starting point from which to begin outlining the theoretical and methodological approaches applied in this thesis.

Oral-formulaic Theory

Niles's first reason concerns the theory of oral-formulaic composition and transmission. For Niles, the formulaic nature of Old English poetry, and his confidence that some Old English poems are thus orally derived, are reason enough to continue the search for the historical figures who created and performed them.[49] Before discussing the theory, some relevant key terms which refer to recurrent components in the poetry discussed in this thesis will be defined.

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[48] Frank, 1993; John D. Niles, 'The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet', *Western Folklore*, 62 (2003), 7-61.
[49] Niles, 2003, p. 10.

Theme

For Albert B. Lord, one of the early oral-formulaic critics, a theme requires the appearance of analogous diction and structure between passages in a single poet's work. Lord states:

> I consider the theme as a repeated passage – not a repeated subject – within the songs or poetry of a given individual, thus constraining it not only to a single poet but also to a more or less stable set of words.[50]

However, a broader definition of a theme has been dominant in oral-formulaic discourse concerning Old English poetry since Francis P. Magoun considered the 'beasts of battle' in 1955.[51] Donald K. Fry offers a definition of a theme more appropriate for the purposes of this thesis: 'a recurring concatenation of details and ideas, not restricted to a specific event, verbatim repetition, or certain formulas, which forms an underlying structure for an action or description.'[52] Lord referred to such instances as 'motifs', because, as John Miles Foley interprets in relation to the 'beasts of battle', 'there is no repeated, specific set of actions involved … [and] no narrative process preserved from one instance to the next.'[53] In this thesis, a theme is a loosely analogous episode having general similarities and characteristics.

Type-scene

Fry distinguishes a type-scene from a theme, defining a type-scene as 'a recurring stereotyped presentation of conventional details used to describe a certain narrative event, requiring neither verbatim repetition nor a specific formula content'.[54] Put simply, themes involve 'a state of being or situation' for Fry, while a type-scene

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[50] Albert B. Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 201.
[51] Francis P. Magoun, 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 56 (1955), 81-90 (see particularly pp. 82-83).
[52] Donald K. Fry, 'Themes and Type-Scenes in Elene 1-113', *Speculum*, 44:1 (1969), 35-45 (p. 35).
[53] Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 198-99; John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The* Odyssey*,* Beowulf *and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 330.
[54] Fry, 1968, p. 35.

involves a ‘narrative event’.[55] His 1968 article demonstrates the difference using episodes from the opening to the Vercelli Manuscript poem *Elene*. In doing so, he acknowledges that the concepts are similar. Nevertheless, the distinction between theme and type-scene is useful in relation to artistry, and is applied in this thesis, though episodes featuring artistry are predominantly themes in Fry’s conception.

Scene

The term ‘scene’ has a narrower focus than ‘type-scene’ in this thesis, referring to instances in which one particular performance is being described at a specific occasion, as in film or theatre studies discourse. In Old English poetry, artistry is often presented as a generalised reference to more than one event. Such descriptions are referred to as ‘passages’ or ‘episodes’ rather than scenes. They exemplify a poetic technique emphasising generality and idealisation. ‘Scene’ is used to describe such generalised events by many critics. For example, following Lars Lönnroth’s use of the term, Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl adopt it in their discussion and overview of the performance of oral literature.[56] It is also evidenced by the quotation from Lerer on p. 39.

Meme, meme-plex

Taking after Russell Poole, who defines a meme as a ‘self-replicating unit of cultural inheritance’,[57] Michael D.C. Drout applies concepts from the evolutionary biology of Richard Dawkins to Old English poetry. For Drout, a meme is ‘the simplest unit of cultural replication, analogous to the biological gene; it is whatever is transmitted when

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[55] Fry, 1968, p. 45.
[56] Lars Lönnroth, *Den dubbla scenen: muntlig diktning från Eddan till ABBA* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1978); Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl, ‘Performance and Performers’, in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. by Karl Reichl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), p. 141.
[57] Russell Poole, *Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), p. 7.

one person *imitates*, consciously or unconsciously, another.'[58] He additionally defines a 'meme-plex' as 'an aggregation of separate memes that travel together as a unit. All memes that are of any interest to us are actually meme-plexes, combinations of smaller memes existing in a cultural matrix that gives them meaning and enables their reproduction.'[59] The meme/meme-plex concept is applied toward the end of this thesis, when the question as to whether the representation of artistry in the early medieval period can be seen as a tradition is considered.

Trope

The term trope is often used by critics, but in this thesis is not differentiated from the concept of a theme as outlined above.

Oral-formulaic theory has been developed extensively and reappraised persuasively since its genesis with Milman Parry's work on Homeric poems in the 1930s, and that of Lord, his student, who conducted fieldwork with Parry studying Yugoslav epic singers in the 1930s, and also in the 1950s and 1960s following Parry's death.[60] Francis P. Magoun, Jr., an early adherent of the theory, applied its principles somewhat unquestioningly to Old English literature, analysing Cædmon's *Hymn* and extracts of *Beowulf* and *Christ and Satan*, and subsequently the account of the oral poet Cædmon in Bede's eighth-century *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 'Ecclesiastical

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[58] Michael D.C. Drout, *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), p. 4 (Drout's emphasis).

[59] Michael D.C. Drout, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature: An Evolutionary, Cognitivist Approach* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), p. 12. See also Michael D.C. Drout, 'A Meme-Based Approach to Oral Traditional Theory', *Oral Tradition*, 21:2 (2006), pp. 269-94.

[60] The key texts are Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. by Adam Parry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), and Lord, 1960. Concerning early oral formulaic theory as applied to Greek and Old English literatures, see Ann C. Watts, *The Lyre and the Harp* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 7-62.

History of the English People'.[61] Magoun's lack of scepticism leaves him in no doubt that Cædmon existed, and Bede's account is enough for him to conclude that Cædmon composed his *Hymn* in an oral manner, within a lettered community.[62] Considering the method of composition undertaken by literate Anglo-Saxon poets such as Cynewulf, Magoun concludes that 'if … the narrative parts of his poems prove on testing to be formulaic, one must assume that those parts at least he composed in the traditional way.'[63] Magoun presumably envisaged a distinct stage of oral composition for the formulaic material using formulas passed down through oral transmission, together with incorporation of that composition within his poetry derived from non-formulaic production and scribal sources. The issue with Magoun's supposition is that it identifies two distinct compositional, creative processes within the single communicative method, i.e. the text. Yet, formulaic or not, all poetry is composed in the mind whether or not it is being committed to writing during composition. It is only the extent to which writing is an active part of the process that differs, rather than envisaging two methods of composition which remain distinct in the creation of formulaic poetry. For this reason, when considering the Old English poetic corpus, oral-formulaic production is a less useful concept than oral transmission, which highlights the prehistory of some Old English poems as being *passed down* orally, rather than merely *created* orally in a process separate from, and prior to, subsequently being committed to manuscript. Moreover, as Lord states, all poems can be delivered orally, but '[w]hat is important is not the oral performance but rather the composition *during* oral performance.'[64] Naturally, such composition cannot be characteristic of a written poem, which can only

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[61] Francis P. Magoun, Jr., 'Oral-formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry', *Speculum*, 28:3 (1953), 446-67; Francis P. Magoun, Jr., 'Bede's Story of Cædmon: The Case History of an Anglo-Saxon Oral Singer', *Speculum*, 30:1 (1955), 49-63.
[62] Magoun, 1955, p. 62.
[63] Magoun, 1953, p. 460.
[64] Lord, 1960, p. 5.

be improvised upon after the fact of its existence as a cohesive text, notwithstanding variances that inevitably occur between manuscripts.

Resultantly, the binary opposition between oral and literate composition postulated by early oral-formulaic critics such as Parry, Lord and Magoun is problematic in relation to the extant manuscript material. It is doubtful, for example, that a literate poet such as Cynewulf adopted two different methods when creating a poem, writing part of it down at the moment of conception, with creation and writing being inextricably linked, and then constructing another part by stepping away from his pen, composing it through the assemblage of formulas, reciting it orally until satisfied - thereby keeping the ‘oral’ separate from the ‘scribal’ as much as possible - and then returning to the pen to add the completed ‘oral’ part to his written text. Indeed, any extant oral-derived Old English poem is arguably necessarily transitional; any composition during oral performance has been crystallised in the text, removing it from conventional performance practice and context, with further innovation only occurring through performances based on the manuscript text, though oral poems could of course have coexisted with related poems circulating in manuscript form.

Formulaic elements could also be learnt or copied from written poems. Larry D. Benson’s analysis of the Latin-derived Old English Exeter Book poem *The Phoenix*, the verse prologue to the Old English translation of Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Care*, Exeter Book *Riddle 35*, and the *Meters of Boethius*, showed that literate poets working with manuscript sources also produced formulaic verse. He proved therefore that a poetry originally created and communicated orally cannot be distinguished from one that involves writing throughout the creative process based on its formulaic characteristics alone.[65] Furthermore, Marcia Bullard highlighted the limitations of the

[65] Larry D. Benson, ‘The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry’, *PMLA*, 81:5 (1966), 334-41 (pp. 335-36).

methodology undertaken by Magoun and other oral-formulaic theorists such as Robert Diamond,[66] who based their conclusions concerning compositional method largely on statistical analysis of characteristics such as the frequency of poetic formulas, and did not consider the qualitative aspects of the creative process.[67] In her assessment of the validity of the early oral-formulaicists' work, Ruth Finnegan also questions the assumption that a formulaic style is evidence of oral composition.[68] She also questions the statistical approach, which she suggests is problematised by the lack of agreed definition for 'the formula'.[69] Finnegan's overview of the theory recognises that it nevertheless possesses 'stimulating and fruitful' insights, remarking that 'provided that the more ambitious claims of some exponents are treated with caution, the Lord-Parry school provides a body of work which cannot be ignored by any student of comparative oral literature'.[70]

While there are issues, then, the significance of oral-formulaic theory has been profound, and has been a valuable tool for the interpretation of Old English poetic material. The findings of critics influenced by the early applications of the theory have greatly increased the understanding of the creativity at play within Old English poems. For example, Stanley Greenfield extended the analysis of formulaic style to consider exile as a conventional poetic device,[71] and, as noted earlier, Fry's analysis of *Elene* exemplified the way in which a theme differed from a type-scene, and highlighted the

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[66] See Robert E. Diamond, 'The Diction of the Signed Poems of Cynewulf', *Philological Quarterly*, 38 (1959), 228-41.
[67] Marcia Bullard, 'Some Objections to the Formulaic Theory of the Composition of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry', *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, 21:1 (1967), 11-16. See also Watts, pp. 195-97.
[68]Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: It's Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 69-71.
[69] Finnegan, pp. 71-72.
[70] Finnegan, p. 72.
[71] Stanley Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of 'Exile' in Anglo-Saxon poetry', *Speculum*, 30:2 (1955), 200-06.

way in which Old English poets manipulated these two devices.[72] Moreover, the appealing notion of oral origins lingers. Robert P. Creed argued enticingly for example that *Beowulf* is 'a copy of a recording of a performance. The recording was made at a time when the traditional technique of singing tales was alive and vigorous.'[73] Earlier, however, Fry had asserted that, of the extant Old English corpus, 'only *Cædmon's Hymn* can confidently be called oral.'[74] Even this is questionable, given doubts concerning the provenance of Bede's account. Fry also asserted that 'no reliable test can differentiate written from oral poems',[75] and the blurring of the oral-literary binary opposition is of particular relevance to this thesis. Parry believed that 'literature falls into two great parts not so much because there are two kinds of culture, but because there are two kinds of *form: the one part of literature is oral, the other written.*'[76] An assumed distinction between oral and literate form also permeates Lord's *The Singer of Tales*, particularly in its introduction, leading Michael Alexander to assert that, for Lord, 'the text is either oral or literary; there can be no transitional stage.'[77] Lord later qualified his view, [78] yet not before Magoun and others had applied the dichotomous theoretical standpoint to Old English literature.

Recently, however, critics have stressed that literate culture is in part responsible for creating a myth of the oral past. In particular, they do not consider episodes of artistry in the poetry to necessarily be examples of historical oral performance,

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[72] Fry, 1969.
[73] Robert P. Creed, 'The *Beowulf*-Poet: Master of Sound-Patterning', in *Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord*, ed. by John Miles Foley (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1981), pp. 194-216 (p. 194).
[74] Donald K. Fry, 'Caedmon as a Formulaic Poet', in *Oral Literature: Seven Essays*, ed. by J. J. Duggan (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 1975), pp. 227-47 (p. 227).
[75] Fry, 1975, p. 227.
[76] Parry, 1972, p. 377 (Parry's emphasis).
[77] Michael Alexander, *A History of Old English Literature* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2002), p. 68. See Lord, 1960, pp. 3-12.
[78] In Albert B. Lord, 'The Merging of Two Worlds: Oral and Written Poetry as Carriers of Ancient Values', in *Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context*, ed. by John Miles Foley (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 19-64.

particularly improvised performance, as oral-formulaic theorists and others had once assumed. For example, Mark C. Amodio argues that 'those reports of scopic activity that survive in the written records do not document contemporary Anglo-Saxon cultural praxis but are rather idealized and fictionalized accounts of how legendary figures composed vernacular poetry.'[79] Although his focus is specifically on the production of poetry, and leaving aside the fact that vernacular poetry is not necessarily being depicted in these accounts, Amodio's statement aligns with one of the central premises of this thesis: idealisation and fictionalisation assuredly exist in Old English poetry. Yet such a generic view of what these representations of artistry are, in particular the exclusive notion that they should be perceived solely as idealised or fictionalised, overlooks the intricacies of the literary techniques employed in the poems, particularly in *Beowulf*. That representations of artistry are idealised fictions has become the standard view, replacing the romantic historicism of earlier critics such as Magoun and Creed. However, despite acknowledging that the *Beowulf* poet is 'engaged in creating a piece of poetic fiction and is not presenting anthropological evidence',[80] Amodio turns to an anthropological approach in his analysis, searching for truths in the reports of 'scopic activity' in the poetry and questioning what the characters may have been up to in the worlds of the poems when 'off-camera', a critic-imagined history outside the text.[81] Even among those attempting to stress the creative, fictional or allusive qualities of Old English poems, the desire to discover evidence concerning the performance practices of the historical past is difficult to resist.

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[79] Mark C. Amodio 'Res(is)ting the Singer: Towards a Non-Performative Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetics', in *New Directions in Oral Theory*, ed. by Mark C. Amodio (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 179-208 (pp. 184-85).
[80] Amodio, 2005, p. 196.
[81] For example, Amodio, 2005, pp. 196-97.

Seth Lerer similarly highlights the literary-creative aspects of Old English representations of artistry, whilst also presenting a somewhat uniform view of its function:

> [w]hat we have come to think of as the inherently "oral" quality of early English poetry – its origins in formulaic composition or its transmission in the public contexts of instruction or entertainment – may … be a literary fiction of its own. Those scenes of bardic performance or social response long understood to be the heart of Anglo-Saxon self-representation are, when seen in broader contexts, framed by representations of the written text, and function more as tropes than as unmediated versions of historical reality.[82]

This thesis aims to show that artistry in Old English poems is indeed used as a trope, which, as noted earlier, I take to be analogous to Fry's conception of a 'theme' (see p. 31), particularly in *Beowulf*, although only in certain instances, and the trope takes various forms and has diverse stylistic effects. Moreover, even when artistry is used as such, it can operate dynamically within a poem's narrative and structure, and functions in complex ways which undermine a straightforward reading of it merely being a formulaic component 'dropped in' to a poem at particular points.

Another relevant aspect of recent oral-formulaic theory is the analysis of Old English poetry's syntactical constructions, from individual morphemes to larger linguistic structures, including formulas, passages, and themes. Particularly influential for this thesis is Foley's concept of traditional referentiality and his work on metonymy and anaphora,[83] and also Michael D.C. Drout's theories concerning cultural memes and the formation of traditions, noted earlier. Concerning the technique of referentiality, Foley explains that 'mere intelligibility can hinge on information or perspectives that the composing poet assumes to be available to the audience and thus does not explicitly

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[82] Seth Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 4.

[83] John Miles Foley's principal discussions concerning referentiality are found in Foley, 1991, and in John Miles Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

rehearse in the present performance or text.'[84] An oral-derived poem, and its poetic tradition, is in theory therefore culture-bound. Traditional referentiality is the result of an exercise in effective application and selection by a poet; the audience engages with a poem in a manner which cultivates the semantic space as well as any historical detail. Foley argues that it

> entails the invoking of a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself, that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual performance or text. Each element in the phraseology or narrative thematics stands not simply for that singular instance but for the plurality and multiformity that are beyond the reach of textualisation.[85]

Foley assumes that this concept can be usefully applied to written poems as well as to oral performances of poetry. After all, he analyses Homer's epics and Old English poetry, particularly *Beowulf*, in exploring his theory of what he calls 'immanent art', with the understanding being that such poetry is orally derived, notwithstanding its preservation as literary texts within manuscripts. He defines immanence as '*the set of metonymic, associative meanings institutionally delivered and received through a dedicated idiom or register either during or on the authority of traditional oral performance*.'[86]

In relation to the concerns of this thesis, Foley's concept of immanence, together with the invocation of traditional referentiality, involves the prioritisation of the symbolic meanings connected with a performer and their acts of performance over the naturalistic description thereof. This priority is established through poetic technique, and is intended to carry through to the audience in their reception of the poem. It enables the association of a complex array of meaning, for both the poet and the poem's audience, from what might be sparse description. As a result, traditional referentiality is

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[84] John Miles Foley, 'Epic as Genre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 171-87 (p. 180).
[85] Foley, 1991, p. 7.
[86] Foley, 1995, p. 7 (Foley's emphasis).

particularly suited to Old English poetic form, with its concise style and regulated metre which encourages pithy yet suggestive phrasing. Although its implementation is not uniform across poetries, it additionally figures outside of Old English poetry in diverse oral and oral-derived poetic traditions. As proposed in Chapter 7, traditional referentiality is an aspect of Old Norse Eddic poetry, a literature closely related culturally, linguistically, and formally to Old English with apparently similar structure, metre, and even theme, yet analysis of its workings exposes differences in the way it functions. However, in more distinct poetic traditions, such as classical Greek, there can be significant similarities. The formal features of a poem, such as its line length or alliterative rules, do not therefore dictate the methods of generating and inferring referential meaning, and neither does genetic proximity between languages. It is established instead through particular creative compositional techniques such as anaphora, allusion and the use of symbolic language. This thesis considers, then, the way in which Old English poets generate traditional referentiality through the depiction of artistry, arguing that referentiality can be seen as reflecting imaginative conceptions among poets. The comparative case studies undertaken in later chapters discern relationships but also distinctions in style and representation between Old English and Eddic poetry, as well as later English poetry. The chapters argue in particular that the way in which the referential method is used can both contribute to and befit a genre of poetry set in a partly imagined past. However, while *Beowulf* is shown in Chapter 4 to be a poem retaining much of its referentiality in the transition from orality to literacy, referentiality is redundant in Laȝamon's textually-derived chronicle history, Laȝamon's *Brut*, considered in Chapter 8. The referentiality of immanence is substituted by discrete, formulaic episodes.

Drout neatly summarises the mechanisms of anaphora and referentiality, demonstrating the ways in which they operate in poetry, and their practical effects:

> anaphora extends beyond the poetic line into formula, scene, and theme. Because the repetition in a tradition creates anaphoric effects, readers who are literate in the tradition end up reading differently than readers who are not. Encountering the repeated initial element, the reader who participates in the tradition is able to infer the rest of the unit via the metonymic process of traditional referentiality (Foley 1995: 13). So when readers encounter a type-scene that they have previously encountered in an oral traditional poem - for example, the "beasts of battle" or "hero on the beach" in Anglo-Saxon, the "shouting in prison" theme in South Slavic oral epic, or the feasting scene in Homeric Greek epic (Foley 1991: 33-35) - they can bring to mind the other "conclusions" to the anaphoric line, formula, or scene that had obtained. The presence of anaphoric elements thus causes readers not only to "fill in the gaps" in the current text with the traditional elements invoked by traditional referentiality, but also to forecast the shape of portions of the narrative that they have not yet encountered.[87]

This thesis assumes that listening to or reading poetry was an active, creative experience for an Anglo-Saxon audience. It involved identifying references to extra-poetic cultural concerns, moral understanding, and other meaning, invoked by sparse description and repeated elements in a narrative. In doing so, Anglo-Saxon poets and their audience were connecting with their own history - whether true or legendary, and often a combination - and cultural traditions, which are often presented in the poems. They were also engaging with and responding to a particular literary form, together with the stylistic characteristics of its themes, type-scenes, and other narrative components, with their associated referential and symbolic meaning, the workings of which they understood intimately. It is argued in Chapter 6 that cultural behaviour was being influenced as a result of this engagement, leading to the admonition of some clerics who evidently did not share the moral perspectives of the poetic imagination.

One final purpose of this thesis in relation to oral-formulaic theory is to question the typical assumptions that such approaches to understanding Old English poetry, and the representations of artistry within it, have been founded upon. There has been previous work in this direction. Along with the critiques of Benson and Bullard noted above, as early as 1967 Michael Curschmann attempted to move beyond the reductive

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[87] Drout, 2006, p. 284. The works alluded to by Drout are listed in the bibliography.

teasing out of formulas as an end in itself, and to blur the distinctions between approaches to texts perceived to be oral and those perceived to have a written origin.[88] More recently, Tiffany Beechy has questioned the alterity assumed by Foley between oral and oral-derived poems, and written ones, as well as his assertion that each type requires a distinct critical approach. She argues that 'the insistence that medieval texts evince orality and that this orality requires reception and reading practices qualitatively different from those supplied by modern poetics seems unnecessary.'[89] Rather than adopting the typical method of formulaic analysis, which sees the poems as clusters of unoriginal formulas, Beechy focuses on their intra-formulaic characteristics.[90] Moreover, instead of bracketing '*a priori* literary categories', she considers the 'structures and effects of texts', by focusing on their aesthetic, as well as linguistic and formal features.[91] Consequently for Beechy no distinct oral-formulaic theoretical approach is needed simply because a poem contains formulas or is thought to be oral-derived. This thesis also analyses the structures and effects of Old English poems through an empirical method which considers their aesthetic and stylistic as well as formal characteristics, especially in Chapter 5 in relation to the storytelling elements in *Beowulf*, the purpose of which is to argue that storytelling was the primary mode of performance for the *Beowulf* poet.

Another post-oral-formulaic method of envisaging the creativity of Old English poetry's form and characteristics is offered by Manish Sharma, who uses Henri Bergson's notion of 'continuous multiplicity', and Deleuze and Guattari's adaptation of Bergson in particular, to argue, as does Beechy, for a focus upon Old English poetry's 'novelty, originality and experimentation' instead of its traditionality and reliance on

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[88] Michael Curschmann, 'Oral Poetry in Mediaeval English, French, and German Literature: Some Notes on Recent Research', *Speculum*, 42:1 (1967), 36-52.
[89] Tiffany Beechy, *The Poetics of Old English* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 18.
[90] Beechy, p. 18.
[91] Beechy, p. 127.

formula.[92] Sharma sees the typical view of formulas as 'discrete multiplicities',[93] a term adopted from Bergson, to be limiting, and attempts to move away from the conventional methods of analysing formulaic linguistic constructs:

> an overly narrow and formalistic concern with the repetition of extensive linguistic units can only lead to the somewhat dreary theoretical conviction … that the Old English corpus is pallidly homogeneous, 'similar thoughts in similar language' subtended by a nostalgic 'aesthetics of the familiar'.[94]

Sharma argues instead that 'novelty, originality, and experimentation' can co-exist with the poetry's formulaic nature. This thesis likewise attempts to demonstrate the creative and dynamic characteristics of formulaic poems, in relation to artistry. In *Beowulf*, for example, each passage containing artistry exhibits a different relationship with the formulaic style and its structural functions, generating diverse effects. This diversity has eroded in the *Brut*, which evinces homogeneity and structural and thematic isolation by comparison.

In another attempt to diversify formulaic theory, Peter Ramey applies the analogy of the World Wide Web's interconnected, hyperlinked structure to envisage the function of episodes featuring performances in *Beowulf*.[95] For him,

> the recurring scenes of poetic performances by a singer (or *scop*) … [are] non-linear hyperlinks that connect the heroic narrative to a wider network of poetic tradition and thus help the audience navigate the thread of that heroic tale through a web of alternate songs and stories.[96]

A comparable analogic approach is John Leyerle's attempt to envision *Beowulf*'s structure as being interlaced rather than digressional.[97] It highlights the narrative's

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[92] Manish Sharma, 'Beyond Nostalgia: Formula and Novelty in Old English Literature', *Exemplaria*, 26:4, (2014), 303-27 (p. 303).
[93] Sharma, p. 305.
[94] Sharma, p. 322.
[95] Peter Ramey, '*Beowulf*'s Singers of Tales as Hyperlinks', *Oral Tradition*, 26:2 (2011), 619-24. See also the structural experimentation of John Miles Foley, *Oral Tradition and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012).
[96] Ramey, p. 619.
[97] John Leyerle, 'The Interlace Structure of Beowulf', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 37:1 (1967), 1-17.

interperformativity, and is a useful image with which to conceptualise artistry's structural function. However, this thesis argues that established oral-formulaic theory has at times led to one-dimensional conceptions of the representation of artistry in Old English poetry, a representation seen as being bound up with the poetry's perceived orality. Artistry is to be understood solely as a theme, for example, or as relational hyperlinks, and its performers primarily as poets, executors of an oral tradition of which a proportion of the extant Old English corpus is all that remains to us. In fact, each instance of artistry has a quantity of stylistic and functional difference great enough for us to usefully consider its characteristics independently. Together, the depiction of artistry demonstrates various philosophical concepts, expressed through diverse techniques and with wide-ranging function. The poems may possess the formulaic qualities indicative of potential oral-derivation, but the poets' diverse and often subtle creative application can reward an analytic approach that exposes unique literary characteristics in each instance, reflecting the complex understanding of artistry in the poetic imagination.

The Status of Artistry and its Performers in the Anglo-Saxon Imagination

Niles' second reason for continuing the search for the oral poet is that 'the figure of the *scop* (that is, the early Germanic court singer) loomed large in the imagination of the Anglo-Saxons themselves.'[98] Whether or not he loomed large in the Anglo-Saxon imagination in general, the analysis in this thesis shows that Old English poems represent the court performer as a rather vague, marginal figure, and only very occasionally. *Beowulf* and the Exeter Book 'artist poem' *Deor* are the poems in which he looms largest, yet even in *Beowulf*, the only narrative poem in the Old English corpus which contains a character described as a *scop*, barely any description or

[98] Niles, 2003, p. 11.

individual characteristics are provided. Rather, the past in general loomed large, and one function of the performers imagined in poems was to enable, both for the poet and a poem's audience, a creative engagement with and interpretation of this past. The obscurity of such performers who are described as *scopas*, or through other identifiers: *gleoman*, *woðbora* etc., often results from the fact that they are conventionalised literary types rather than characters drawn from reality. In *Beowulf*, performers feature in symbolic passages superfluous to principal events but which offer instead an image of success or community, for example, or relief from an external monstrous or military threat. This is reflected in the *Brut*, which shows signs of influence from such passages.

Because the passages in which court poets and other performers feature are ambiguous yet symbolic, it is tempting to conflate the creators of the poems with the performers who appear within them. Except for the possible example of *Deor*, however, such associations are never overtly recognised by the poets, and remain conjectural. Referring to ancient Greek society, Eric Havelock observes that 'Greek literature had been poetic because the poetry had performed a social function, that of preserving the tradition by which the Greeks lived and instructing them in it.'[99] If a similar function to that outlined by Havelock is accepted for the Anglo-Saxons and their poetry, an appealing notion considering the significant amount of wisdom poetry in the extant corpus, a distinction must still be made between the characters who appear in poems and the Old English poets themselves. Even if performers were perceived of as historical, and we can never be certain of this, then by the later Anglo-Saxon period, when nearly all of the extant corpus was committed to manuscript, they are likely to have been part of the poetic imagination for some time. Unlike the Scandinavian skald, who continued to operate into the late-medieval period, they became part of the tradition

[99] Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 8.

preserved by Old English poets and monastic scribes, reflected in the symbolic though ambiguous manner of their representations. The status of performers in the creative poetic imagination is of concern in this thesis.

Indeed, this thesis considers the extent to which the representation of artistry and its performers in Old English poetry reflects an idealisation of poetry's social role as outlined by Havelock. Overwhelmingly, artistry in Old English poetry has positive associations, and can generally be seen as romanticised as a result. Moreover, an oral-derived poetry, which retained aspects of oral transmission and the complex symbolism of traditional referentiality, might well not reveal particulars concerning the social function of performers in Anglo-Saxon society, particularly around the turn of the first millennium when the Old English poetic manuscripts were composed. Rather than illuminating contemporary opinion regarding social function, if anything it would instead reveal information about an earlier period, or about behaviours archaised in the poems. Anglo-Saxon personal correspondence, historical account, and other prose writing is more appropriately analysed with this social function paradigm in mind. Such analysis is undertaken in Chapter 6, revealing a much more ambivalent attitude, particularly among the Christian hierarchy, towards the kinds of artistry represented in the poetry.

Symbolism and 'Inherited Potentials'[100]

This thesis investigates the way in which language relating to artistry functions symbolically in Old English writing. Within the conventionality of Old English poetic form, metre and style, the creative use of compounding and formulaic arrangement enables poetic language to generate powerful symbolic effects through its operation

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[100] 'Inherited potentials' and their poetic applications are outlined in Peter Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 68-116, particularly p. 82.

within that orthodoxy. Moreover, certain words and phrases relating to artistry possess complex semantic ranges and carry significant referential meaning. They can emphasise such effects and simultaneously undermine any notion that Old English poetry is to be trusted as a source for understanding historical Anglo-Saxon artistry. Rather than being a naturalistic reflection of either contemporary or historical culture, the poetry has a symbolic character requiring a methodological approach that does not treat it as a source for evidence of historical practices and behaviours, but rather as the result of processes of conventionalisation and archetyping blending with linguistic creativity following the migration period. The process developed from a little known, prehistoric, partly 'Germanic' past, through a process of cultural historicisation, into a language and a poetic form that together create effects such as those enabled through the technique of traditional referentiality. This allowed the Anglo-Saxons to reflect upon their cultural circumstances and their past, as they imagined it. For example, I suggest in Chapter 4 that references to artistry in narrative poems are often symbolic illustrations related to and influenced by sentiments such as those found in wisdom poems, rather than unmediated descriptions of contemporary or historical Anglo-Saxon realities. These illustrations were formulated as part of the process of conventionalisation; they reflect inherited cultural values, influenced at times by Christian teaching.

My understanding of the term 'symbol' derives from M.H. Abrams' succinct definition: 'a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference, beyond itself.'[101] It is also informed, via Abrams, by Coleridge and Goethe's distinction between 'allegory' and 'symbol' in the Romantic period. In their discussions, the symbol is seen, according to Abrams, as the

[101] M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 8th edn (Boston, MA: Thomson, 2005), p. 320.

'higher mode of expression', 'richly – even boundlessly – suggestive in its significance'.[102] For Goethe,

> [a]llegory transforms the phenomenon into a concept, the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept always remains bounded in the image, and is entirely to be kept and held in it, and to be expressed by it.
>
> Symbolism [however] transforms the phenomenon into idea, the idea into an image, and in such a way that the idea remains always infinitely active and unapproachable in the image, and even if expressed in all languages, still would remain inexpressible.[103]

This conception of symbolism essentially aligns with the technique of traditional referentiality, constituting an aspect of it, and this thesis aims to show how Old English poets make significant use of the symbolic mode in the creation of a multifaceted, referential poetic corpus.

My examination of symbolic operation is also influenced by Peter Clemoes' theories of the relationship between the imagination, language and poetry, and also his concept of the linguistic symbol. Clemoes' fundamental position concerning Old English poems is that they 'furnished society in the present with memorable images, sometimes unforgettable, typifying the past'.[104] I assert that this practice of typifying forms a link in a chain of events, with written Old English poetry representing a particular product of the historical links between pre-migration, pre-literate past and Anglo-Saxon present. At the same time, like the creative use of language, such typifying undermines any assumption that the poetry reflected Anglo-Saxon historical realities. Clemoes discusses the presence and function of Old English poetry in this chain:

> The business of this poetry was social continuity. It placed social action of the past in a general perspective in order to show its relevance in the present. It dealt with the basis of action at any time, past or present, by converting accepted perceptions of active being into narrative through language designed by

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[102] Abrams, p. 322.
[103] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, trans. by Elisabeth Stopp, ed. by Peter Hutchinson (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 33-34.
[104] Clemoes, 1995, p. xi.

> convention for the purpose. The core of poetic tradition was established form which regularly implied interaction of two (or sometimes three) fundamental potentials inviting, and receiving, fulfilment in explicit narrative.[105]

The 'fundamental potentials' are cultural concepts expressed as linguistic components, combined by the poet in the process of adapting them into narrative. That the resultant narrative originates from 'accepted perceptions of active being' is an essential notion both for Clemoes and for this thesis. Clemoes does not explicitly define active being. The concept suggests the capacity the human agent has for doing and performing in society; one has potentials for action that are initiated in, for example, heroic endeavour, or indeed artistic performance. For example, concerning Wiglaf, Beowulf's steadfast companion during his fight with the dragon, Clemoes explains that

> [h]e possessed certain potentials for action by virtue of his *gecynd*, his inherent nature, and that was the central fact which needed stating about him at this supremely testing moment. By comparison, other (we might well think important) considerations, such as the training he had received, did not rank…[106]

Members of Anglo-Saxon society shared an established understanding of individual potential and realised behaviour in relation to being a performer, or at least the understanding existed in the poetic imagination, although this does not mean they are necessarily reflections of historical being. The notion of 'accepted perceptions of active being' is related to Drout's concept of the 'meme' in his analysis of tradition: the active being of performers became a meme that in turn became part of a literary tradition once committed to poetic form, as formulas, type-scenes, or common themes, for example.

To exemplify how I apply Clemoes' ideas concerning active being to the issue of artistry, one potential considered in this thesis is the conscious awareness that a poetic character or narrator often has of their ability to perform, which, they state, generally results from the accumulation of worldly experience. This meme, which problematises the assertion in Christian wisdom poems that artistic performers have divinely-given

[105] Clemoes, 1995, p. xi.
[106] Clemoes, 1995, p. 74.

gifts, figures in numerous Old English poems. The Exeter Book poem *The Seafarer*, for example, opens as follows: *Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan, siþas secgan*, 'I can recite a true lyric about myself, speak of journeys'. His seafaring experience enables this. Also because of his experiences, having travelled to many locations in his transient role as patronised performer to the rulers of diverse lands, the narrator in the Exeter Book poem *Widsith* states *ic mæg singan ond secgan spell*, 'I can sing and tell a tale' (54). Elsewhere, in the Exeter Book poem *The Wife's Lament*, the wife's experiences lead her to declare self-consciously in the opening line that *ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre*, 'I recite this lyric about myself entirely sad'. She is aware of her circumstances and also her impending act of poetic performance. In these examples, such circumstances facilitate the creation of the poems; according to their narrators, they are the reason the poem can exist. Narrative declarations have a performative aspect.

Another potential explored in this thesis is the knowledge of tales possessed by performers. In *Beowulf*, for example, the knowledge possessed by the performing *þegn* on horseback is stressed extensively. Also, Hrothgar, king of the Danes, is described as being *wintrum frod*, 'old in years', a phrase with associations which assure the audience that having this status is a characteristic that enables effective performance. The *þegn* is discussed in Chapter 4, while Hrothgar's performances are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. One final example is objects, such as the *gleobeam*, 'music-beam'=harp, which have the potential to make mirth for men, according to the composition of their compound. They are linguistically and - through the construction of the poetry - symbolically associated with people who can release the object's musical potential, and consequently realise their own potential to deliver successful performances. Compound terms for the harp are discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

Additionally, I take Clemoes' view of the nature of Old English poetry's linguistic components as a tool for my analysis:

> [f]ormulas, in Parry's sense, there certainly were in this poetry, but … not all its traditional language was of this sort … Indeed … the most fundamental was not. I believe that at the deepest level a traditional thought and a traditional form were inherited by a poet, such as the *Beowulf* one, as an indivisible whole: for him and his like 'a given essential idea' in their core vocabulary was not a meaning to which some wording was regularly attached; it was no abstracted idea, defined as an item in a body of systematic thought. It was semantic potential in a received form of wording. The meaning existed through the wording.[107]

The notion that thought and form were indivisible is explored in this thesis, and the logic of their interdependence is applied to artistic performance. For instance, the *gleobeam* compound emphasises the joyful context in which the instrument is played in particular episodes in the poems. A poetic noun-epithet, for instance 'joy-giving wood', has been condensed into a single compound unit. It forms an indivisible connection between joy and harp that the poets can exploit, because the language thus provides inherent referentiality, allowing for concise phrasing that can be applied in narrative construction. Clemoes' notion that the meaning in poems 'existed through the wording' represents another facet of traditional referentiality. In this thesis, consideration will be given to such linguistic referents, and the associations created by the poet in utilising the indivisibility of thought and form handed down to him.

By way of further explication, Clemoes' concept of the linguistic symbol also informs this thesis:

> [the linguistic symbol] can be described as a frame for (usually binary) interaction at the primary level of being. In practice it identified and combined at least (and usually) two potentials of active being so as to imply an interaction of a general sort requiring a contextually defining narrative to activate it. Whether the linked potentials belonged to a single being (as in *feorhbora*, 'bearer of life') or to separate ones (as the man and instrument in *hornbora*, 'horn-bearer') was of no matter. What was essential was that each potential retained its own field of active indefinite reference so that the combination of them introduced an indefinite implication of narrative action: a *hornbora* carried a horn in order to

[107] Clemoes, 1995, pp. 126-27.

> play it from time to time; a *rædbora* carried counsel so as to give it to others as need arose. Each combination contained within it a seed of narrative thought, which, by virtue of its general character, constituted a unit of thinking in the epoch's basic appreciation of active being becoming narrative living. The narrative generalization implied by the 'seed' acted in conjunction with a specific narrative which made it explicit.[108]

For Clemoes, rather than being instances of linguistic bifurcation and the embellishment of ordinary language as the concept of the kenning can infer, compounds were vital, dynamic fusions of pre-existing cultural concepts.[109] As a result of this fusion, the linguistic symbol can be seen as a formation that enables traditional referentiality in concise form. Given that even simplex words are necessarily linguistic referents, poets utilise compounding for the generation of additional symbolic allusion. As discussed above with reference to the *woðbora* in *The Order of the World*, in addition to a method of translation that relies on context, the construction of the compound should thus also be considered. For example, *wordgyd* (*Beowulf*, 3172) is often translated 'dirge',[110] but that rendering depends on a particular narrative context. *Wordgyd* can be translated as 'word-tale', retaining elements of the compound and signifying a verbal performance but with unspecified characteristics. The compound thus has varying applicability. Only because of its position, when describing the troop of riders mourning Beowulf, does it come to mean 'dirge' for translators, who infer the meaning from context. Clemoes' notion of the compound as symbol is adapted in this thesis to incorporate the half-line, together with larger structures such as the theme; these too are linguistic constructs enabling symbolic allusion. I thus follow Foley and other recent oral-formulaic critics who perceive these larger constructs as being capable of bearing referential meaning.[111]

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[108] Clemoes, 1995, pp. 127-28.
[109] Clemoes, 1995, p. 128, n. 12.
[110] For example in John R. Clark-Hall, *Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), p. 177; George Jack, *Beowulf: A Student Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 210; Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A Verse Translation* (London: W. W. Norton, 2002), p. 78.
[111] See the summary by Drout quoted on p. 42. See also Foley, 1995, pp. 49-53.

Chapter 2 - The Language of Artistry in Old English Poetry

Old English poetry's distinct vocabulary was conservative in comparison with that of other Anglo-Saxon writing, and the fact that the lexis may have been retained throughout the Anglo-Saxon period is one characteristic which problematises attempts to date much of the corpus. R.D. Fulk argues that it is 'the influence of oral tradition … that insulates the language of verse from the immediate effects of change, allowing archaic language forms to persist in poetry long after they have been lost from everyday speech'.[112] This influence is potent and enduring; for example, D.G. Scragg points out that *The Battle of Maldon*, with a *terminus post quem* of 991, contains an archaic lexis and many terms rarely found outside poetry.[113] Surveying the entire corpus, Dennis Cronan counts 264 'poetic simplexes', which he describes as 'any simple word found in two or more poems whose occurrence is either completely restricted to poetry, or whose use in prose or glosses seems to be exceptional in some way.'[114] If compound words are included, the number of words confined to poetry and occurring in more than one poem increases significantly, to 840, reflecting the importance of compounding in the poet's creative toolkit.[115] There are also 193 *hapax legomena*.[116] Because Old English poetic vocabulary is distinctive and traditional, it can reasonably be assumed that it is closer than that of other Old English writing to that used in the preliterate period. It can thus provide insight into the symbolic world of that prehistory, as well as into the referential intentions of earlier Anglo-Saxon poets. Such conventionality also manifests itself in a

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[112] R.D. Fulk, 'Old English Meter and Oral Tradition: Three Issues Bearing on Poetic Chronology', *JEGP*, 106:3 (2007), 304-24 (p. 304).
[113] *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. by D.G. Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 32.
[114] Dennis Cronan, 'Poetic words, conservatism and the dating of Old English poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 33 (2004), 23-50 (p. 24).
[115] Cronan, p. 24.
[116] Cronan, p. 24.

distinctive and creative application of the vocabulary, with many words not confined to poetry having unique meanings or indefinite applications in poetic contexts. As noted in Chapter 1, interpretation and translation of depictions of artistry can be problematic as a result. Compounding the difficulties of interpretation, when considering relevant terms, Vladimir Orel's point that many etymologies are 'automatically accepted today and sanctified more by habit than by reason'[117] should be borne in mind.

This chapter commences with a discussion of the presence and classification of the performer figure in Old English literature. Subsequently, the likely etymologies and semantic ranges of key Old English terms that relate to the concepts 'performer', 'performance' and 'instrument' are outlined. The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate the lack of clarity when attempting to determine possible meanings of words concerning artistry in specific instances, because of the array of senses that the relevant terms possess, a situation exacerbated by the creativity with which they were applied.

Defining Anglo-Saxon Performer Figures

This thesis contributes tangentially to a contested aspect of Anglo-Saxon literary and historical studies: the study of the performer figure, and to a particular debate concerning the historical existence of the oral poet. This debate has moved from enthusiastic interpretation of, and speculation upon, literary and archaeological evidence up to the middle of the twentieth century, through resigned admission during the later twentieth century that we ultimately know very little, if anything, about such performers or the manner of their performances, to renewed inquiry that relies on the same material for evidence but has adopted rather more subtle aims and approaches, and has reached

[117] Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (Linden: Brill, 2003), p. xi.

more cautious and qualified conclusions. As with artistry in general, attempts to discover particulars concerning the historical performer figure rather than the literary or imagined one have dominated the critical discourse. As noted in Chapter 1, whilst discussing these attempts, this thesis considers performer figures in Old English poems to belong to a literary-creative rather than a historical category, and it also contextualises their representation through the comparative analysis of poetries closely related to Old English, through a predominantly stylistic rather than anthropological approach.

Researchers have undertaken a comprehensive though often speculative search for historical figures in the role of artistic performer in Anglo-Saxon England, particularly the improvising oral poet. Early understanding of these performers hinged on the belief that there were figures in the past who held that particular role, which remained generally consistent from prehistory onwards. In 1765, Thomas Percy introduced the first edition of his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* with ‘An Essay on the Ancient English Minstrels’. By the fourth edition of 1794, he had revised and expanded his essay under the influence of Joseph Ritson.[118] In his essay, Percy does not isolate the Anglo-Saxon performer, though he does discuss the Scandinavian skald and describes his lineage, together with that of comparable figures from other Germanic and Celtic traditions:[119]

> The Minstrels seem to have been the genuine successors of the ancient Bards, who, under different names, were admired and revered from the earliest ages among the people of Gaul, Britain, Ireland, and the North, and indeed by almost all the first inhabitants of Europe, whether of Celtic or Gothic race; but by none more than by our own Teutonic ancestors, particularly by all the Danish tribes. Among these they were distinguished by the name of scalds, a word which denotes "smoothers and polishers of language”. The origin of their art was

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[118] He also retitled it ‘An Essay On The Ancient Minstrels In England’; see Bertrand H. Bronson, *Joseph Ritson: Scholar-at-Arms*, 2 vols (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1938), II, pp. 543-610 (particularly pp. 586-88).

[119] Percy translated several Old Norse poems. See *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001).

> attributed to Odin or Woden, the father of their gods; and the professors of it were held in the highest estimation. Their skill was considered as something divine; their persons were deemed sacred; their attendance was solicited by kings; and they were everywhere loaded with honours and rewards. In short, Poets and their art were held among them in that rude admiration which is ever shown by an ignorant people to such as excel them in intellectual accomplishments.[120]

It is immediately apparent that Percy perceived the social status of these performers to be high, an understanding likely informed by material concerning the skalds of the tenth and eleventh centuries. For him, they were revered figures, divinely inspired, who were rewarded handsomely for their abilities. It is tempting to conclude that Percy intended the Anglo-Saxon performer to be descended from these 'ancient Bards', and also from the 'Teutonic ancestors', and thus to conflate them with the *scop*. The stated function of encouraging a martial spirit does usefully apply to earlier medieval, particularly heroic, Germanic circumstances, or at least the literature concerned with those circumstances. Additionally, the 'high scene of festivity' context is relevant to the poetic instances discussed in this thesis. However, Percy believed that in Anglo-Saxon England the roles of poet and minstrel diverged. In the version of the essay in the fourth edition of *Reliques*, Percy argues assertively that

> as the Saxons, soon after their establishment in this island, were converted to Christianity, in proportion as literature prevailed among them this rude admiration would begin to abate, and poetry would be no longer a peculiar profession. Thus the POET and the MINSTREL early with us became two persons. Poetry was cultivated by men of letters indiscriminately, and many of the most popular rhymes were composed amidst the leisure and retirement of monasteries. But the minstrels continued a distinct order of men for many ages after the Norman Conquest, and got their livelihood by singing verses to the harp at the houses of the great.[121]

Evidence considered in this thesis largely supports this distinction, although creativity of representation in poems allows for much ambiguity. Indeed, much of what Percy says has been widely accepted or evidenced in primary sources, the attribution of skaldic art

[120] Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London: Walter Spiers, 1839), p. xiii.
[121] Percy, 1839, pp. xiii.

to Odin, for example. Remarkably, however, the distinction between poet and minstrel has been overlooked. The assumption that one type of performer figure existed in Anglo-Saxon times has proliferated, and remained largely unchallenged into the twentieth century, during which time the search for Anglo-Saxon performers apparently yielded further success. As recently as 1989, John Southworth opened his monograph on medieval English minstrels with the bold but unsubstantiated assertion that '[t]he presence of minstrels at every level of society and on all kinds of occasion is an undoubted fact of English life … from Alfred the Great to Henry VIII'.[122] Southworth claims in particular that '[t]he bard was a valued member of Anglo-Saxon society for his skill in perpetuating the fame of the heroes, past and present', in a chapter on 'Widsith and the Early Harpers'.[123] It is likely however that the quotation refers to a certain category of performer, the eulogistic *scop*, whereas his chapter is focused overall on the harping *gleoman*. Such conflation is commonplace. Moreover, unquestioningly perceiving literary material to be historical evidence, he also confuses the two: '[t]he significance of the bard's role in Anglo-Saxon society is very much apparent in *Beowulf*'.[124] The fact that *Beowulf* does not represent Anglo-Saxon society belies Southworth's assumptions, which also exemplify a belief that Old English poets were unable to represent the culture of peoples geographically or temporally distinct from their own.

Critics have regularly offered assured, detailed descriptions of these performers, ascribing to them such characteristics as the use of harps or an ability to improvise and create eulogistic or historical narrative at short notice. This enticing figure of the Anglo-Saxon period, often generically given the Old English term *scop* by critics, if they are

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[122] John Southworth, *The English Medieval Minstrel* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), p. 1.
[123] Southworth, p. 20.
[124] Southworth, p. 21.

not referred to as 'minstrels' or 'bards',[125] has been defined confidently in various introductory texts on the literature and history of the period up to the present day.[126] For example, Allen J. Frantzen claims that 'we know from numerous references that the Anglo-Saxons recited verse to the accompaniment of a harp or a similar instrument'.[127] It is by no means certain that this was the case, however.[128] Moreover, Anglo-Saxon poets who produced the extant corpus have regularly been conflated with the *scop* figure who features in the literature, to the extent that J. C. Pope, in his extensive study of the verse forms of *Beowulf*, and its possible rhythmic characteristics in performance, contends that the poem was likely to have been performed to the accompaniment of a harp.[129] The modern critical search for the Anglo-Saxon performer figure began in the early twentieth century with Lewis Flint Anderson's *The Anglo-Saxon Scop*, the first thesis to attempt a detailed study of the *scop* figure.[130] Like Southworth in his discussion of minstrels, Anderson unquestioningly unearths the historical figure of the *scop* from his analysis of Old English poetry. His status as court singer is based on passages in *Beowulf*,[131] and he describes them as 'the conservators of the knowledge of their time' using the creation myth episode from *Beowulf* (89-98) as his sole source.[132] Using evidence from *Widsith*, together with gnomic aspects of other poems, he

[125] For example, *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine M. Traherne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 130. Niles also uses *scop* in a general sense in *Beowulf: The Poem and its Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and also in Niles, 2003, but reviews his earlier work in 2007 and decides that he 'would replace the noun "scop" with the more neutral one "poet" or, if it seemed justified, "singer". While "scop" is a word that is echt germanisch, it seems to have reached retirement age except for special purposes': John D. Niles, *Old English Poems and the Social Life of Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 202.

[126] For a recent example, see Tom Shippey, 'Introduction', in Williamson, 2017, pp. xv-li (p. xv).

[127] *Anglo-Saxon Keywords* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 185-89 (p. 186).

[128] See Opland, 1980, particularly pp. 257-66, plus the findings of this thesis.

[129] See *The Rhythm of* Beowulf (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 88-95.

[130] Lewis Flint Anderson, *The Anglo-Saxon Scop* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1903).

[131] Anderson, 1903, pp. 15-17.

[132] Anderson, 1903, p. 17.

additionally asserts that the *scop* was a teacher as well as a performer,[133] and is in no doubt that he accompanied himself using the harp.[134]

The most extensive survey of the *scop* remains Egon Werlich's 1964 thesis.[135] Werlich begins by associating the *scop* figure with Continental Germanic priesthood, a role which developed into that familiar to us from the literature, the oral poet in the service of a ruler.[136] Werlich also considers the semantics and etymology of key terms for performer, *scop*, *woðbora*, *gleoman*, *leoðwyrhta*.[137] He sees *scop* and *woðbora* as essentially synonymous, referring to poet figures with the same role.[138] He also notes the distinct associations that the *gleoman* had.[139] Werlich surveys the material typically mined for information regarding the oral performer, i.e. the poetry, together with archaeological evidence regarding musical instruments, such as the Sutton Hoo find. Consequently, while noting the problems of conjecture based on poetic material, he relies heavily on it.[140] He also associates the *scop* with improvised performance, and the accompaniment of musical instruments, particularly the *hearpe*.[141] Although less speculative than Anderson's thesis, Werlich attempts to reconstruct historical practices using material which is unreliable, creative, or open to varying interpretation.

Descriptions of and assumptions concerning historical performers have been more circumspect in recent times, and there has been increasing recognition that we

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[133] Anderson, 1903, pp. 17-21. Thornbury argues that some known poets can also be classified as teachers (Aldhelm, for instance, and possibly Cynewulf), but does not see the association as being inevitable or universal. See Emily V. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 95-160, particularly pp. 159-60.
[134] Anderson, 1903, pp. 36-37.
[135] Egon Werlich, 'Der Westgermanische Skop: Der Aufbau seiner Dichtung und sein Vortrag' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Münster, 1964).
[136] Werlich, pp. 7-37.
[137] Werlich, pp. 58-88.
[138] Werlich, pp. 58-67. Cf. Ida Masters Hollowell, '*Scop* and *woðbora* in OE Poetry', *JEGP*, 77 (1978), 317-29.
[139] Werlich, pp. 87-88.
[140] E.g. Werlich, p. 213, pp. 219-20.
[141] See his discussion of improvisation and the harp in Werlich, pp. 213-22, pp. 234-62, respectively.

know very little about them, to the extent that there are doubts as to whether they existed at all. Changes in cultural practice over time have also been acknowledged. Renee R. Trilling reminds us that

> the image of the Germanic lord, seated at the head of the mead-hall and calling for the *scop* to sing the history of his ancestors, is an iconic, if anachronistic, cultural artefact, yet it continues to inform many readings of Anglo-Saxon poetic texts.[142]

Nevertheless, it is usually assumed that people with specific roles who were identified as *scopas* did exist outside the literature, and books and articles discussing various aspects of Anglo-Saxon society have mentioned and described them unquestioningly, either within general or introductory discussion or as a basis for specific conclusions. C.L. Wrenn argues for example '[t]hat the *scop* or poet accompanied his recitations in early times on the harp is attested by Bede's famous account of Cædmon, and this is borne out by a number of casual allusions in *Beowulf* and other poems, as well as by the preservation of the small model of a royal harp in the Sutton Hoo collection'. [143] Bede's account does not reference a *scop* or such accompaniment, however, and the Sutton Hoo royal harp, now rebuilt in the shape of a Germanic round lyre, does not provide evidence that poets performed with the instrument. Graeme Lawson meanwhile argues that the 'wandering or partly wandering role', that he perceives the *scop* as having, accounted for the popularity of the round lyre, and he intimates that the demise of the *scop* and his role coincided with the demise of the instrument.[144] As a result, the figure of the harp-playing, patronised, eulogising court *scop*, whether itinerant or not, has

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[142] Renee R. Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 3.
[143] C.L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1967), pp. 36-37 (p. 36).
[144] Graeme Lawson, 'An Anglo-Saxon Harp and Lyre of the Ninth Century', in *Music and Tradition: Essays on Asian and Other Musics*, ed. by D. R. Widdess and R. F. Wolpert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 222-44 (p. 244).

become a principal component in the perception of social life in early medieval England, and of the pre-Christian period in particular.

It is curious that such attention and significance has been afforded this elusive literary character, and such efforts made to extract him from texts and place him into history. His appearances are very rare in the Latin and vernacular writing of Anglo-Saxon England and also in Continental sources which refer to it.[145] Yet elusiveness might go some way to explaining why the somewhat romantic search for the oral poet has continued, and assumptions about him and his performances have persisted, even after Frank, among others, attempted to debunk the myth, claiming that 'all we can be sure of is our ignorance.'[146] She cautions that 'such glimpses of the poet in society are standard fare, enriching our lectures and enlivening our books. They are also no more than hopeful speculations hallowed by repetition.'[147] Frank pursues and confirms the sceptical approach taken by Jeff Opland in his analysis of the oral poet, which comprehensively reviews the literature of the Anglo-Saxon period and also considers the meanings of Old English words relating to poetry.[148] On the whole, Opland treads more warily than his predecessors, such as Anderson, Magoun and Creed, emphasising the lack of descriptive clarity in poetry and prose, the resultant difficulties of translation and interpretation, and the limited value in deriving conclusions about cultural history from what are often implausible literary sources.[149]

In the spirit of Percy's 'Minstrels' essay, and developing Frederick Padelford's argument from 1899 that 'in those early days preceding the migration there were two classes of minstrels, the scops who dwelt in the halls of princes, and the gleemen who

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[145] Opland discusses these sources at length: 1980, pp. 28-189.
[146] Frank, 1993, p. 12.
[147] Frank, 1993, p. 12.
[148] Opland, 1980.
[149] For Creed's view of the oral performer, see Robert P. Creed, 'The Singer Looks at His Sources', in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. by Stanley B. Greenfield (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1962), pp. 44–52.

wandered',[150] one of Opland's main conclusions is his distinction between two principal types of historical Anglo-Saxon performer. Like Padelford, he argues that they were linguistically differentiated. The *scop* was a eulogising, tribal court poet, in the service of a king and with a martial role at times, inciting or praising success in battle.[151] A *gleoman*, meanwhile, had a more generic role as entertainer with diverse functions and skills;[152] wandering in search of patronage was commonly essential for his existence.[153] Opland claims that their statuses were distinct, as were society's attitudes towards them: 'the glosses for *scop* and its occurrence in the extant texts suggest a serious, respected function for the poet, whereas the harper and *gleoman* are often bracketed with scurrilous professional entertainers.'[154]

For Opland '[t]he distinction between tribal poet [*scop*] and harper [*gleoman*] was manifested in function and performance.'[155] His view of the *scop* as court poet is similar to Niles' earlier conception. The latter in comparison would provide more diverse entertainment, and their verbal material would also differ. Opland argues that in typical performance practice the *scop* would perform unaccompanied, whereas the *gleoman* might use instruments such as the harp. Opland hypothesises that the role of the *scop* may have become redundant, and observes for example that '[King] Alfred does not seem to have supported a scop'.[156] Former court poets may then have fallen in with the *gleomen*, enabling the gradual conflation of the two terms. If this were accepted, it seems that a process of generalisation by observers of the medieval period, which could have begun in Anglo-Saxon times with the broadening of *scop*'s semantic

[150] Frederick M. Padelford, *Old English Musical Terms* (Bonn: P. Hansteins Verlag, 1899), p. 3.
[151] Opland, 1980, p. 259.
[152] Opland, 1980, pp. 190-91.
[153] Opland, 1980, p. 244.
[154] Opland, 1980, p. 259.
[155] Opland, 1980, p. 190.
[156] Opland, 1980, p. 265.

field,[157] has resulted in the dominant perception of the *scop* figure as harp-wielding Anglo-Saxon poet and minstrel, influenced perhaps by an awareness of later medieval figures, such as the troubadours who operated in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Occitania.[158] Typical of such a perception is Southworth's assertion, that '[i]n a pre-literate age, poetry and music are almost invariably associated; poet and composer are often the same person, and he may well be his own performer. The harper-poet of the oral tradition was also a story-teller and historian'.[159] If Opland's argument is accepted, then this view has been brushed over a more complex historical picture. Amodio is another recent critic who rejects the notion that such a process of generalisation took place; he sees the *scop* as analogous with a later minstrel figure:

> his title changes from "scop" (pl. scopas) in Anglo-Saxon England to "minstrel" by the early Middle English period, and although the language in which he composed undergoes dramatic changes during that same time period, his job description seems to have remained fairly constant.[160]

That *scop* is a term interchangeable with 'minstrel' was indirectly questioned long ago by the distinctions of Percy and Padelford, and is undermined by Emily Thornbury's recent research, discussed below, as well as by the analysis in this thesis. Moreover, the view of Amodio and Opland that terms like *scop* and *gleoman* are identifiers that can usefully apply to someone who had a specific, differentiated role in Anglo-Saxon society is problematic. It has become an assumption of critics who perceive such terms to be part of the classification of cultural history and historical process, when the population of the time did not necessarily categorise so.

Despite the possibility that they were used purely to facilitate alliteration, poets must have based their decision to use an identifier, indeed any word, on their

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[157] See Opland, 1980, p. 265.
[158] For detail concerning the troubadour figure, see *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially Chapters 4-7 (pp. 66-126).
[159] Southworth, p. 21.
[160] Amodio, 2005, p. 179.

understanding of its potential semantic range in a poetic context, because otherwise they would have rejected its use, knowing that the lines would not have made the required sense to their audience. Yet because poets made creative use of terminology relating to artistry, poetry makes for particularly unreliable evidence. Identifiers for performers are applied variously. For example, in *Beowulf*, *scop* refers to an archaic figure, the product of a process of conventionalisation. In prose, however, it is mainly used in relation to contemporary psalmists, as Thornbury, surveying the entire corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature, points out.[161] However, it additionally refers in both poetry and prose to historical and legendary individuals who would not sit within Opland's definition. This is particularly evident in the Old English translation of the Latin prose of the late-fourth/early-fifth century Gallaecian priest and historian Paulus Orosius, in which *scop* describes classical poets such as Homer, Parmenides, Tyrtaeus, and Virgil.[162] *Scop* and other words for performer are used broadly; they can describe an individual historical or fictional poet, but can also refer to conventional, symbolic figures of legend such as those found in *Beowulf*. In the poetry outside of *Beowulf*, *scop* is applied far more widely than solely to denote a Germanic court poet. For example, Homer appears in the poetry too, referred to as a *scop* in the thirtieth *Metre of Boethius.*[163]Also, Aldhelm, the seventh-century abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne, is described as a *scop* in a poem found within a manuscript of his prose *De Virginitate*.[164] As a result of such wide application, nouns for performers do not indicate specific or consistent roles, and

[161] Thornbury, 2014, p. 23.
[162] See *King Alfred's Orosius*, EETS, o.s. 79, ed. by Henry Sweet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1883); Opland, 1980, pp. 235-40.
[163] London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho A. vi. See *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, ASPR V, ed. by G.P. Krapp, (New York, NY: Columbia, 1932), pp. 202-03.
[164] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS Corpus Aldhelm MS 326. See *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ASPR VI, ed. by E.V.K. Dobbie (New York, NY: Columbia, 1942), pp. 97-98, p. 194.

there is routinely no naturalistic accompanying description that can aid any attempt at interpreting a specific instance.

This is not to suggest that the Anglo-Saxons did not include the court performer in their imaginings of the past, but critics have at times seized upon these imaginings in support of various arguments concerning life in Anglo-Saxon England. Thornbury accepts Opland's distinction between the relatively stable *scop* and the wandering *gleoman*,[165] and also distinguishes between Anglo-Saxon poetic conceptions of performer figures and recent critical understanding of them:

> [i]n Old English poems set in the Heroic Age … the Anglo-Saxons seemed to share an idea of a world in which there were poets at court, even if these were not quite the same as later scholarly conceptions of court poets. The traveller rewarded by rulers for his songs should be viewed as a vital part of the Anglo-Saxons' own 'mental modelling of their ancestral past' as Niles puts it.[166]

While there were courtly praise poets in Anglo-Saxon England, most notably the Scandinavian poets at Cnut's court, a matter considered further in Chapter 7, the vernacular literature, limited as it is, reveals nothing of such practices. Thornbury conducts an analysis of Old English words for poet, and concludes:

> in Anglo-Saxon England, words meaning "poet" functioned something like the modern category of "statesman". The term is not really a professional category, but rather a word for those who have excelled in the professions of politics or diplomacy … declaring oneself actually to be one would smack of hubris. A similar situation, I think, held true of *scop* or *poeta* in early England: it was something one could hope to be called after death.[167]

Also identifying *scopas* as poets, Clunies Ross likewise rejects any notion that they comprise a professional class, and notes additionally that 'this deduction accords with what we know from later sources about the role of skalds or court poets in Scandinavia'.[168] These views undermine the understanding that there were specific roles, classified linguistically, in Anglo-Saxon society. Instead, a term meaning poet

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[165] Thornbury, 2014, p. 20.
[166] Thornbury, 2014, p. 19. For the reference to Niles, see Niles, 2003, p. 12.
[167] Thornbury, 2014, p. 35.
[168] Clunies Ross, 2016, p. 13.

suggested that an individual possessed the knowledge and ability to perform. It also had a wider implication: that of indicating an imprecise, conceptualised, and somewhat abstract status. This thesis argues as a result that Anglo-Saxon poets and the body of work they created should be perceived as being separate from the various types of artist depicted in their poems. Opland's distinction between poet and general performer-entertainer can thus be seen as pertinent in this way: even if his linguistic classification is open to question, particularly in relation to the poetry, a distinction can be made between the historical Anglo-Saxon poet and the imagined performer figures who appear in their material.

Thornbury discusses six Old English words that she identifies as terms for 'poet' (see Table 1), and these will be discussed in the following section. The most common words do not refer exclusively to a figure who in Modern English would be most appropriately described as a poet, but could also apply to a singer or other kind of musician, or a storyteller. They can all be defined generically as 'performers' for the purposes of this thesis.

Old English word	Appearances in Old English Literature	Appearances in Old English Poetry
Scop	115	8
Gleoman	24	3
Woðbora	7	6
Meterwyrhta	1	0
Leoðwyrhta	6	1
Sangere	30	1

Table 1: Instances of words for 'poet' in Old English poetry, according to Thornbury.[169]

[169] Adapted from Thornbury, 2014, p. 21.

Scop

As indicated in Table 1, *scop* is the Old English term most commonly associated with artistic performers in the Anglo-Saxon period. Despite this primacy, however, in the extant poetry *scop* only appears as a simplex seven times, together with one compound instance which appears in a riddle. According to Orel, it is believed that *scop* derives from Proto-Germanic **skupan*, and is cognate with Old High German *scopf*, 'story', 'anecdote', 'mockery', and also Old Norse *skaup/skop*, 'railing,' 'mocking'.[170] Modern English 'scoff' is likely to be related to the word. The meaning 'creator', associated with the Old English verb *scieppan*, is also believed to have been significant in the early period of its use.[171] There is also a suggestion that the term could be a development from Old English *biscop*, 'bishop'.[172]

Thornbury claims that all instances of the term *scop* in Old English literature 'certainly or almost certainly referred to someone who composed in verse.'[173] The analysis in this thesis questions this view; in *Beowulf*, for example, the *scop* figure is a singer and storyteller but not necessarily a composer of verse specifically, as will be proposed in Chapter 4. Richard North also stresses the correlation between *scop* and singing, although he argues that the *scop* is a singing poet.[174] Thornbury observes that those most likely to be called a *scop* were psalmists.[175] Though the number of appearances in the literature does not necessarily translate to likely occurrence in Anglo-Saxon verbal discourse, it does seem probable in this instance, there being sixty-two references to psalmist-*scopas* in the literature. She also concludes that, save for the

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[170] Orel, p. 346; Jan De Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 487, p. 498.
[171] Wrenn doubts that it is related to *scieppan*, however: Wrenn, p. 36, n. 3.
[172] See Richard North, 'OE *scop* and the singing Welsh Bishop', in *Northern Voices: Essays on Old Germanic and Related Topics offered to Professor Tette Hofstra*, ed. by Kees Dekker, Alasdair MacDonald, and Hermann Niebaum (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), pp. 99-122 (p. 99).
[173] Thornbury, 2014, p. 21.
[174] North, 2008, pp. 103-04.
[175] Thornbury, 2014, p. 23.

example in the Exeter Book poem *Deor*, Anglo-Saxon poets did not define themselves as *scopas*. Instead, *scop* was a term used to describe others, or applied to fictional people.[176] We do not even have to conclude that the *Deor* poet necessarily conflated himself with Deor his character-narrator, or that the term *scop* referred to a specific role that he held. Rather than solely being an identifier, *scop* is often a symbolic term, as argued in Chapters 3 and 4, used by Anglo-Saxon poets to refer variously to archetypal, classical and named historical figures. Its symbolic function is particularly evident in *Beowulf*, in which *scopas* are associated with court formalities and entertainment, an idealised past, and prosperous, joyous society.

Considering the instances of *scop* in Anglo-Saxon Latin-Old English glossaries can give some indication of the ways in which it was understood in the period, though it should not be assumed that such glosses represent unequivocal translations. *Scop* only appears in late Anglo-Saxon glossaries, from the tenth century onwards, although these were often developed from earlier glossaries.[177] From the tenth-century glossaries, *witega oððe sceop*, 'prophet or poet', glosses the Latin *vates*, 'seer', 'prophet', 'soothsayer',[178] *scop* glosses *comicus* 'comic', 'of or relating to comedy', *scopas* glosses *lyrici*, 'lyricist,[179] and *mid scoplicum meterlicum fotum* glosses *pedibus poeticus. i. metricus*, 'poetic foot, a metre'.[180] In the eleventh century, *unweorðe scopes*, 'unworthy poets' glosses *tragedi uel comedi*, 'tragedy or comedy', *scop* glosses *liricus*, 'lyric poet', and *unwurð scop* glosses *tragicus uel comicus*, 'tragic or comic'.[181] Finally,

[176] Thornbury, 2014, p. 24.
[177] For detail concerning the interrelationships between Anglo-Saxon glossaries, see Patrizia Lendinara, *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 27-28.
[178] In the glosses of *Ælfric's Grammar*: Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 9. 17 (819).
[179] Both in MS Cotton Cleopatra A III.
[180] In Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 146.
[181] All in London, British Library, MS Additional 32246.

two manuscripts, one from the twelfth and one from the thirteenth century, have *sceop oððe leoðwyrhta* glossing *poeta*, 'poet'.[182]

The term *scop* thus has a wide semantic range, in the later Anglo-Saxon period at least, and little semantic homogeneity can be determined. North offers a summary of the principal associations: '[b]roadly, on the evidence of tenth-century glosses, the word seems to mean "poet" of a secular style, with a comic to tragic slant depending on the attitude to secular poetry espoused.'[183] Like Opland, John M. Hill asserts that a *scop* referred to a serious and respected figure: '[n]othing of the trivial or licentious entertainer hangs upon him.'[184] This opinion is challenged however by the straightforward gloss for *comicus*, and associations with dramatic entertainment, and the situation is complicated by the phrase *unwurð scop*, which suggests figures of lower status associated with tragic or comic dramatic performances. The limited glossary evidence available unusually suggests that the range of meaning narrowed during the period. Although, as previously stated, some of the references may have been transcribed from earlier glossaries now lost, the late dating of these glosses unfortunately obscures any insight into conceptions of what a *scop* referred to in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period. Possibly it had a narrower semantic range. It may have referred to a specific type of performer, yet glossary evidence undermines such a notion in late Anglo-Saxon England.

Concerning the limits of the *scop*'s role, Opland's analysis of the literature, together with evidence from the glossaries, leads him to believe that *scop* could never refer to a musician, but strictly an oral poet.[185] Whilst it would be a stretch to perceive

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[182] London, British Library, MS Cotton Julius A II and Worcester, Worcester Cathedral, MS F 174.
[183] North, 2008, p. 101.
[184] John M. Hill, 'The Social and Dramatic Functions of Oral Recitation and Composition in *Beowulf*', *Oral Tradition*, 17:2 (2002), 310-24 (pp. 319).
[185] Opland, 1980, pp. 253-56, and pp. 257-66.

scop as referring to musicians, it is not wholly inconceivable. Although historical circumstance does not necessarily correspond to poetic application, *scop* certainly refers to singers in the poetry. Indeed, this thesis suggests that in *Beowulf*, the *scop* is conceived of primarily as a singer rather than necessarily a poet given the associated terminology. In only one of his three appearances is there any suggestion that he performs poetry (1066), and that instance is not conclusive. Moreover, *scopas* sometimes appear in passages where music is also referred to, and there is also proximity between mention of them and of harping (89-90, 1065-66), though admittedly there is no overwhelming evidence directly linking the term *scop* with the playing of instruments. Rather than there being a focus on their attributes, *scopas* in poetry typically serve to create a symbolic association between a performer figure, expressive human behaviour, and wider cultural values.

Gleoman[186]

Whilst *scopas* can represent joy in poems, as will be shown in Chapters 3 and 4, the etymology of the term *gleoman* incorporates it inherently: *gleo* (also *gliw*) meant 'joy' and its Modern English reflex is 'glee'. However, it had additional meanings including 'entertainment' and 'music'.[187] It can thus be inferred that the *gleoman* was originally a performer who provided joy through entertainment. He may have done this through musical skill, although the term does not necessarily imply a musical performer; for example, *inimum* and *mimum*, 'mime', are glossed *gliw*, in the Cleopatra Glossary.[188] *Gleo* and its variant spellings commonly form the root of a compound in Old English poetry associating it with artistry. As well as *gleoman*, other examples include

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[186] Alternative spellings include *gligman*, *gligmon* and *gliwman.*
[187] *DOE* [online], 'gliw', <https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/?E12802> [accessed 5 July 2018].
[188] MS Cotton Cleopatra A III. Wright claims that both glosses should be *mimum*, *inimum* (1884, p. 424) being erroneous. For the *mimum* glosses, see Wright, 1884, p. 445, l. 14, and p. 476, l. 14.

gleobeam, 'joy-wood', and the emphatic *gleodream*, 'joy of music', a fusion of two words associated with both joy and artistry. Additionally, *glíwhléoðriendlic* means 'music' or 'musical', if a gloss for *musica*, also found in the Cleopatra Glossary, is accepted.

Unfortunately, as with *scop*, *gleoman* appears very rarely in Old English poetry: just three times. It is only used once in *Beowulf*, reflecting perhaps the poem's heroic subject matter, for which *scop* was considered by the poet to be more appropriate. As noted above, Opland describes a *gleoman* as an itinerant entertainer whose role was more generic and diverse than that of the *scop*. He is distinguished in particular by occasional association with the use of musical instruments and the employment of other performance skills such as acrobatics and juggling.[189] Opland also suggests that, unlike *scop*, *gleoman* has no connection in the glosses with poetry or composition.[190] Given his belief that *scop* refers to a poet figure, with no connection to music or other forms of entertainment, there is thus no overlap in their respective roles for Opland. Whether or not such a distinction in Anglo-Saxon England between *scop* and *gleoman* is accepted, this thesis aims to demonstrate that the function of these terms in poetry, and conception in the poetic imagination, is similar. Whilst the referential associations of *scop* and *gleoman* may be distinct at times, Opland's definitions seem too exclusive and divergent when the poetry is considered. For example, Widsith, associated with *gleomen*, enjoyed the patronage of lords, just as Deor, associated with *scopas*, had done. While *Widsith* evinces that a *gleoman* might not have had a long-term relationship with one particular lord, Deor is also shown to have won and lost favour and an associated contract. Moreover, the term *gleoman*, like *scop*, has a symbolic dimension, and poets took advantage of its construction and associations to refer generally to one who

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[189] Opland, 1980, pp. 257-66 (particularly p. 259).
[190] Opland, 1980, p. 244.

entertains and provides joy, rather than using it as a descriptor or identifier for someone with a specifically prescribed role. Unlike *scop*, however, *gleoman* refers overtly to someone who plays, or is at least accompanied by, musical instruments. For example, Widsith describes himself singing to the harp, as discussed in Chapter 3. Opland admits that linguistic differentiation of the roles of *scop* and *gleoman* is not always clear, partly because of creative decisions by poets.[191] In *Beowulf*, for example, the poet appears to conflate *scop* and *gleoman* by describing the tale of the Frisian slaughter (1071-159a) as the product of a *scop* (1063-68), and a *gleomannes gyd* (1160). Opland regards this as evidence that, whilst they might have been distinct at some point in the past, the identifiers could have become conflated by the time *Beowulf* was written down.[192] He also offers poetic licence as a possible reason for this connection: '[the most convincing] explanation of the apparent identification of *scop* and *gleoman* … [is] that the author was a poet, that he was creating poetry not social history.'[193]

The appearance of *gleoman* in non-poetic material suggests that he adopted multiple roles, in keeping with the jack-of-all-trades emphasis which Opland associates with the term. Moreover, glosses where *gleoman* is used indicate a reputation as a scandalous, defamatory and unruly character, whose transience leaves him on the margins of society.[194] They indicate a distinction from *scop*, glossing terms associated with morally dubious behaviour, such as *parasitis*, 'parasite' or 'sponge',[195] and *circulator*, 'pedlar',[196] implying a reliant yet nomadic character. It also glosses *seductor*, 'one who misleads'.[197] He is also associated with baser forms of entertainment

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[191] Opland, 1980, p. 199.
[192] Opland, 1980, p. 197.
[193] Opland, 1980, p. 197.
[194] See Opland, 1980, p. 244.
[195] In Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 146, and Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 1650, for example.
[196] Prudentius Glosses, Boulogne, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 189.
[197] Prudentius Glosses, MS 189.

such as *pantomimus*, 'pantomime performer',[198] and clownish characteristics are implicated at times: *gligman* glosses *mimus jocista scurra*, 'jester',[199] and *gliwere* glosses *scurra*, 'buffoon'.[200] The only evidence opposing such marginality as indicated by the glossaries is found in the poetry, the reference to *gleoman* in relation to the performer of the Frisian Slaughter tale in *Beowulf* being an example. Also, in the Exeter Book poem *The Fortunes of Men* there is great need for a harper who is given a fee for playing at the feet of his lord, though he is not given the identifier *gleoman*. Despite *gleo*'s semantic range, no glosses indicate an association between *gleoman* and music or the harp, as the poetry does. Certain harpers may not have been referred to as *gleomen*, or they could have been called *scopas* after all. North claims that '[a]ll *scopas* are *gleomen*, but not all *gleomen* are *scopas*',[201] and it could be that the hypothetical harper as imagined in the *Fortunes of Men* would have been designated a *scop* because of his position in relation to his lord at court.

It is also possible that a *gleoman* could have been scandalous and important at the same time. Studies of music in diverse world cultures have established that musicians often hold a unique status in society, a combination of low social standing and high cultural importance, with a licence to deviate from society's norms and indulge in immoral and/or criminal behaviour. This paradigm for the musician was hypothesised by Alan Merriam, one of the twentieth century's foremost ethnomusicologists. Merriam conducted fieldwork among the Basongye people of the former Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the 1950s. Based on his findings, and supported by comparative evidence from other ethnographies, Merriam concludes that

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[198] MS Add. 32246.
[199] MS Add. 32246.
[200] Prudentius Glosses, MS 189.
[201] North, 2008, p. 107.

> there is some evidence, at least, to suggest that this pattern of low status and high importance, coupled with deviant behaviour allowed by the society and capitalized upon by the musician, may be fairly widespread and perhaps one of several which characterizes musicianly behaviour in a broad world area.[202]

Merriam believes that somewhat negative stereotypes are routinely applied to musicians, who may play upon them to indulge in deviant behaviour.[203] This behaviour reinforces belonging among a musician social group or serves to position themselves in relation to wider society. Subsequent fieldwork by ethnomusicologists in diverse world cultures has revealed similarly ambivalent reputations, both for individual musicians and among musician social groups. For example, John Baily, whilst noting that it is undoubtedly a general conception particularly unsuited to some western cultural contexts,[204] found that the paradigm applied among Afghan musicians in the 1970s, noting that it 'certainly fits with traditional trends in Afghan culture.'[205] Discussing musicians in some Muslim societies, he states that '[w]hile it may be a ritual necessity (especially for weddings), those who provide music are stigmatized and often recruited from low-ranking ethnic minorities'.[206] The requirements of some early medieval European courts possibly engendered a similar cultural situation, and within a Christian context Cuthbert's letter to Archbishop Lul, discussed in Chapter 6, provides evidence that a similar social requirement may at the same time induce scorn. Stephen Cottrell also considered Merriam's paradigm, in relation to Western art (classical) musicians in London. He concluded that, notwithstanding the complexities of social relations in a large urban metropolis, musicians also conformed broadly to Merriam's hypothesis in

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[202] Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 137 (see pp. 123-44 for Merriam's evidence and general discussion concerning this paradigm).
[203] Merriam, p. 137.
[204] John Baily, 'Music Is in Our Blood: Gujarati Muslim Musicians in the UK', in *Learning, Teaching, and Musical Identity: Voices across Cultures*, ed. by Lucy Green (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 109-27 (pp. 109-10).
[205] John Baily, *War, Exile and the Music of Afghanistan: The Ethnographer's Tale* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 35.
[206] Baily, 2011, p. 110.

that context.[207] To these examples could be added the jazz musician in early twentieth-century American society.[208] It is entirely plausible that some historical performers who could have been described as *gleomen*, and indeed those imagined by poets and detailed in their poetry, also conformed to this paradigm.

Leoðwyrhta

The compound *leoðwyrhta* appears once in verse, in an introduction to the Old English *Boethius*, where it refers to King Alfred. In the glossaries it glosses *poeta* three times,[209] and also *vates*[210] and *melopius*.[211] All of these Latin terms translate adequately as 'poet', which would thus seem to be the most appropriate interpretation. Opland claims that *leoðwyrhta* is synonymous with *scop*;[212] however, such synonymy could undermine Thornbury's understanding that *scop* would be a term for someone viewed in a particular way among wider society. She suggests that the uses of the term *scop* 'trace a more nuanced picture of Old English usage' than compound terms such as *leoðwyrhta* or *meterwyrhta*.[213] These compounds do appear to be more functional and less symbolic. Possibly, to adopt North's suggestion in relation to *gleomen*, all *scopas* were *leoðwyrhtan* but not all *leoðwyrhtan* were *scopas*. Unlike *scop*, and as with *gleoman*, the modern reader is able to perceive some vestige at least of literal meaning from *leoðwyrhta*'s compound structure. The simplex *leoð*, considered below, is one of several Old English words that translate as 'song', 'tale' or 'poem', and *leoðwyrhta* could therefore be translated as 'song-wright'; he was a worker of poems, stories, or

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[207] Stephen Cottrell, *Professional Music-Making in London* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 193-99.
[208] See Alan P. Merriam and Raymond W. Mack, 'The Jazz Community', *Social Forces*, 38:3 (1960), 211-22 for a discussion of the jazz musician's segregation from mainstream society, the value of deviance, and their 'occupational ideology' (p. 222).
[209] Oxford, St. John's MS 154; London, British Library, MS Cotton Julius A II; Worcester, Worcester Cathedral MS F 174.
[210] London, British Library, MS Add. 32246.
[211] MS. Cotton Cleopatra A III.
[212] See Opland, 1980, pp. 246-53, particularly p. 246.
[213] Thornbury, 2014, p. 23.

song material. Interrogating the compound thus suggests a broad category, which assumes wider potential applicability than simply ‘poet’.

Woðbora

As stated at the opening to this thesis, the term *woðbora* appears mainly in poetry, where it features six times. It is only used once outside of verse, glossing *rethoribus*.[214] *Woðbora* also contains etymological evidence within its compound construction concerning function and applicability; a *woðbora* ‘bears’, and thus has the potential to deliver, *woð*. It has been widely asserted that *woð* has the same root as Latin *uates*, which generally translates as ‘poet’.[215] However, it had additional meanings, for example ‘sound,’ ‘noise,’ ‘voice,’ ‘song,’ or ‘eloquence.’[216] A *woðbora* is thus a bearer of poetry, song or eloquence, and possibly a combination of these things, and like *leoðwyrhta* its potential range of application is wide. North notes *woðbora*’s generic sense, arguing that it is synonymous with *reordberend*, ‘signifying a man or articulate being.’[217]

Meterwyrhta and *sangere*

There is little to be considered concerning the final two words listed by Thornbury. *Meterwyrhta*, despite being a *hapax legomenon*, is used as a gloss for *metricus* in the Cleopatra Glossary, and it is difficult to believe that a compound would have been invented solely to gloss. The *meter* component denotes a stress on poetic construction, and it was likely used more uniformly and specifically in relation to creators or performers of verse than *leoðwyrhta*. Meanwhile, rather than *sangere* referring to a generic ‘singer’, its application in prose writing overwhelmingly associates it with church figures, just as *scopas* are regularly associated with psalmists. Accordingly, it is

[214] In MS Cotton Cleopatra A III.
[215] Opland, 1980, p. 30 and pp. 251-52; Hollowell, 1978, p. 319; Thornbury, 2014, p. 25.
[216] Orel, pp. 469-70.
[217] Richard North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), p. 42.

appropriate to translate *sangere* as ‘church singer’. In its definition of the Modern English reflex, ‘songer’, the *OED* additionally offers the more specific ‘psalm-writer’.[218] Appropriately, the sole use of *sangere* in the poetry occurs in *Psalm 50*, the *Kentish Psalm*, referring to the musical abilities of King David.[219]

Even if Opland’s view is accepted, that there were distinct, linguistically classified types of artistic performer, in the earlier Anglo-Saxon period at least, those who are given a specific identifier appear so infrequently in Old English poems that a clear understanding of each type, reliable as evidence of historical practices, fails to emerge. Niles asserts that ‘because representations of the *scop* were important to Anglo-Saxons, they have value to us today.’[220] However, this assumption of importance is not supported in the poetry, regardless of the identifier used. Moreover, although performers could well have been important for society at some point in history, they are not depicted with any regularity or detail in written Anglo-Saxon poetry, the principal creative representational medium from the period that we are directly able to analyse, exemplifying the creative imagination and providing evidence of psychological constructs significant for the Anglo-Saxon mind.

Compound terms for performer in particular illuminate the synthesis of concepts that would have been significant for the culture at one stage in the past. They expressed an association between cultural phenomena and performer,[221] routinely connecting a word-element relating to the performer as human agent, for example *bora* or *man*, with one that expresses, albeit concisely, the product of their performances. Other Old English symbolic compounds do not initially appear to have had contextual symbolic

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[218] *OED* [online], ‘songer, *n.*’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/184581> [accessed 23 May 2016].
[219] See Joseph Harris, ‘Sanger’, *RGA*, 26 (2004), 79-86. *The Kentish Psalm* appears in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D VI.
[220] Niles, 2003, p. 12.
[221] See Clemoes, 1995, p. 116 and p. 132.

significance within a poem. Some, feasibly seen as rudimentary kennings, are often functional instruments enabling alliteration, such as the compound *hronrad*, 'whale road', which alliterates in *Beowulf*:

> oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra
> ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
> gomban gyldan . (9-11a)

…until each of those surrounding peoples over the whale-road must submit to him and pay tribute.

Another compound for the sea, *swanrad*, 'swan road', also alliterates:

> Het him yðlidan
> godne gegyrwan; cwæð, he guðcyning
> ofer swanrade secean wolde,
> mærne þeoden, þa him wæs manna þearf. (198b-201)

He ordered to have prepared for him a sea vessel, a good one, he said he wanted to seek a war-king, a mighty lord, over the swan's road, as he was in need of men.

While both examples conjure images representing the sea, they seemingly add little more than would a non-kenning compound or simplex noun. However, although they refer to unspecified watercourses, both have the potential to demonstrate a referential aspect and engender a symbolic dimension, with *hronrade* signifying a wide or turbulent sea and *swanrade* a smaller, calmer or more inviting one. Moreover, the relationships between peoples are also hinted at here. Perhaps the *Beowulf* poet and others, perceiving linguistic links in compounds between music and joy, utilised such language as part of their general nostalgia, to embellish their imagining of the past as well as in fulfilment of alliterative requirements. Drawing on society's values, the Anglo-Saxon poet made creative use of the inherited components of the Old English language, applying or extending the conventional sense of a known compound for a particular use, or inventing one that he believed would have been original yet acceptable to the poem's audience.

Old English Terms Relating to Performances

Many Old English nouns can refer to the product of a performance, including *dream*, *gesegen*, *galdor*, *gied*, *gliw*, *hleoþor*, *leoð*, *saga*, *sang*, *spell*, *stær*, *sweg*, *talu*, and even *word*.[222] Verbs expressing the act of performance are also various: *cyðan*, *dryman*, *galan*, *gieddian*, *singan*. As with attempts to characterise performers, identifying the details of a particular performance episode in the poetry from the presence of one term is for the most part futile, and there is generally little supporting description that might aid the task. A sense of each word's semantic range can be developed through analysis of its appearances overall, but the breadth of this range undermines attempts at a specific translation of each instance. Many of the terms encompass acts of speech, singing, and music. However, as indicated thus far, there is some evidence concerning the etymologies of these words that enables awareness, to varying degrees, of their possible origins and primary applications. Moreover, as with performers, there are terms for performance that bind semantic concepts together in the language. For example, there is a clear association in some terms for performance between artistry and joy, as seen with certain words for performer, and some Old English simplexes have dual semantic strands, encompassing both concepts in their range of meaning.

Old English *Dream* and Linguistic Referentiality's Potential

An illuminating example of the linguistic relationships that closely associated artistic performance and concepts of joy in Old English is the word *dream*, which had a similar semantic range to *gliw*. For almost a thousand years, from the beginning of the period of Anglo-Saxon migration until Chaucer's time, *dream* had diverse senses in English. None of them has survived to the present day. The minor sense in which one might say

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[222] See, for example, *A Thesaurus of Old English* [online], 'To relate, recount, tell :: A narrative, story, account', <http://oldenglishthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/category/?id=15018> [Accessed 4 June 2018]

‘this sword is a dream to wield in battle’ is relatively recent and not a survival; the *OED* dates the first instance of this sense to 1891.[223] There were different strands to its semantic range. ‘Joy’, ‘delight’ and ‘mirth’ was one strand, but it could also mean ‘noise’, and thus ‘a noisy joy’, ‘revelry’. Music was also a component: ‘melody’, ‘the sound of an instrument’, ‘musical performance’. It is generally supposed that *dreamere*, a *hapax legomenon* which appears in Chapter 16 of the Old English translation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, means ‘musician’, and *musica* is glossed *ða dreamlican* in the Cleopatra Glossary.[224] All of these earlier senses survived until the fourteenth century, when they died out to leave the Modern English primary association, ‘sleep vision’, which entered the language in the thirteenth century and came to replace Old English *swefn*. The medieval and modern meanings thus coexisted for over a century in the late medieval period.

Understandably, much research into *dream*’s history in the English language has focused on possible reasons for this shift in meaning, and there has been considerable speculation concerning its prehistoric origins. *Dream* had cognates in several early Germanic languages, generally restricted to the Modern English sense. In Old Norse, for example, *draumr* meant ‘sleep vision’, as did *troum* in Old High German and *dram* in Old Frisian. In Old Saxon, *drôm* also had the ‘sleep vision’ meaning,[225] although according to the *OED* there are instances in Old Saxon literature of the senses ‘mirth’, ‘noise’ and ‘minstrelsy’, so that *drôm* therefore had the closest semantic association with *dream* among related Germanic languages.[226] There is some speculation that

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[223] *OED* [online], ‘dream, *n.*[2] and *adj.*’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57600> [accessed 13 February 2017].
[224] See Wright, 1884, p. 445, l. 28.
[225] Orel, p. 75.
[226] *OED* [online], ‘dream, *n.*[1]’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57599> [accessed 23 May 2016].

Modern English ‘dream’ has two Germanic root words whose meanings have merged over time. According to the *OED*,

> [i]t has been suggested that the word is a derivative (with nasal suffix) of the same Germanic base as *dree v.*, with original meaning ‘to follow or serve (as part of a retinue)’, reflected by Old English *drēogan* to do, perform, carry out, to suffer, Gothic *driugan* to carry out (a military campaign), and (with different suffix) Old English *dryht* retinue, army...; the semantic link in this case would be the social activities of a Germanic leader's retinue.[227]

However, it is unclear where this suggestion comes from. Friedrich Kluge claims that Old Saxon *drôm* coexisted with another term, *dram*, which had a distinct etymology; the former informed Modern English ‘dream’, while the latter informed the Anglo-Saxon *dream* meanings. He suggests that Anglo-Saxon *dream* is related to Greek *θρῦλος*, ‘noise’, ‘murmur’ or ‘shouting’.[228]

Dream is used frequently in Old English literature. Half of the instances are in the prose, half in the poetry, and so it could be seen principally as a poetic term, given the relative scarcity of extant poetic material relative to the quantity of literature overall. According to the *DOE*, the meaning ‘music’ or ‘melody’ occurs more frequently in prose texts, whereas in poetry it mainly meant ‘delight’, ‘joy’, ‘revelry’ or ‘bliss’, and was often used contextually to refer either to an earthly, social joy, or a heavenly or spiritual joy, particularly when compounded. However, the *DOE* also suggests that the word was often used ambiguously or referred to both senses, and the analysis in this thesis supports this view.[229] Poets exploited its multiple meanings, and in poetry it regularly refers to musical or other artistic activity that can induce joy. Bogislav von

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[227] *OED* [online], ‘dream, *n.*[1]’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57599> [accessed 23 May 2016]. See also Orel, p. 75.
[228] See Friedrich Kluge, *An Etymological Dictionary of the German Language* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1891), p. 366.
[229] *DOE* [online], ‘dream’, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/dict/indices/headwordsd.html#E06159> [accessed 23 May 2016].

Lindheim considered the development of *dream* in the English language. He rousingly asserts that

> no other OE. word is so distinctly expressive of the vitality and energy of the Germanic warrior, inspiring him to deeds of valour and fame, but also driving him to wear himself out in the noise and reckless mirth of the banquet.[230]

Yet *dream* does not solely express aspects of pagan Germanic culture. It features in many Old English Christian poems, appearing twenty-three times in the Exeter Book saint's life *Guthlac* alone. It is thus a wide-ranging term with diverse application. Examples from the poetry considered in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 expose the inspiration for von Lindheim's statement, but also reveal the way in which poets made use of *dream*'s ambiguity and the relationships between the concepts that fall within its semantic range.

As with *gliw*, *dream* is often compounded, and these compounds regularly reflect the particularly social contexts to which the word refers, for example *seledream*, 'hall joy', and *medudream*, 'joy at mead: festivity', both of which appear in *Beowulf*. They also associate humans with pleasure more generally, as in two compounds also used in *Beowulf*: *mondream*, 'pleasure of human life', and *gumdream*, 'pleasures of men'. *Beowulf* also features *gleodream*, near the end of the Geatish messenger's speech towards the close of the poem, referring to that which Beowulf has relinquished following death. One of Bosworth and Toller's definitions is the improbable 'glee-joy', but I would suggest 'joyful noise', and hence possibly 'music' or 'joyous music'. Indeed, Bosworth and Toller additionally offer 'pleasure caused by music'.[231] *Dream*'s association with artistry, particularly the sound of a performance, is also evident in other compounds: *swegldream*, which appears in the Exeter Book poem *Christ* as well as in *Guthlac*, is generally accepted to mean 'music', and like *gleodream* could also mean

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[230] Bogislav von Lindheim, 'OE "Dream" and Its Subsequent Development', *RES*, 25 (1949), 193-209 (p. 199).

[231] Bosworth and Toller, 1882-98, p. 480. Fulk et al. exclude the musical aspect, and translate *gleodream* as 'enjoyment, entertainment, revelry': Fulk et al., 2008, p. 386.

'musical joy' or 'joy of music', while *dreamcræft*, 'art of music', also appears twice in Old English: in the *Consolation of Philosophy* and in *The Martyrology*. Overall, *dream* and its use in the poetry exemplifies the way in which the Old English language reveals close links between prosperous, successful human societies and circumstances, whether Christian or otherwise, and the pleasure that humans derive from the performance of music, poetry and other artistry. As will be shown in Chapters 3 and 4, the poets used the semantic ambiguity and variety of *dream* to powerful creative effect, whilst at the same time reinforcing those links through compounding and application.

Gesegen

Seemingly related to *secgan*, 'to say', *gesegen* can refer also to a story as well as a speech act in particular. The online *DOE* omits the word, presumably to be included under 's', but Bosworth and Toller offer 'saying, telling, conversation, relation, tradition'.[232] *Gesegen* is of interest in relation to this thesis as it is used to describe the material that the king's *þegn* knows in *Beowulf* (869) (see Chapter 4, from p. 148), in the form *ealdgesegena*, 'old stories'.

Galdor

The *DOE* offers 'poem' and 'song' as the principal performance types referred to by *galdor*, but notes that it glosses *praestigia*(*e*), 'illusion', 'deception' 'deceitful use of words', and is also associated with spells and incantations.[233] The term is related to the verb *galan* (see below, p. 86).

[232] Bosworth and Toller, 1882-98, p. 439.
[233] *DOE* [online], 'galdor', <https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/?E12274> [accessed 18 June 2018].

Gied

Roscoe E. Parker describes a *gied* as ‘an elegy, moral tale, maxim, or parable’,[234] but this does not exhaust its possible semantic range. The *DOE* offers many possibilities, including: ‘poem’, ‘song’, ‘enigmatic utterance’, ‘riddle in verse’, ‘a mournful utterance’, ‘dirge’, ‘lamentation’, ‘keening’, ‘report’, ‘tale’, ‘story’, ‘speech’, ‘utterance’, ‘eloquent speech’, ‘wise utterance, ‘saying’, ‘proverb’, ‘maxim’, ‘instructive speech’, ‘didactic tale’, ‘parable’, ‘figurative utterance’.[235] Reichl has noted the term’s diverse applicability,[236] and Niles argues that it refers ‘to many things, from poetry, to prophecy, to healing charms, to riddles, to heightened speech.’[237] He also claims that it ‘was a keyword in the Anglo-Saxons’ cultural vocabulary and … “denoted sententious, rhythmically charged speech … uttered in a heightened register”’.[238] According to North, who uses evidence of the history of *geð*’s senses, the word is derived from pre-Christian concepts of the soul, *geð* being *gied*’s cognate.[239] He also argues that the common phrase *gied wrecan*, used in *Beowulf* to refer to a *scop*’s performance (1065), thus formerly meant ‘to purge one’s soul’ before meaning ‘to compose or recite a poem or song’.[240] North also stresses the elegiac nature of *gied*, arguing that it referred to ‘an inherently sad genre of composition … [which] expressed

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[234] Roscoe E. Parker, ‘*Gyd*, *Leoð*, and *Sang* in Old English Poetry’, *Texas Studies in Literature*, 1 (1956), 59-63 (p. 63).
[235] *DOE* [online], ‘gydd’, <https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/?E13456> [accessed 4 June 2018]
[236] Karl Reichl, ‘Old English *giedd*, Middle English *yedding* as Genre Terms’, in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Michael Korhammer, Karl Reichl, and Hans Sauer (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 349-70 (particularly pp. 351-66).
[237] John D. Niles, *Old English Literature: A Guide to Criticism with Selected Readings* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), p. 223.
[238] Niles, 2016, p. 223, n. 3. The nested quote is from John D. Niles, *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999), p. 30.
[239] North, 1991, pp. 39-41.
[240] North, 1991, pp. 54-55.

a private and personal form of poetry especially appropriate for elegy of the dead.'[241] The use of the phrase *gleomannes gyd* in *Beowulf* suggests that the poet had no issue associating the term with the tale of the Frisian slaughter, which, whilst a tragic episode that could, if rather loosely, be interpreted as an elegy for the dead, could not be classed as a private and personal form. He also deemed *gleoman* to be an appropriate descriptor for someone who could perform such a *gied*, notwithstanding the obvious alliterative convenience. Indeed, *gied* is associated with all three instances of *gleoman* in Old English poetry, suggesting that the need to conform to the rules of alliteration may have given poets license to employ the term widely. Moreover, the horse-riding *þegn* in *Beowulf*, who is described as being *gidda gemyndig*, 'mindful of lyrics', performs within a non-elegiac context: during the Danish troop's triumphant ride home in the morning after the death of Grendel, further indicating that broad applicability was acceptable in poetry.

Galan, sang, singan, and sweg

Galan, *sang*, *singan*, and *sweg* also have diverse meanings that preclude an exact understanding of performance delivery. In *Beowulf*, *sang* is frequently used when *scopas* are mentioned, and it evidently referred to a broad range of artistry; Parker describes the scope of the term as 'anything that is sung or chanted'.[242] However, the desire of poets for figurative expression and their obligation to alliterate means we should not assume that use of the noun *sang*, or the verbs *galan* and *singan*, necessarily indicate sung performance. Such language occurs at unexpected times in *Beowulf*. For example, Grendel 'sings' a *gryreleoð*, 'song of terror', and a *sigeleasne sang*, 'victoryless song', as Beowulf gains the upper hand during their fight in Hrothgar's hall, Heorot:

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[241] North, 1991, p. 40.
[242] Parker, p. 60.

Norð-Denum stod
atelic egesa, anra gehwylcum
þara þe of wealle wop gehyrdon,
gryreleoð galan Godes andsacan,
sigeleasne sang, sar wanigean
helle hæfton. (783b-88a)

Horrible fear came upon the North-Danes, to each one of them who heard wailing from the wall, God's adversary sounding a song of terror, a song of defeat, hell's captive bewailing his wound.

Since the interpretation that Grendel actually sang at this point in the narrative would be most unlikely, there is a strong possibility that *galan* and *sang* are being used figuratively, with *gryreleoð* and *sigeleasne* combining in the half-line to affect the way *galan* and *sang*, chosen at least partly because of the requirements of alliteration, are interpreted. In poetic use, then, *galan* and *sang* are shown to have a wide range of meaning and also figurative uses, particularly under influence of an adjective in the half-line. This breadth of meaning can also undermine the view that the *scop* necessarily delivers sung performances in *Beowulf* (90), for example, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Sweg is also used in proximity with *scop* in *Beowulf*, although only when a harp is also present. It refers to harp performance three times in the poem, and it is likely that the *Beowulf* poet wished it to refer particularly to musical performance. Outside of *Beowulf*, in which it is used six times, *sweg* appears in numerous other poems and is common in prose. As well as referring to human musical performance, it refers to the song or call of a bird, in *The Phoenix* (131) and *The Seafarer* (21). It also refers to noise more generally, and can denote the clamour of the hall, for example *Beowulf* (644).[243]

Leoð

Leoð only appears three times as a simplex in poetry. For Parker, the term referred to 'an aphoristic or lyric poem',[244] and so likely to a short form of poetic expression. Though the morphology and meaning of the word is similar to Modern English 'lay',

[243] See Bosworth and Toller, 1882-98, p. 946.
[244] Parker, p. 61.

with the sense ‘a short lyric poem intended to be sung’, ‘lay’ entered the language in the Middle English period, derived from Old French *lai*.[245] Moreover, in its sole appearance in *Beowulf* (1159) it refers to the long tale of the Frisian slaughter, which was not necessarily intended to have been a verse performance and is also classified as a *gied* (1160). In a verse preface to the C text of the Old English *Boethius*, *leoð* is of interest because it describes King Alfred’s practice, *ðæt he ðiossum leodum leoð spellode* (4), ‘that he told tales to those people [the West Saxons]’, but unfortunately no detail is provided about such tales, other than that they are *ealdspell* (1), ‘old stories’.[246] The other use in the poetry occurs in *The Phoenix*, at a point when the narrator interrupts his narrative to address the poem’s audience directly, and thus *leoð* refers to the poem itself:

> Ne wene þæs ænig ælda cynnes
> þæt ic lygewordum leoð somnige,
> write woðcræfte

Let none of mankind imagine that I am composing a poem and writing word-craft with lying words.

The Phoenix has lyric and aphoristic characteristics, but at 677 lines is not a particularly short poem. Glossaries do not provide significant additional information about *leoð*’s meaning; it glosses *poema* and *odas*,[247] and *carmentriumphale*, ‘triumphal poem’, ‘triumphal song’, is glossed *þæt sigorlice leoð*[248], while *tragoediam*, ‘tragedy’ is glossed *sarlic leoð*,[249] which, if it is accepted that a tragedy is generally a long form, again indicates that it could be used to refer to an extended performance. Overall, *leoð* is a term often, yet not in all cases, used in relation to verse, with semantic flexibility

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[245] *OED* [online], ‘lay, *n.*[4]’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/106490> [accessed 7 April 2017].
[246] Godden and Irvine, I, p. 384.
[247] In British Library Add 32246 and MS Cotton Cleopatra A XIII, respectively.
[248] MS Cotton Cleopatra A XIII.
[249] MS Cotton Cleopatra A XIII.

greatest in poetic instances. It likely had a primary sense of 'poem', but could also mean 'song' or 'tale', and there is no clear distinction from words such as *talu*.

Talu

Modern English 'tale' is *talu*'s reflex. It was a prose term, and despite its retention into Modern English it does not feature at all in singular form in the primary corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry as compiled by Krapp and Dobbie. The plural *tala* is used in *Solomon and Saturn*, referring to writers of stories found by the narrator in books of the East. It also appears in the late *Instructions for Christians*, a poem that features a partial collapse in alliteration, found only within a twelfth-century manuscript.[250] Outside of poetry it glosses *disputatio*, 'formal debate', *constellatio*, '?constellation' and *laterculus*, 'a list (particularly of roles or offices held)'.[251] It too thus has a wide range of association.

Although their meanings are various, there is little diversity in the way these terms for performance are used in the poetry. Often they are simply used within statements, unsupported by additional description. In *Beowulf*, for example, *þær wæs sang ond sweg* (1063) and *þær wæs gidd ond gleo* (2105) both serving to satisfy the requirements of alliteration. This creates the impression that they are largely interchangeable, and applicable so long as the metrical and alliterative rules are observed. However, the lack of description could have been offset by any referential properties that the terms once possessed, or that were generated through a particular application. The poet did not need to expand upon them, and an audience may well have been aware of the intended references. Overall, the principal creative use of these terms lies in the poets' crafting of images of performance containing symbolic associations generated by their appropriate

[250] In Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Li I 33. See J.L. Rosier, 'Instructions for Christians', *Anglia: Zeitschrift für englische Philologie*, 82 (1964), 4-22.
[251] Wright defines *laterculus* as 'a catalogue of employments': Wright, 1884, p. 437.

insertion within terse poetics, rather than through their appearance within detailed descriptions of performance.

Instruments of Artistry

Musical instruments, and the *hearpe* in particular, form a significant constituent of the symbolic conception of artistry in early medieval poetry. In contrast with other literatures, however, instruments are only rarely conceived of as individual objects in Old English poems, as will be shown in Chapters 3 and 4. In Homeric epic poetry, by contrast, individual players and instruments are described, as well as classes of instruments. In Old Norse Eddic poetry, too, individual harps and their performers appear, and they feature in specific narrative events, as will be considered in Chapter 7. In Laȝamon's *Brut*, considered in Chapter 8, named performers appear, together with lists of instruments that are not a feature of Old English poems, but the generally ambiguous depiction seen in Old English poetry is retained in most cases. Significant issues of interpretation are apparent concerning musical instruments in Old English poetry. Along with the question, raised earlier, of whether musical instruments were used to accompany vocal performances, there is also a crux concerning their organological identification. Classification is highly problematic, because the relationship between the Old English vocabulary for musical instruments and the specific instruments being referred to is ambiguous and complex.

Hearpe[252]

[252] Concerning instruments of the lyre and harp class from the Anglo-Saxon period, see Christopher Page, 'Anglo-Saxon *Hearpan*: Their Terminology, Technique, Tuning and Repertory of Verse 850-1066' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1981).

The sixth-century Latin poet Venantius Fortunatus had a taxonomic understanding of the different string instruments preferred by various peoples. In a poem addressed to the Roman aristocrat Duke Lupus, he writes:

> Romanusque lyra, plaudit tibi barbarous harpa,
> Graecus Achilliaca, crotta Brittana canat

Let the Roman applaud you with the lute, the barbarian with the harp, the Greek with epic lyre, the Briton with the crwth.[253]

Venantius's distinction is largely appropriate. The Germanic 'barbarians' did use a string instrument that can be distinguished, if principally cosmetically, from those related instruments of other cultures, as confirmed by the increasing number of archaeological discoveries.[254] The Old English cognate of *harpa*, *hearpe*, is the principal simplex term for an instrument mentioned in the context of artistic performance in Old English poetry. It is generally supposed that the instrument was prevalent in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, and passed to the Germanic peoples via the Greeks.[255] Cognates for *hearpe* appear in all Germanic languages, with its etymology traceable to Proto-Germanic **xarpon*,[256] suggesting widespread use of such instruments among the early Germanic peoples. However, the recent archaeological discovery of a lyre dated to 300 B.C. indicates use of such an instrument in Britain long

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[253] *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, trans. by Judith George (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), p. 64. George offers 'crowd' as an alternative translation for *crotta* but this makes less sense in context, as Venantius is clearly assigning particular instruments to respective cultures. Concerning the reason *achilliaca* is likely to mean 'lyre', see Curt Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006), p. 261.
[254] See Robert Boenig, 'The Anglo-Saxon Harp', *Speculum*, 71:2 (1996), 290-320 (p. 300). Rupert Bruce-Mitford counts at least fifteen comparable lyres from 'before the Viking period and just into it' at the time of writing: 'The Sutton Hoo Lyre, *Beowulf*, and the Origins of the Frame Harp', *Antiquity*, 44:173 (1970), 7-13 (p. 10). More recently, C.J. Arnold notes that four lyres have been found in Anglo-Saxon burials: *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 69.
[255] See Roslyn Rensch, *The Harp: Its History, Technique and Repertoire* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1969), pp. 3-11.
[256] Orel, p. 163.

before the migrations of Germanic peoples,[257] and there may have been a more complex introduction to the British Isles for the instrument, or instruments, that the Anglo-Saxons referred to as *hearpan*.

In addition to doubts concerning the origins of the instrument found in Anglo-Saxon burials and represented in contemporary illustrations, there is by no means consensus on the particular instrument that the term *hearpe* referred to in Old English literature. Indeed, it may not refer to one particular instrument but to a group of instruments, or indeed to all string instruments, though the latter is unlikely.[258] Even when *hearpe* refers to a specific instrument being played by an individual in a particular passage, its type is thus indeterminable. Because of regular appearances in early medieval illustrations[259] and its presence among archaeological finds, it is generally believed that *hearpe* referred to a string instrument also known in medieval times as a *rotte*[260] and presently the round lyre, a relatively portable instrument that could rest on the knee, such as that discovered in the Sutton Hoo excavation (see Figure 4). Page concludes that *hearpe* originally referred to the Germanic round lyre, and came to refer to the frame harp at some point from *c*. 800 onwards. Both instruments were thus referred to as *hearpe* for a time.[261] It is generally supposed that the frame harp was introduced later in the Anglo-Saxon period. Indeed, there is a suggestion that the modern orchestral frame harp was invented in Britain, though there are Egyptian paintings depicting instruments in the shape of frame harps from the twelfth century

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[257] *BBC News* [online], <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-17537147> [accessed 13 September 2014]. To date, no report has been published concerning this find, but see John Purser, 'The Significance of Music in the Gàidhealtachd in the Pre- and Early-Historic Period', *Scottish Studies*, 37 (2017), 207-21.
[258] The most extensive discussion of the terminology is Page, pp. 10-11, pp. 75-164.
[259] Examples of such illustrations are found in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A I, fol. 30^{v} (Figure 5), and Durham, Cathedral Library, MS B.II.30, fol. 81^{v}.
[260] Cuthbert uses the term *rotte* as early as 764, and it may have been used in *Beowulf*: see Marijane Osborn, '*Reote* and *ridend* as musical terms in *Beowulf*: Another kind of harp?' *Neophilologus*, 62:3 (1978), 442-46.
[261] Page, pp. 163-64).

B.C.[262] The pictorial evidence of lyres from the early medieval period, especially in depictions of King David (see Figure 5), has supported the perception that the Germanic round lyre is being imagined in *Beowulf* and elsewhere in the Old English poetic corpus. Lyre strings are parallel to the soundboard (see Figure 4), whereas on the triangular frame harp they run perpendicular to it (see Figure 1). As a consequence, I will likely be referring to the instrument more accurately classified in Modern English as a lyre when discussing the Old English term *hearpe*, and its apparently synonymous poetic compounds, or, less likely, a class of musical instruments.

Partly as a result of the doubts concerning classification and interpretation, there has been limited musicological analysis and critical consideration of the early medieval string instrument which could be classified as a *hearpe*, a *rotte* or a round lyre. Often, cursory consideration is made of them within larger works that focus on the frame harp, which has received greater critical attention given the status of the modern orchestral harp.[263] Along with other work considered later in this thesis, one notable exception is the work of Rupert Bruce-Mitford, who provides a detailed description of the Sutton Hoo lyre, including information on the materials and components from which the instrument was constructed.[264] He also discusses it in relation to *Beowulf*.[265] Bruce-Mitford is in no doubt that the Germanic round lyre is being represented in *Beowulf*, and by Bede in his account of Cædmon. He finds no evidence of frame harps in pre-

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[262] Rupert Bruce-Mitford, 1970, pp. 11-12. For the Egyptian illustrations see Rensch, 2007, p. 10. It is indicative of the prominence of the frame harp that in 1948 the Sutton Hoo lyre was at first mistakenly reconstructed as one (see Figure 3).

[263] See, for example, Roslyn Rensch's two book-length overviews of the harp (1969, 2007). She discusses the round lyre briefly in these works (particularly 1969, p. 14; 2017, pp. 77-79). Rensch erroneously saw the use of the term *hearpe* as evidence for the early adoption of the frame harp in England (1969, p. 29), though she is more cautious in later work; see Roslyn Rensch, *Harps and Harpists*, rev. edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), pp. 77-79.

[264] Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton-Hoo Ship Burial*, 3 vols (London: British Museum, 1975-83), III (1983), pp. 611-720.

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Christian Anglo-Saxon England: '[t]he quest for a second, different Germanic instrument, of harp type, seems a futile one'.[266]

The analysis of references to musical instruments in Old English poetry has also been minimal, though a small number of articles have focused on poetic instances featuring the *hearpe*. In his consideration of the corpus, together with archaeological and pictorial material, Robert Boenig questions the idea that *hearpe* necessarily referred to the round lyre in Old English poems.[267] He suggests instead that the frame harp is the instrument being described, although his evidence is not particularly conclusive. He points out rather tentatively that its loud volume is mentioned in *Beowulf*,[268] and also that reference is made to the use of both hands in the Junius Manuscript poem *Genesis*, and the Exeter Book poems *Maxims I* and *The Gifts of Men*.[269] Yet, as Lawson notes, there appears to have been a wrist strap attached to lyres found in Anglo-Saxon burials, enabling the strings to be easily manipulated with both hands. See for example the image of King David from MS Cotton Vespasian A I (Figure 5), in which a strap which wraps behind the neck appears to be represented.[270] Boenig additionally uses an illustration from the Junius manuscript as evidence (see Figure 1).[271] However, it is not clear that the Junius manuscript's illustrator intended to represent a harp from the Anglo-Saxon period, because it depicts a biblical character, the musician Jubal.[272] In any case, as noted above, representations of the biblical David often feature an Anglo-Saxon lyre similar in form to that found in the Sutton Hoo burial. An approach which

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[266] Bruce-Mitford, 1970, p. 11.
[267] Boenig, 1996, p. 292.
[268] Boenig, 1996, p. 292.
[269] Boenig, 1996, pp. 317-18.
[270] Graeme Lawson, 'The Lyre Remains from Grave 32', in *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery: Excavations and Surveys 1824-1992*, ed. by William Filmer-Sankey and Tim Pestell (Ipswich: Suffolk County Council, 2001), pp. 215-23 (p. 218); Bruce-Mitford notes the frequency of the instrument in graphic representations as well as among archaeological finds: Bruce-Mitford, 1970, p. 10.
[271] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11; Boenig, 1996, p. 296.
[272] Exemplifying greater confusion, Southworth even believes the image of Jubal to be the depiction of an Anglo-Saxon harper: Southworth, p. 21.

relies on such images, along with poetic references, in an attempt to prove poetic intention or historical circumstances is thus potentially flawed. To further exemplify the issues of interpretation, Boenig agrees with Marijane Osborn that *reote* in *Beowulf* (2457) refers to a musical instrument rather than to 'joy', as it is commonly translated, and therefore that it is a synonym for *hearpe*, which features on the following line.[273] However, *reote* is more likely to have referred to a lyre than a frame harp, notwithstanding the poetry containing creatively-applied terminology. *Beowulf* 2457 is a semantic crux reflecting the close relationship in the language between music and joy, and it is also possible that the ambiguity was intentional.

Even though pictorial and archaeological evidence points to the Germanic round lyre being the likely instrument imagined in Old English poems, the poetry exacerbates doubts concerning the classification of Anglo-Saxon musical instruments, partly because naturalistic detail about them and their associated performance practices are of little importance for Anglo-Saxon poets. As with words for performers and performances, terms relating to instruments of performance do not have classificatory functions specific enough to pinpoint one type of instrument in a particular instance. This is because describing the exact instrument being referred to is a lower priority for the poets than the functions and effects of these references, and the associations suggested by them. Analysis of the passages featuring *hearpe* in the poetic corpus reveals certain patterns of treatment by Anglo-Saxon poets. Moreover, references to the instrument are a useful focus of analysis when considering the relationship between Anglo-Saxon cultural thought, conventional wisdom, and poetic aphorism and narrative, because they constitute a key symbol of what Niles refers to as Anglo-Saxon 'mental modelling'.[274] Most representative of the symbolism that the instrument has are the

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[273] Boenig, 1996, p. 294; see also Osborn.
[274] Niles, 2003, p. 12.

poetic compounds often used as an alternative to, or in conjunction with, the *hearpe* simplex. For example, *gleobeam*, 'music beam', 'harp', discussed above because of the associations inferred by its compound structure, is used in *Beowulf*, *Christ II*, and the *Gifts of Men*. Another compound, *gomenwudu*, 'wood of entertainment', which similarly associates pleasure and pastime with the instrument as material object, is unique to *Beowulf*, in which it is used twice (1065, 2108). The poetic application of both simplex and compounds is considered in Chapters 3 and 4.

Concerning the configuration and setup of the round lyre, archaeological discoveries have determined that the standard instrument of the Anglo-Saxon period had six strings. Tuning conventions are unknown and could have varied according to the particular composition of the instrument or the requirements of a certain performance. The Sutton Hoo lyre has been tuned to a pentatonic scale, though only because of a general belief that this was a preference in earlier times, not because of any specific evidence suggesting it to be the desired method.[275] There is a discussion and example of tuning for a six-string Classical *cithara*, a Boethian instrument of the lyre class, by one Anglo-Saxon contemporary, the Frankish monk and teacher Hucbald (c. 840-930). In his treatise, *De Harmonica Institutione*, Hucbald describes the tuning as follows: with the lowest-pitched string tuned to C, each adjacent string is then tuned higher by an interval of a tone, except that the interval between strings three and four is a semitone.[276] Corresponding to the first six white keys in the C major scale on a piano, this is known as a hexachord, a popular tuning in medieval Europe.[277] Such an 'open' tuning, which enables a pleasant-sounding chord to be sounded by strumming without

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[275] Bruce-Mitford, 1970, p. 8. For discussion of the tuning of Anglo-Saxon harps and lyres, including analysis of treatises such as that of Hucbald and others, see Page, pp. 12-13, pp. 187-202.
[276] *Hucbald, Guido, and John on Music: Three Medieval Treatises*, ed. by Claude V. Palisca, trans. by Warren Babb (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 22-23.
[277] 'Hexachord', *NGD*, XIII (1980), p. 543.

the need for a string to be stopped, would make it likely that such an instrument was relatively easy to play and adaptable to diverse contexts. Benjamin Bagby, a prominent modern interpreter of medieval music, offers an alternative open tuning solution that he uses in his performances, with an octave between the highest and lowest strings, which has a similar sonic effect to the hexachord and is also relatively straightforward to play.[278] Such open tunings would make it more likely that the instrument could have been passed around a group of non-professionals with varying abilities, or circulated among a group of singers.

[278] Bagby, p. 190.

Figure 1: Jubal playing a frame harp, from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Junius 11.

Figure 2: The Sutton Hoo Lyre fragments.

Figure 3: Erroneous 1948 ‘frame harp’ reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo lyre.

Figure 4: 1969 reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo lyre.

Figure 5: King David playing the round lyre, surrounded by his retinue of performers, from London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A I, fol. 30v (eighth century).

Horns and trumpets

Horns and trumpets appear more frequently than the *hearpe* in Old English poems, but do not feature in social entertainment contexts typical of artistic performances, except possibly for one enigmatic example: Exeter Book *Riddle 14*, to which 'horn' is the solution. In this riddle, the instrument is shown to be of use in various contexts, mostly military, but it also summons warriors to drink in the hall: *hwilum ic gereordum rincas laðige | wlonc to wine* 'sometimes with my voice I invite proud warriors to wine' (16-17a). Of course, a horn can additionally be a vessel from which to drink said wine in the poetic imagination. Håkan Ringbom notes that horns had various purposes, but were mainly used for signalling and as a summons, both in Old English and in Laȝamon's *Brut*. In many cases in the *Brut*, however, they are used as a discrete component in the construction of passages that elsewhere also contain reference to harps, performers and the associated elements of 'joy in the hall', as will be discussed in Chapter 8.[279]

Overwhelmingly, horns and trumpets are mentioned within the context of martial activity or accomplishment, and compounds such as *guðhorn*, 'war horn', used in *Beowulf* (1432), emphasise this association. A *hornbora*, 'horn bearer', appears in *Elene* (54), in a manifestly martial context, adjacent to mention of the 'beasts of battle' in a section describing conflict between Constantine's Romans, and Huns and Hrethgoths. In the Junius Manuscript poem *Exodus*, meanwhile, the trumpet sings out as seafarers spread their tents along the hills (l132), as it similarly does as the troop rest by Grendel's mere in *Beowulf*. One function of trumpet calls in the poetry is thus to protect a society exposed in some way. Elsewhere in *Exodus*, the *sang* and *sweg* of the *sigebyman*, 'war trumpets', is described, together with its ability to signify rejoicing through *fæger sweg*, 'beautiful music':

[279] Håkan Ringbom, *Studies in the Narrative Technique of* Beowulf *and Lawman's* Brut (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1968), p. 85.

æfter þam wordum werod wæs on salum,
sungon sigebyman, (segnas stodon),
on fægerne sweg; folc wæs on lande… (565-67)

After those words the troop was happy. The war-trumpets sang in a beautiful music and they raised the banners; the people were on land…

The emotional resonance and musical quality of the trumpet is clearly implied here. However, they are war trumpets, appropriate to the context of battle or its aftermath: the raising of the standards, the arrival of the troop on land, and their victory. There are several references across the poetic corpus to heavenly trumpet blasts, and in *The Phoenix* the cry of horns and trumpets are compared unfavourably with the phoenix's call, inferring some aesthetic appreciation on the part of men.[280] However, they are overwhelmingly functional instruments for poets. Unlike harpers, save for the single instance of *hornbora* in *Elene* there are no references to the players of horns or trumpets in Old English poetry. They do not have specific descriptors, and do not appear within episodes featuring artistic performance and its usual contexts. Horn and trumpets, and their players, are thus outside the scope of artistry in the Old English poetic imagination.

The language relating to artistry and the concepts 'performer', 'performance' and 'instrument' in Old English poems thus possesses the following characteristics: it is unspecific, in that the significant terms often have broad semantic ranges that raises questions as to the type of performance or performer being depicted in poetic context. As a consequence, it poses issues of interpretation; it is often not possible to determine the referent for a specific term. As will be shown in the following three chapters, such elusiveness allows for poetic creativity, exploiting the inherent associations between concepts associated with artistry in an individual term. Moreover, the referential nature

[280] See from p. 135.

of the terms serve in the creation of a poetry that is frequently characterised by terse allusion and suggestion rather than by descriptive detail.

Chapter 3 - Artistry in Non-narrative Old English Poems

The wide semantic ranges possessed by many Old English words relating to artistry in Old English poems creates particular problems for the modern translator. Issues of interpretation are exacerbated by the fact that we look back such a distance in time. An understanding of Anglo-Saxon performance practices, and of the poet's creativity and aesthetic preferences, is difficult to ascertain. Yet the breadth of meaning offered poets the chance to employ ambiguity for imaginative literary effects. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 consider the ways in which the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination was applied in the creative representation of artistry. The chapters assert that descriptions of artistry found in Old English poetry, seen rather monolithically by some critics as evidence of Anglo-Saxon historical practices, or as reflexive representations of Anglo-Saxon oral poetry in production, are instead literary devices that were deployed in diverse and often symbolic ways. They are creative representations, often of a partly imagined cultural history from a mythical earlier period. Indeed, such descriptions are significant poetic illustrations of a process of influence that involved a complex relationship between an earlier, prehistoric epoch, commonly referred to now as the 'Germanic' or 'heroic' past, and Anglo-Saxon society's imaginative yet conventionalising interpretation of that culture. This process included the development of Anglo-Saxon concepts of performance and the referents that performance alluded to, the reflection of those concepts in the Old English language, and the poetic representation of that process of imaginative conventionalisation. As a result, the poetic representation of artistry is symptomatic of the nostalgic, the symbolic, and the heroic, concepts often archaised and idealised in Anglo-Saxon England in both the poetry and its language. The extent to

which this process was a purely poetic phenomenon is a key question considered as a result of evidence from material analysed in the following three chapters.

As stressed in Chapter 1, Old English poems have been one of the principal sources for evidence and conclusions regarding the historical practices of performer figures. This is partly because of a popular belief that some of the surviving poems derive from oral performances, and that some poems therefore contain evidence within them concerning their own origins and production.[1] Although oral-formulaic theorists considered this possibility in detail during the later twentieth century, the poems in question offer no categorical internal proof that this is the case. Any links between the content of Old English poems, those who composed them, and the method of their composition, are lost; the poetry does not explain the manner of its own origin. Also in the later twentieth century, critics came to reject the idea that artistry in Old English poems necessarily reflects historical practices. Rather than being naturalistic depiction of historical figures and their behaviour from a moment in time both specific and observable, description of artistry has increasingly come to be seen as an aspect of poetic creativity. It often possesses symbolic meaning that operated within the context of the poetry, and also resonated with the cultural understanding of an Anglo-Saxon audience, through the effect of referential association. Moreover, even if artistic performers and performances in poems were influenced by and reflective of historical culture, this would only be part of the reason why they reveal more interesting characteristics than mere description of real-life behaviours. Such characteristics are related to Anglo-Saxon cultural thought, the poetic imagination, the Old English language, and its literary forms, together with stylistic and substantive relationships with other literatures.

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[1] See for example Hugh Magennis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 40; also Niles, 1983, p. 37, and Robert P. Creed's argument concerning *Beowulf*'s origins, quoted on p. 37.

Despite the lack of direct association between artistry in the poetry and its presence in Anglo-Saxon society, a relationship between Anglo-Saxon cultural thought, the significant amount of wisdom poetry that resulted from it, and depictions in other types of poem, is evident from the extant corpus. Chapter 3, an analysis of artistry within non-narrative Old English poetics, comprises three sections. The first section discusses the representation of artistry within such wisdom poems: those classified variously as 'gnomic', 'aphoristic', or 'catalogue', together with gnomic elements in other kinds of poem. The second section considers 'artist poems': those concerned with performer figures and their biographies. The third section considers other shorter poems, such as lyrics and riddles. Building upon the analysis in Chapter 3, Chapters 4 and 5 focus on instances of artistry in narrative poems, and particularly *Beowulf*. These three chapters aim to expose the similarities and divergences in representation between aphoristic, homiletic, enigmatic, and narrative poetics of the Anglo-Saxon period through critical juxtaposition, building a picture of the complexity of understanding in relation to artistry in the Old English poetic imagination.

There is significant formal, stylistic and representational diversity in the non-narrative poems of the Anglo-Saxon corpus. However, they contain analogous elements that can be seen as examples of comparable memes which persisted in the poetic imagination during the Anglo-Saxon period. Analysis of the references to artistry in such poems reveals similarities in its treatment, and in the conceptions and associations developed by the poets. In relation to the importance of wisdom, for example, in the Exeter Book poem *Vainglory*, which advocates the virtuous religious path, and cautions against and censures pride, the narrator claims to have had contact with a mysterious figure. He describes how the figure offered him valuable Christian knowledge:

> Hwæt, me frod wita on fyrndagum
> sægde, snottor ar, sundorwundra fela.
> Wordhord onwreah witgan larum

beorn boca gleaw, bodan ærcwide,
þæt ic soðlice siþþan meahte
ongitan bi þam gealdre godes agen bearn,… (1-6)

Listen! A learned man in former days, a wise messenger, informed me of many special wonders. A book-wise man revealed the word-hoard with wise lore to inform me with prophetic proclamations, so that thereafter I might be able to perceive truly through that secret song God's own son…

The manner in which this *frod wita*, 'learned man', and his reserved store of Christian knowledge is introduced is immediately reminiscent of the *wis woðbora* described in *The Order of the World*. In *Vainglory*, the narrator quotes some actual verse delivered by the mysterious figure. The verse is introduced with the following statement: *þæt se witga song, | gearowyrdig guma, ond þæt gyd awræc*, 'the wise man, the man ready of speech, sang, and recited this tale' (50b-51). Because of the poem's ambiguity, how far direct speech extends into the following lines is uncertain. Huppé restricts the speech to five lines (52-56), and refers to it as 'the description of the archetypical fall'.[2] A statement of Christian wisdom, effectively an extended aphorism, the speech does not appear to have any specific source, although it is patently influenced by biblical teachings.[3] The *frod wita*, like the *wis woðbora* in *The Order of the World*, is able to communicate well the doctrine of the church and the wisdom of God. This knowledge is demonstrably his most important attribute. The significance evidently placed upon learning marks certain individuals out in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination, but it also resulted in a particular class of Old English poetry, known variously as the wisdom, catalogue, gnomic or aphoristic poems.[4]

[2] Huppé, p. 19.
[3] See Huppé, pp. 19-20.
[4] For an overview of the genre categorised as wisdom poetry, see David Ashurst, 'Old English Wisdom Poetry', in *A Companion to Medieval Poetry*, ed. by Corinne Saunders (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 125-40.

I - Wisdom Poems

Paul Cavill offers a concise explication of the functions performed by gnomes and maxims:

> [l]anguage is the primary means of structuring and expressing thought. Gnomes and maxims are linguistic moulds into which observation, experience and thought can be poured in order to clarify, solidify and preserve them. Gnomes and maxims are structural forms of language which organise thought into conventional patterns.[5]

As well as being linguistic constructs, the maxims and gnomic phrases that feature extensively in Old English poetry are a key psychological and cultural category. They are statements of pre-theoretical cultural belief, and Cavill sees them as 'communal, conventional, experiential'.[6] He also argues that, whilst some are designed to teach, 'they are the product of knowledge applied to particular situations, or the preservation of knowledge *per se*'.[7] They constitute an aspect of the conventionalisation of society and, intrinsic to convention, an interpretation of the past. Moreover, they can be seen as textual micro-performances of Anglo-Saxon cultural thinking. Crucially for this thesis, Cavill stresses that maxim poems '*constitute* a context for interpretation of Old English poetry.'[8] We can usefully scrutinise artistry through the lens of the wisdom poems, recognising the ways in which they represent the cultural understanding of the Anglo-Saxon imagination, or the poetic imagination at least. Moreover, the nature of these poems as catalogues of collective wisdom mean they are more likely than those of the lyric or narrative type to have circulated orally among the population, of which those designated as poets were naturally only a part. Although an individual scribe wrote them down, and likely an individual poet assimilated their contents in the product of the

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[5] Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), p. 11. This understanding could also apply to formulas, which Clemoes refers to as 'linguistic symbols', discussed above (p. 52).
[6] Cavill, p. 8.
[7] Cavill, p. 9.
[8] Cavill, p. 158 (Cavill's emphasis).

poem we now have, they thus represent a generalised reflection of the understanding of artistry in the poetic and wider cultural imagination. Because of the prevalence of such wisdom writing, which often takes the form of lists of gnomic statement as well as isolated statements of wisdom in narrative or lyric poems, it can also be reasonably inferred that such phrases, or the sentiments within them, figured prominently in Anglo-Saxon verbal communication. Niles argues that 'Old English wisdom literature … reveals a longing for unequivocal wisdom',[9] and the engagement with and communication of conventional wisdom was evidently important for the Anglo-Saxons. The symbolic, learned figures of *The Order of the World* and *Vainglory* reflect the consistent adoption and expression of conventional wisdom, and of this type of knowledge-ordering.

Cavill distinguishes between gnomes and maxims, describing a gnome as a 'linking of a thing with a defining characteristic' and a maxim as a 'sententious generalisation'.[10] However, distinction between the two is not absolute, and, as Carolyne Larrington asserts, a gnome can be seen as all but analogous with a maxim.[11] Cavill's definition of a maxim does not seem to apply adequately, for example, to the lists of distinct human attributes that feature in the Exeter Book poems commonly titled *Maxims I* and *II.* For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, I use the terms 'maxim', 'gnomic', and 'aphoristic' to refer to the content of wisdom writing in general.

Performers in Wisdom Poems

Characters who perform artistry appear occasionally in the catalogue wisdom poems, and these appearances will now be discussed. Indeed, because *Beowulf*, *Deor* and

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[9] Niles, 2003, p. 39.
[10] Cavill, p. 50.
[11] Carolyne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 5. Larrington discusses the various terms used to describe the statements that feature in the wisdom poems, such as 'maxim', 'gnome' and 'precept', pp. 2-5. See also T.A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 12.

Widsith are about Continental figures from an earlier period, it is in these catalogue wisdom poems that the performing artist from the Anglo-Saxon period, as it figured in the poetic imagination, can be best observed and evaluated, despite their appearances being brief and sporadic. For example, a performer described as a *scop* is mentioned in *Maxims I*, in a section that weaves together aphorisms on the themes of war and battle with those on society's needs, pleasures and luxuries:

> Muþa gehwylc mete þearf, mæl sceolon tidum gongan.
> Gold geriseþ on guman sweorde,
> sellic sigesceorp, sinc on cwene,
> god scop gumum, garniþ werum,
> wig towiþre wicfreoþa healdan. (124-28)

Every mouth needs food, meals must come at the proper time. Gold belongs on a man's sword, fine ornament of victory, jewellery on a woman, a good poet [belongs] among the people, to heroes conflict, to hold the dwellings protected against war.

The half-line *god scop gumum* appears within a section about the ways in which certain objects or people belong within particular contexts. For example, gold belongs on a sword or ornament, a shield with a soldier, books with a student. These contextualising statements are similar to the gnomes which place a creature in a certain natural habitat, for instance:

> wulf sceal on bearowe,
> earm anhaga, eofor sceal on holte,
> toðmægenes trum (*Maxims II*, 18b-20a).

The wolf must be in the wood, a miserable recluse; the boar must be in the forest, strong with the power of his tusks.

Cultural as well as natural norms are thus articulated through such statement.

The importance of these performers is immediately evident. *God scop gumum* is an example of an ideal, of the vital role the performer has in society, or at least in the poetic representation of society. It exemplifies the assertion, developed in Chapters 4 and 5, that narrative poetry was representative of Anglo-Saxon conventional wisdom, because narrative poems contain scenes in which performances are mentioned that describe the performer delighting the people as a feature of social gathering, suggesting

he is a required presence in the social spaces imagined by the poets. The *scop* is linked with the people in particular, as he is in *Beowulf*, in which his performance is always public, if not communal, and of benefit to the social group. A concise phrase, *god scop guman*, thus encapsulates a concept that is evinced variously in narrative form, especially in *Beowulf*. The wider intimation of this concise statement concerning belonging is that a *scop* must be with the people, and the people need a *scop*, for society to be in order. Like the *wis woðbora* in *The Order of the World*, or the *frod wita* of *Vainglory*, it can be inferred that the *scop* in *Maxims I* is someone who can be relied upon for his skills and knowledge, and should be welcomed because of them. Like food, a strong military defence, and aptitude in battle, he is a symbol of society's success and essential for its existence, as are other elements in the representation of artistry such as the *hearpe*, discussed below. He is a central character in human social group relations.

Shortly after the reference to the *scop*, the role of performers, or at least communicators, in society is expanded upon somewhat:

> Ræd sceal mon secgan, rune writan,
> leoþ gesingan, lofes gearnian,
> dom areccan, dæges onettan. (138-40)

A man should speak counsel, write runes/secrets, sing songs, earn repute, expound judgement, be busy each day.

Here, the relationship between performance, wisdom and judgement is expressed, along with the routine nature of the behaviour being a social requirement. Later in *Maxims I*, mention is also made of *gleomen*:

> Wæra gehwylcum wislicu word gerisað,
> gleomen gied ond guman snyttro.
> Swa monige beoþ men ofer eorþan, swa beoþ modgeþoncas;
> ælc him hafað sundorsefan. (165-68a)

Wise words are proper in everyone: a lyric to entertainers and wisdom to a man. As many as there are people across the earth so are there opinions. Each of them has a different mind.

The nature of gnomic statement means that maxims tend in general to distinguish types, categorising people by skill, ability, and personal characteristics, as well as classifying

other natural or cultural phenomena by defining attributes. That the terms *scop* and *gleoman* are mentioned separately in *Maxims I* suggests the poet's wish to distinguish two kinds of performer. It is not clear that the poet necessarily wished for us to contrast or compare their attributes, as they are situated forty lines apart, but they appear to have occupied distinct places in the poet's mind, possibly conforming to Opland's classification. Yet despite the *gleoman*'s associations with scandal, noted in Chapter 2, in this passage he is linked with the communication of wisdom. He is thus comparable with the *woðbora* in *The Order of the World* and the *frod wita* in *Vainglory*. The successful performance of a *gleoman* can be seen as an assemblage of the individual *modgeþoncas*, 'intellectual conceptions' (167), which together constitute the diverse wisdom of men, and wise words and entertainment are traits that enable society to operate successfully. *Gied*, the term used to describe that which a *gleoman* performs, also refers to the performance associated with a *gleoman* in *Beowulf*, and also the *gleomen gumena*, 'people's entertainers', in *Widsith*. As stated in Chapter 2, perhaps the requirements of alliteration explain this connection between *gied* and *gleoman*, *gied* being one of several possible descriptors for performance that the poet could have used. Whether or not they are the result of stylistic impulse, such regular connections create memetic assemblages of meaning in the poetry in a manner comparable to formulas: concise phrasing is created for concepts as a result of linguistic and poetic convention and repetition.

Limited further reference is made to performer figures in the extant wisdom poems. In *The Gifts of Men*, a performer gifted with songs or tales is listed: *sum biþ woðbora | giedda giffæst*, 'someone is a bearer of song, gifted with lyrics' (35b-36a). As discussed in the introduction, *woðbora* is a word that can translate for example as 'bearer of song', 'bearer of poetry', or 'bearer of eloquence', and his function and knowledge is proclaimed intrinsically, if equivocally, within the compound. Little

further detail is offered, other than that *gied* is again the term used to define their performances. In a terse section of the same poem, in the lines following those in which a harper, discussed below, is mentioned, another performer is briefly introduced:

> Sum bið rynig, sum ryhtscytte,
> sum leoða gleaw, sum on londe snel,
> feþespedig. (51-53a)

Someone is good in counsel, someone sure of aim, someone skilled at poetry, someone rapid on land, speedy of foot.

Here, the half-line is self-contained; there is no parallelism as in the *woðbora* passage. The character described as being *leoða gleaw*, 'skilful in poetry', could possibly be of the same type as conceived in *The Order of the World* or *Vainglory*. The brevity leaves such a hypothesis unprovable, but referentiality may have enabled early audiences to comprehend this figure and his perceived place in society more specifically. In part because of the classificatory nature of such gnomic statement in wisdom poems, artistry is regularly presented as being the preserve of certain skilled individuals. Through their performances, which are associated with society's norms and its continuation, they are able to please their fellow men. Such associations may have been inferred intrinsically in this example from *The Gifts of Men*, even if they were not expressed overtly.

The Harp in Wisdom Poems

Occasionally, the distinction between phenomena catalogued in gnomic poems is not clear. In the lines following those in which the *gleoman* is mentioned in *Maxims I*, for example, positive connotations of success and happiness are associated with the harp:

> Longað þonne þy læs þe him con leoþa worn,
> oþþe mid hondum con hearpan gretan;
> hafaþ him his gliwes giefe, þe him god sealde.
> Earm biþ se þe sceal ana lifgan,
> wineleas wunian hafaþ him wyrd geteod (169-73)

He has less longing, who knows many songs/poems or can touch the harp with his hands; he has his gift of music in him that God gave to him. Miserable is he who must live alone, to exist without friends, fate has ordained it for him.

Harpers or songsmiths have the gift of music-making given to them by God, just as a *gleoman* has an ordained ability to tell a tale. Moreover, the harper-songsmith has less *longað*, 'longing', and seemingly greater inclusion in society. However, it is not clear what kind of connection the poet wished to make, if any, between him who knows lots of songs or poems (169) and the harper (170). The presence of the conjunction *oþþe* (170) suggests that they are to be understood as distinct skills, although both can bring comfort, companionship, and relief of longing. *Gliw* in this instance makes more sense if translated as 'music' rather than 'joy', if only because having a gift of joy translates less appropriately than having a gift of musical ability. However, the poet could have intended to exploit the term's ambiguity; having a gift of giving joy is not inconceivable in this instance, and the purpose could have been to indicate that such joy, possibly the result of musical endeavour, could contribute to the relief of longing. Except for reference to the use of the hands, little detail is provided about harping technique, as might be expected in a catalogue poem. This absence of descriptive detail in relation to harping technique is unfortunately common in Old English poetry and is typical even of *Beowulf*, as will be shown in Chapter 4.

The *hearpe* as instrument, and the ability to play it, is singled out elsewhere in Old English wisdom writing. As well as in *Maxims I*, skill at harping is specifically referred to three more times in the Exeter Book: twice more in wisdom poems, *The Gifts of Men* and *The Fortunes of Men*, and also in a gnomic section of the long narrative poem *Christ II*. Along with the passage in *Maxims I*, these appearances combine to reflect the harp's symbolic significance in the poetic imagination. As in *Maxims I*, skill playing the instrument is cited as one of the gifts bestowed upon men by God in *The Gifts of Men*:

> Sum mid hondum mæg   hearpan gretan,
> ah he gleobeames   gearobrygda list.   (49-50)

Someone can touch the harp with his hands; he possesses the skill of prompt vibration with the music-beam.

There is a distinction between performers in this poem, a feature also comparable with *Maxims I*. Skill at playing the harp is distinguished from a reference to the person gifted with songs, who is mentioned earlier in the poem (35b-36a), and also from the man skilled in poetry described in the section following the harper (52), both of whom have been discussed above. In this instance, harping is listed among other abilities with which men are endowed, such as athleticism, construction skills, and seamanship. Regarding technique, *gearobrygd* has been translated variously, as ‘a prompt vibration’[12] or ‘quick movement, deft playing’,[13] for example, and *list* meant ‘skill’ or ‘craft’. Otherwise, particulars are not mentioned. Unfortunately, whilst ability and skill are stressed, from this passage it is not possible to conclude anything further regarding the way in which harping and its performance practice were imagined. However, there is striking similarity between the formulaic construction of this instance and *Maxims I* (170): the hands are mentioned in both, and the ‘b’ half-line *hearpan gretan*, to ‘touch the harp’ or ‘to handle the harp’, is identical. Routine references to touch foreground the human body and its relationship with the instrument in performance. Moreover, a communication imagined between performer and instrument can be inferred, employing anthropomorphism, as *gretan* can also mean ‘greet’, its Modern English reflex, as it does in the half-line *wordum gretan* in *The Order of the World* (2). Given the mechanisms of traditional referentiality, one can only imagine the thoughts of musical and vocal performance that were conjured merely by half-line statements such as these, particularly if the audience had seen harps being played and understood, or were at least familiar with, the performance techniques involved.

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[12] Bosworth and Toller, 1882-98, p. 368.

[13] *DOE* [online], ‘gearu-brygd’, <https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/> [accessed 3 January 2017].

Skill with the harp is also one of the gifts endowed by God to men in a gnomic section of Cynewulf's poem *Christ II*:

> Sumum wordlaþe   wise sendeð
> on his modes gemynd   þurh his muþes gæst,
> æðele ondgiet.   Se mæg eal fela
> singan ond secgan   þam bið snyttru cræft
> bifolen on ferðe.   Sum mæg fingrum wel
> hlude fore hæleþum   hearpan stirgan,
> gleobeam gretan.   Sum mæg godcunde
> reccan ryhte æ.   Sum mæg ryne tungla
> secgan, side gesceaft.   Sum mæg searolice
> wordcwide writan.   (664-73a)

To someone He sends wise speech through his mouth's breath, fine understanding into his mind's consciousness. The power of wisdom is granted to the spirit of the man who can sing and say all manner of things. Someone is able to strike the harp with his fingers and play the music-beam very loudly before an audience. Someone is able to interpret the divine law correctly. Someone is able tell the mystery of the stars, the extensive creation. Someone is able to write words artistically.[14]

According to Clemoes, in this section of the poem Cynewulf converted 'a list (by Gregory the Great) of six spiritual endowments distributed by the Holy Spirit into a selection of ten discrete *cræftas* implanted by God in different people, five primarily in the mind and five mainly in the body.'[15] These *cræftas*, including harping and verbal ability, distinguish humans from other animals, and such classification represents the logical organisation of human social, intellectual and creative abilities in the Anglo-Saxon mind. Many appear in catalogue wisdom poems, with some, such as martial ability and seafaring, appearing extensively across the wider Old English poetic corpus. In the above instance, harp playing is distinguished from other performance activity, the 'singing and telling of all manner of things' (666b-68a). Cynewulf surely intended to suggest some connection between these artistic *cræftas* through their proximity, though the conjunction *sum mæg*, 'someone can', separates them. Again it is not clear whether we are being encouraged to distinguish, associate, or compare.

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[14] The translation is adapted from Janie Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 120; she comments on the Old English adaptation of this passage on p. 121.
[15] Clemoes, 1995, p. 79.

Although his list was adapted from a Latin source, Cynewulf's phrasing of 669b-70a is similar to that used by the *Beowulf* poet. His use of variation to place stress on the reference to the harp, applying the simplex *hearpe* and then varying with the more referential compound *gleobeam*, appears in *Beowulf*: *hearpan wynne*, | *gomenwudu grette* (2106b-07a), *næs hearpan wyn,* | *gomen gleobeames* (2262b-63a). Following the commonplace word, the poetic compound creates emphasis and supplies additional symbolism in variation. The *Christ II* passage is also analogous with other gnomic instances. For example, the presence of an audience of men is stressed (669), as in *The Fortunes of Men*, in which harping is similarly proclaimed as one of the destinies given to men by God:

> Sum sceal on heape   hæleþum cweman,
> blissian æt beore   bencsittendum;
> þær biþ drincendra   dream se micla.
> Sum sceal mid hearpan   æt his hlafordes
> fotum sittan,   feoh þicgan,
> ond a snellice   snere wræstan,
> lætan scralletan   sceacol, se þe hleapeð,
> nægl neomegende;   biþ him neod micel.   (77-84)

Someone can please a company of men, gladden at beer those sitting on the bench; there the drinkers' joy is the greater. Someone must sit with the harp at his lord's feet, accept treasure, and always rapidly twang the harp string, let the plectrum leap to create sweet melody; the need for him is great.

Despite being contained within a catalogue poem concerning God's gifts, there is a temptation to view this passage as depicting a pre-Christian scene, bearing comparison with 'joy in the hall' passages in *Beowulf*, discussed in Chapter 4,[16] because of the mention of beer, the reference to the benches invoking the mead-hall, and the fact that the harper benefits financially, although no scene making reference to patronage or reward for a harper exists in *Beowulf*. There is no altruism in the harper's performance,

[16] For discussion of the 'joy in the hall' theme in Old English poetry, see Jeff Opland, '*Beowulf* on the Poet', *Mediaeval Studies*, 38 (1976), 442-67 (pp. 445-53); also Ramey, p 620.

in praise of God for instance, unless the need for him is inferred to be for religious purposes.

The passage offers no identifier for the performer, and the lack of clear distinction between roles again leaves the poet's intention open to interpretation. Whether he intended the man who pleases the company on the benches and the harper sitting at his lord's feet to be the same person is unclear, though it is unlikely as they are distinguished by the *sum sceal*, 'someone must', device (77, 80). The reference to the harper sitting at his lord's feet conjures images of the hall-space, with the ruler on his throne and his patronised performer sitting on the dais below him. T.A. Shippey has recently claimed that this harper was 'surely' a *scop*, and conflated him with the kind of man whom he describes as a 'warrior-poet', who was buried with a harp in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Snape, Suffolk.[17] However, as Trilling's observation quoted on p. 61 warns, this image may be anachronistic and could as easily arise from erroneous interpretation as from traditional referentiality.

One distinctive though ultimately indefinite functional detail in this passage is the description of the *nægl*, likely either a fingernail or a plectrum, though Page offers the additional possibility that *nægl* referred to a tuning peg.[18] The use in Ælfric's *Grammar* of the more specific *hearpnægel*, used elsewhere as a gloss for *plectrum*, does seem to offer evidence that there was awareness at least of the practice of plectrum use with the harp, though whether or not such practise was intended in this passage is unclear.[19] The functionality of the *nægl* is countered somewhat by the half-line *snere wræstan*, 'twist'

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[17] Shippey, 2017, p. xv.
[18] Page, p. 183.
[19] In MS Add. 32246. It also features in the prose *Apollonius of Tyre*, a fairly close translation of a Latin text, translating Latin *plectrum*. See *The Old English* Apollonius of Tyre, ed. by Peter Goolden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 26-27. The simplex for 'plectrum' is possibly *sceacel* ('shackle' being its Modern English reflex): see "sceacel.", in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Supplement*, ed. by T. Northcote Toller and Joseph Bosworth. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 694. Page denies that this is a genuine Old English word for plectrum, however: 1981, p. 181. He also doubts that the plectrum was used in lyre performance: 1981, p. 325.

or ‘wrest the string’, imagery that invokes both the physical and emotional effort required to play the instrument. Understanding of typical playing techniques would again have enabled greater referential association in this passage.

There are immediately identifiable resemblances between these instances in Old English gnomic poems featuring an instrument called a *hearpe*. The ability to play the instrument well is stated as one of the gifts or abilities bestowed by God upon men, listed among other enabling skills such as martial prowess or divinely-conferred knowledge. The number and consistency of these appearances gives the impression that skilful performance with the instrument is an important attribute in the collective understanding of Old English poets, worthy of gnomic expression. As with the *woðbora* in *The Order of the World* and the *frod wita* in *Vainglory*, being a harper is imagined as the preserve of certain members of society, a gift or ability akin to being a skilled warrior or wise with words. This distinctiveness controverts the notion of artistry as communal activity, such as that possibly being described in Bede’s account of Cædmon, considered in Chapter 6. However, in none of these gnomic instances is the harp player described using a specific identifier. He is always defined through the action of performance, explicitly before an audience in one passage (*Christ II*, 669). Thornbury understands words such as *scop*, *poeta*, etc., to be specific terms relating to artistry which do not identify a particular category or role. Yet, in a manner contrary to Thornbury’s understanding, the harp player has a specific role, but is not defined by an identifying term. Indeed, the routinely applied identifier for a harp player in Old English, *hearpere*, only appears once in the poetry, though it is used relatively often in Old English literature.[20] Even though the harper is conceived of as having an important and enabling gift in the poetic imagination, he was not represented by an everyday linguistic term. The lack of particularity in terminology, expression and general manner

[20] In *Psalm 50*, the *Kentish Psalm* (4).

of representation instead suggests his role was symbolic. He represents joy and belonging, providing pleasure for a lord and his company in particular.

The *hearpe* is singled out in particular for inclusion in Old English poems. Indeed, unless the word referred to more than one type of instrument, a class of string instruments, or musical instruments in general, it is the only instrument imagined explicitly in the context of artistic performance in Old English poetry with the exception of *Riddle 31*, the solution to which is almost universally accepted as 'bagpipe'.[21] That *hearpe* referred to all musical instruments is unlikely, as there is enough descriptive evidence in the wisdom poems alone to support the conclusion that a particular class of instrument is being described: use of the hands and reference to strings, plectrum or nails, for example. The instrument, or class of instruments, had pre-eminence during the Anglo-Saxon period, particularly outside martial contexts, and appears to have held a unique position in gnomic thought and the poetic imagination. It had symbolic associations with the prosperous world of men, and with what Clemoes refers to as the 'roots of action',[22] the fundamental perceivable values and behaviours operating in Anglo-Saxon society. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, these gnomic associations are voiced in *Beowulf*, in which the most important function of the *hearpe*, as with performer figures, is to symbolise earthly joys and the communal society of men.

Gnomic statement in relation to the harp is not confined to Anglo-Saxon literature. Whether or not harp playing is stated explicitly as being a gift from God in each instance, references to such skill in Old English poetry are comparable with elements of a speech by Polydamas to Hector in the *Iliad*:

> Because the god has granted you the actions of warfare
> therefore you wish in counsel also to be wise beyond others.
> But you cannot choose to have all gifts given to you together.

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[21] *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book*, ed. by Craig Williamson (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 233-35. See also below (p. 136).

[22] Clemoes, 1995, p. xi.

> To one man the god has granted the actions of warfare,
> to one to be a dancer, to another the lyre and the singing,
> and in the breast of another Zeus of the wide brows establishes
> wisdom, a lordly thing, and many take profit beside him
> and he saves many, but the man's own thought surpasses all others.[23] (Book 13, 727-34)

In comparison with the Old English tradition, the singer and harper are more certainly identifiable as the same person in this passage, an overt association common in Homeric epic. Otherwise, however, the similarities are marked, particularly the rhetorical technique of listing divinely given attributes. Additionally, there is connection through proximity between artistry and skill in battle, as well as association with the 'wise mind' trait, reminiscent of associations developed in Old English gnomic poems. Although direct influence should almost certainly be ruled out, in general the representation of the Germanic lyre in Old English wisdom poetry can be seen as an echo of the primacy afforded the classical lyre in Greek literature and culture.

Despite the importance of the *hearpe* in Old English wisdom poems, conception of the social status of the instrument's player is ambiguous. There is great need for him according to *Maxims I*, though it has been suggested that the need is actually for the *naegl*;[24] this would be an uncharacteristically mundane and specific concern for these poems, however. His apparent proximity to a lord could suggest that the poet considers him to have relatively high status. Merriam's 'high importance - low status' hypothesis could still apply, however, because proximity does not necessarily indicate status, as Eliason points out,[25] though a symbolic reading would favour the belief that it is likely to. As previously noted, skill at playing the instrument is seen as an important gift, worthy of mention in numerous wisdom poems, and the performer is always described

[23] Lattimore, 1951, pp. 290-91.
[24] Robert DiNapoli, 'Close to the Edge: *The Fortunes of Men* and the Limits of Wisdom Literature', in *Text and Transmission in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Chris Bishop (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp. 127-47 (p. 145).
[25] Norman E. Eliason, 'The Þyle and Scop in *Beowulf*', *Speculum*, 38:2 (1963), 267–284 (p. 269, n. 14).

in, or in relation to, the act of performance. Such a symbolic, near-reverential status is not universally recognised. We learn in one non-gnomic poem, *The Phoenix*, discussed below, that the harp is one of the instruments that enables man-made music, yet that music cannot compete with the phoenix's song. Harp music is a social rather than a natural phenomenon in *The Phoenix*, in contrast with God's creations; human musical activity reveals our inferiority to His natural designs. These allusions are derived from the Latin original, however.[26] In relation to the wisdom poetry of the period, it is safe to say that the harp and its players are afforded special status in the gnomic imagination.

As with much of the extant Old English corpus, Old English wisdom poems are largely written from a monastic perspective, but that does not preclude other influences from informing their creativity. Carolyne Larrington observes that wisdom poems 'are all Christian in conception', yet 'there may be outcrops of archaic wisdom in the poems'.[27] Morton Bloomfield and Charles Dunn note the diverse forms of 'verbal arts' represented in *The Gifts of Men*, which, they argue, 'suggest that the pious author had not entirely separated himself from his Germanic roots.'[28] Drout argues that they represent

> a rather sophisticated attempt to understand the way that the monastic life fits into the rest of Anglo-Saxon culture. The authors of these poems are not randomly collecting traditional material. They are trying to understand the old world in terms of the new, the new world in terms of the old.[29]

While being Christians, then, the poets were actively, creatively engaging with wider Anglo-Saxon cultural circumstances and their pre- and post-Conversion past. They were also engaging with the concerns of the wider poetic corpus. This does not mean that

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[26] Although *The Phoenix*'s principal source is the Latin poem *Carmen De Ave Phoenice*, generally attributed to Lactantius, who lived *c*. 240 – *c*. 320, references to trumpets and horns are additions by the Anglo-Saxon poet and do not appear in the *Carmen*. See below (p. 135).
[27] Larrington, p. 120.
[28] Morton W. Bloomfield and Charles W. Dunn, *The Role of the Poet in Early Societies* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), p. 95.
[29] Drout, 2006, p. 292.

monks were necessarily observing harping and the performance of stories, songs or poetry as the behaviours of 'others', a discrete lay society, for example, with distinct cultural practices that may be cause for suspicion or concern. Depictions of artistry are overwhelmingly positive in gnomic poems, as indeed they are throughout the poetic corpus, suggesting that being a performer and having the skills required to perform was not customarily frowned upon in the monastic environment in which the wisdom literature was compiled. After all, it is likely that the poets had Christian contexts in mind when creating much of the reference to artistry in wisdom poetry. As noted above, the harper at his lord's feet could have been seen by critics as forming part of a 'Germanic' image too readily invoked. Much artistry referred to in wisdom writing should be seen as an aspect of Christian practice, divinely bestowed by a Christian God. Such a community did produce the Nowell Codex, however, and therefore seemingly had no issue with creating or at least transcribing literature not wholly devoted to Christian concerns. The appearance of artistry in its many forms leads to the conclusion that the scribes who created the extant corpus of Old English poetry at least tacitly accepted artistry's diverse content and contexts, and also the idealised imaginings of earlier, possibly oral, poets. Such acceptance is questioned and challenged in the non-poetic material discussed in Chapter 6.

II - 'Artist' Poems: *Deor* and *Widsith*

Two non-narrative Old English poems are presented as biographies of artistic performers: *Widsith*, an account of a *gleoman*'s previous employments performing at the courts of diverse peoples, and *Deor*, the lament of a character who has lost his patronage and relationship with a lord. These 'artist poems', both found within the Exeter Book, have been principal sources for evidence concerning Anglo-Saxon oral poets and musicians. It is tempting to view these poems as detailed accounts of

performers analogous to the ones glimpsed briefly in *Beowulf*, who are considered in Chapter 4. Though transmitted by Christian clerics, *Widsith* and *Deor* are explicitly concerned with Continental Germanic artists of the heroic age. While they provide biographical detail, the more immediate concern of these poems is to draw characters in a specific situation, who contemplate a particular philosophical and social position. Artist poems employ a manner of representation distinct from wisdom and narrative writing, though the description within them is unfortunately not detailed enough to offer much information concerning Anglo-Saxon performers, performances or their instruments additional to that found in the wisdom poems. Little practical information concerning details such as performance technique can be gleaned from them. They can however inform our understanding of artistry's place in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination.

Deor

Despite being a regular source for historical evidence concerning the *scop* figure, Widsith is never described as one, and the word scop does not appear in the poem - but

it does appear in *Deor*.[30] Indeed, the artist formerly known as Deor describes himself as a *scop*:[31]

þæt ic bi me sylfum   secgan wille,
þæt ic hwile wæs   Heodeninga scop,
dryhtne dyre.   Me wæs Deor noma.
Ahte ic fela wintra   folgað tilne,
holdne hlaford,   oþþæt Heorrenda nu,
leoðcræftig monn   londryht geþah,
þæt me eorla hleo   ær gesealde.
þæs ofereode,   þisses swa mæg.   (35-42)

I desire to say this about myself, that I was once poet of the Heodenings, dear to my lord. Deor was my name. For many years I held good standing and a gracious lord, until Heorrenda now, a man skilled in tales, has received the land-right that the men's protector formerly gave to me. That passed away, so can this.

Deor, a poem presented as autobiography, contains the only instance of a character calling himself a *scop* in the Old English poetic corpus. Being principally a philosophical deliberation on fate, the poem is concerned with consolation. Deor, a Boethian figure, symbolises the transience and changing fortunes of life.[32] The poem's referentiality lies in the allusions to mythical and historical peoples about whom Deor is shown to have a store of knowledge. There is no description of Deor in performance.

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[30] Although is has been noted often that Widsith is not labelled a *scop*, by Opland, 1980, pp. 211-12, and North, 2008, p. 105, for example, critics have applied the term *scop* to Widsith. For example: Malone, 1962, pp. 77-79; Kemp Malone, 'The Old Tradition: Courtly Poetry', in *The Literary History of England: Vol 1: The Middle Ages (to 1500)*, 2nd edn, ed. by Albert C. Baugh (London: Routledge, 1967), pp. 45-59 (pp. 45-46); Niles, 1983, p. 58; John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 204; Peter Orton, *Writing in a Speaking World: The Pragmatics of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon Inscriptions and Old English Poetry* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2014), p. 112; Mark C. Amodio, *The Anglo-Saxon Literature Handbook* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), p. 240. This is potentially misleading, if we are to consider *scop* and *gleoman* to be distinct types in the minds of poets contemplating the 'Germanic' past. He can be described as a *scop* only in the sense that the term could have meant 'poet' in general, which could itself be a misrepresentation of the Widsith character, who is rather storyteller and possibly musician. For further discussion, see Ida Masters Hollowell, 'Was Widsith a *Scop*?', *Neophilologus*, 64 (1980), 583-91.

[31] If he is understood to have lost his name along with his position, Deor's current name is not given, and the character is referred to as Deor in this thesis. See p. 125.

[32] W.F. Bolton, 'Boethius, Alfred, and "Deor" Again', *Modern Philology*, 69:3 (1972), 222-27 believes Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* to be the source for *Deor*, and Kevin Kiernan believes that the *Deor* poet actively adapted Boethius's work, Germanicising characters for example: '*Deor*: The Consolations of an Anglo-Saxon Boethius', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 79:4 (1978), 333-40.

However, through the subjects being alluded to in each stanza, insights are provided into the typical body of knowledge that could have been held by oral storytellers, and consequently the content of their performances. The *Deor* poet weaves both legendary and historical material into the poem via Deor's deliberations. For example, Weland, the mythical smith of Germanic legend, is alluded to, as are the historical Theodoric and Eormanric, the fourth-century Gothic ruler who also appears in *Widsith* and *Beowulf*.[33] Heorrenda, the poet who replaces Deor, could be historical or legendary. He possibly appeared in other Germanic literary traditions, named Horant in medieval German literature and Hjarrandi in Old Norse literature.[34]

Unless we are to understand that Deor changed his name, the poet's use of the past tense: *me wæs Deor noma*, 'Deor was my name' (37), could indicate his awareness that the poem would be read in the future, that it was an artefact with a potential for life beyond its creator. Peter Orton argues that use of the past tense at this point is an indication of the poet's understanding that his work would live on beyond his death.[35] This assumes that Deor the narrator is identified as the poet, yet the use of the past tense can also indicate a conscious detachment from a previous self, or indeed be seen as evidence that the poet is not writing about himself. Davis notes that 'the poem's emphasis is on the past *as* past'.[36] The poet includes himself, or his character, in his contemplation of transience. We can be sure that Deor had certain benefits that went with his role, namely *londryht*, 'land-right', and the description of patronage in the closing lines support the connection between *scop* and lord established in *Beowulf*,

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[33] The identity of the Theodoric referred to in *Deor* is uncertain. It could be the late fifth- and early sixth-century ruler of the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths, the fifth-century Visigoth ruler, or another, Frankish ruler. See Kiernan, 1978, p. 338. Concerning the Germanic allusions in *Deor*, see Bremmer, pp. 201-02.

[34] See Joyce Hill, *Old English Minor Heroic Poems* (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1994), pp. 9-11; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'Gunnarr and the Snake Pit in Medieval Art and Legend', *Speculum*, 87:4 (2012), 1015-49 (p. 1045).

[35] Orton, pp. 198-99.

[36] Davis, p. 355.

albeit an unstable relationship in Deor's case. That the narrator is lamenting such a situation having passed away implies that being in the service of a ruler as a *scop* was perceived, at least by one fictional narrator, to be a positive experience, particularly as his lord was *hold*, 'gracious'. His former status appears to be relatively respectable, moreover, as he describes himself as having *folgað tilne*, 'good standing'. Concerning the types of performance that Deor would have given, little can be discerned. The fact that Deor as narrator is expressing his loss of position through the medium of alliterative poetry does not mean that his patronised performances were of that sort. All that can be established confidently is that a poet created a character, possibly entirely fictional, who called himself a *scop* and had a relationship with a lord. Whether historical or fictional, Deor is represented as a serious, respected artist, of the type defined as a *scop* by Opland. The status of the conspicuously fictional Widsith is more ambivalent.

Widsith

Widsith, like *Deor*, is the first-person account of a performing artist, with corresponding allusions to Germanic history and legend, and other material besides, though his speech is framed by a third-person narrator.[37] Unlike *Deor*, *Widsith* is explicitly presented as a biographical rather than an autobiographical account. The *Widsith* narrator distances himself from his character by naming him in the first line: *Widsið maðolade, wordhord onleac*, 'Widsith spoke, unlocked his word-hoard'. Widsith is a member of the Continental Myrging people (4); it has been suggested that these people migrated to Britain, though no reference to this group appears elsewhere in the historical record.[38] Any pretence to him being historical is undermined by the fantastic range of Widsith's

[37] See Malone, 1962, p. 27 for discussion of the poem's structure. He identifies a prologue (1-9), Widsith's speech (10-134), and epilogue (135-43).
[38] See Harald Kleinschmidt, *People on the Move: Attitudes toward and Perceptions of Migration in Medieval and Modern Europe* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), p. 59.

experience. It is possible that historical entertainers wandered through many lands in search of patronage, yet the scope of the travels in *Widsith* represents a generic example of the life and behaviour of a fictional entertainer, and Widsith's biography should not be seen as evidence for historical content or behaviours. The account is general and encyclopedic, with a chronology covering many centuries, a period from Alexander the Great (356-23 B.C.) to 'Ælfwine', Alboin, (530s-72).

If Opland's distinction is accepted, then Widsith is a *gleoman* rather than a *scop*. Much is revealed concerning Widsith's fanciful destinations, but little detail is provided about performance style. Whereas the autobiographical presentation of *Deor* suggests that the Germanic poetic long line is conceivably Deor's medium, and Widsith speaks in that mode too, there is no evidence to suggest that Widsith's performances before his patrons were in that mode. Also, it is difficult to believe, though admittedly possible, that a terse list of previous travels would suffice as entertainment for any patron, so it would be rash to suggest that the poem contains an example of a performance's subject matter, although the references could each have been fleshed out to form the content for a performance. As Malone reflects, 'how much better we should know the history of Germanic saga had the *Widsith* poet given us a tithe of his store of story!'[39] It is not clear whether the store belongs to the poet or to Widsith for Malone. Of course, it is Widsith and not necessarily the *Widsith* poet who possesses it. Conflation of poet and performer is seemingly difficult to avoid, even concerning such transparent fiction as *Widsith*, testament to the effectiveness of poetic ambiguity. It is unfortunate that a modern audience cannot be sure whether the poem's allusions were intended to reflect the subject matter of historical performances, or how realistic the more mundane references to Widsith's vocation were. If there is anything functional about the poem, it is that the poet appears to have used the performance history of a fictional character to

[39] Malone, 1962, p. 112.

create an *aide-memoire* concerning different lands and their rulers. If that were the case, *Widsith* would tell us something about the practice of poetic memorisation; indeed it would be an example of that practice. Such a functional reading of the poem would mean, however, that it is only with greater reservation that Widsith should be considered as bearing any relationship with historical performers.

Mode of delivery is a significant aspect of the narrator's description of Widsith, mentioned twice in his prologue: once in the opening line as quoted above, and then at 9b: *ongon þa worn sprecan*, 'he began to speak of many things'. Considering the verbs used, *maðolade* and *sprecan*, speech is the more likely mode of delivery and Widsith is shown to be a skilful orator. However, they refer to Widsith's account of himself rather than to his performance technique in the role of *gleoman*. Elsewhere, Widsith does refer explicitly to himself in the act of performance, if only briefly:

Hyre lof lengde geond londa fela,
þonne ic be songe secgan sceolde
hwær ic under swegle selast wisse
goldhrodene cwen giefe bryttian.
ðonne wit Scilling sciran reorde
for uncrum sigedryhtne song ahofan,
hlude bi hearpan hleoþor swinsade,
þonne monige men, modum wlonce,
wordum sprecan, þa þe wel cuþan,
þæt hi næfre song sellan ne hyrdon. (99-108)

Pleasant praise extended through many lands, whenever I by song must say where below the sky I knew the best gold-ornamented queen dispending gifts. Whenever Scilling and I clearly and eloquently upraised a song before our lord of victory and my voice rang out loud with the harp, then many men proud of mind, those who knew well, said they never heard a better song/better singing given.

The poet thus intended it to be understood that Widsith performed accompanied by a harp at times. Whether the poet conceived *Scilling*, 'clear voice' (103), to be the name he gave to his harp or a companion of Widsith, and whether Widsith plays the harp himself, are both unclear. Critics have tended to assume that *scilling* referred to another

performer.[40] Malone acknowledges that it would be a good name for an instrument, though he notes that line 104: *for uncrum sigedryhtne*, 'us two before the lord of victory', argues against the possibility.[41] It can also be seen ambiguously, as an example of anthropomorphism. The *hlud* volume of Widsith's performance is stressed, but otherwise there is little further detail concerning technique. Singing is the likely mode, however, considering the terms used.

Widsith elsewhere summarises his experience as follows:

> Swa ic geondferde fela fremdra londa
> geond ginne grund. Godes ond yfles
> þær ic cunnade cnosle bidæled,
> freomægum feor folgade wide.
> Forþon ic mæg singan ond secgan spell,
> mænan fore mengo in meoduhealle
> hu me cynegode cystum dohten. (50-56)

So I traversed many foreign lands throughout this wide earth. Good and evil I knew there; deprived of family, far from free kinsmen, I served far and wide. I can sing, therefore, and tell a tale, and declare before the fellowship in the mead hall how nobles have been generous and kind to me.

As a result of his experience of travel, the poet indicates that Widsith is able to deliver performances effectively. Moreover, he can deliver both sung and spoken performances, if *singan* is read as distinct from *secga spell* at line 54. Fundamental to his experience is exile from his family and his native people, together with contact with many rulers, a characteristic which distinguishes him from Deor, who mentions only his one former lord, to whom he was presumably bound for a relatively long time as he had been granted land rights. The *Deor* poet could have envisaged that Deor's working life was as precarious as Widsith's, however, and an early audience could well have understood this relationship more fully.

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[40] Cf. *The Riming Poem* (27b): *scyl wæs hearpe*, 'the harp was clear'. Concerning *Scilling* as performer, see H.B. Woolf, 'Three Notes on *Widsith*', *JEGP*, 36:1 (1937), 24-28 (p. 27), and W.H. French, 'Widsith and the Scop', *PMLA*, 60:3 (1945), 623-30 (p. 624). Boenig, 1996, p. 298 also favours this interpretation, although he does acknowledge that arguments have also been made suggesting that *scilling* is an instrument. See W.J. Sedgefield, 'Scilling', *MLR*, 26 (1931), 75; also Malone, 1962, p. 50, p. 194.

[41] Malone, 1962, p. 50.

Widsith claims he has particular abilities, which, as with conceptions of the source of ability described elsewhere in Old English poetry outside of the wisdom poems, apparently results from previous experience. Ability in Widsith's case develops from a state of wandering exile that is possibly self-imposed. Lines 50-56 suggest that this experience helps him to obtain further work. The importance of experience chimes with the concerns of wisdom poets to highlight the diverse abilities of men, although they stress such abilities to be divinely conferred. S.A.J. Bradley describes Widsith as a 'symbolic poet' because of his extensive history of travels.[42] This may indeed be the case, but what does he symbolise? Bradley does not specify. The life of uncertainty experienced by some artistic performers, perhaps, and the unique capacity to recount and perform that emerges from such an existence. The precariousness of these performers' professional position exemplifies the transience and insecurity of existence in general, which is a common preoccupation in Old English literature, regularly seen as inherent to the human condition and not something unique to performers.[43] Consequently, such artists epitomise notions of transience. Orton describes Widsith as a 'generic poet, a kind of super-*scop*'.[44] Trevor Ross also labels Widsith a 'super-*scop*'.[45] Kemp Malone argues that '[the poet] wished above all to create an ideal figure, to make a scop who would tower above all other scops'.[46] However, there is no suggestion that poetry is being described in *Widsith*; storytelling, singing and music are the likely modes. In his epilogue the narrator indirectly classifies him as a *gleoman*, if it is understood that he wishes to include him among the *gleomen gumena* of line 136:

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[42] S.A.J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Everyman, 1996), p. 336.
[43] See Christine Fell, 'Perceptions of Transience', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 180-97.
[44] Orton, p. 112. *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal & Kingston: Mcgill-Queen's University Press, 1998), p. 27.
[45] Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal & Kingston: Mcgill-Queen's University Press, 1998), p. 27.
[46] Kemp Malone, *Widsith*, rev. edn (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1962), p. 79.

> Swa scriþende gesceapum hweorfað
> gleomen gumena geond grunda fela,
> þearfe secgað, þoncword sprecaþ,
> simle suð oþþe norð sumne gemetað
> gydda gleawne, geofum unhneawne,
> se þe fore duguþe wile dom aræran,
> eorlscipe æfnan, oþþæt eal scæceð,
> leoht ond lif somod; lof se gewyrceð,
> hafað under heofonum heahfæstne dom. (135-43)

So the entertainers of men go fatedly wandering through many countries, they state their need and speak words of thanks, always, south or north, they will meet someone prudent of songs and lavish with gifts, he who, in the presence of a body of retainers, determines to exalt his repute and sustain his heroic standing, until all passes away, light and life entirely. He who wins fame/creates praise has permanent glory under the heavens.

Focusing on travel and patronage rather than performance, the epilogue makes no mention of performance delivery, technique, or use of musical instruments, although as noted above a harp is referred to elsewhere in the poem. Like the *scop* in *Maxims I*, the *gleoman* is associated with the people in a half-line (136a). Whether labelled a *scop* or a *gleoman*, belonging to the people, and a close relationship between performer and audience in a general sense, i.e. a society's population, is shown to be an important gnomic association concerning performers. Moreover, *gied* are mentioned, and thus this reference is comparable to the two other references to *gleomen* in Old English poetry, also linked with *gied* as stated earlier.

Widsith is certainly envisioned as an archetype; he is a character who is able to bring the stories of various societies to life by recycling the tales of diverse nations, or by recounting his own adventures within them. As in *Deor*, the symbolism in *Widsith* originates in its mythical and quasi-historical allusions. It is with these allusions that the function and referentiality of both poems lies.

Given the unique perspectives offered in these artist poems, considering the social status of the characters depicted in *Deor* and *Widsith* can contribute to our understanding of the position of performers in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination. On the face of it, their statuses appear distinct. Deor was seemingly in a valued and

rewarding role that was formerly stable yet ultimately precarious, leading to circumstances he laments. Widsith, however, appears to successfully find places at which he can perform, showing no concern for precarity and thriving on transience. The *Widsith* narrator perceives the itinerant performer figure whom he labels a *gleoman* to be important. J.R.R. Tolkien thought that the final lines of the poem, *lof se gewyrceð | hafað under heofonum heahfæstne dom*, 'he who wins fame has lasting glory under the heavens' (142b-43), referred to the 'generous patron'.[47] However, it can refer either to a lord or a *gleoman*, because *lof se gewyrceð* can mean 'he who creates praise', i.e. composes eulogy. At this point, Widsith's account contradicts Opland's characterisation of the *gleoman* as a scandalous figure. However, although the closing section of *Widsith* indicates that the narrator has confidence in Widsith and his fellow *gleomen simle*, 'always', finding patronage (138), their fate is determined by fruitful encounters with patrons, and they endure a wandering existence. The role of both protagonists is subservient and dependent, despite their artistic skill and its apparent importance for society. Reliance on generosity and support is a feature of both poems, and their positions are insecure, reminiscent too of the experience of protagonists in *The Seafarer* and another Exeter Book poem *The Wanderer*, who are also absent from their lords. Therefore, although Deor may have had *folgað tilne*, 'a good standing', and Widsith *oft on flette geþah mynelicne maþþum*, 'often had gained great treasure in hall', they do not appear to have high social status in the poetic imagination, if only because their situation is portrayed as being so precarious, and their fate is in the hands of others. Merriam's paradigm is thus possibly pertinent to both Deor and Widsith. Despite their circumstances, they apparently have renowned roles in society, and each has the chance to transcend his own time. Unquestioningly, they have (self) importance.

[47] Tolkien, p. 37.

III - Other Old English Shorter Poems

Comparing Old English, South Slavic and Homeric poetic traditions, Foley argues that 'Old English poetry illustrates the most widespread leakage between and among its traditional verse genres,' because the ubiquity of the Old English alliterative line enables such facets as 'riddling talk' to appear across diverse genres in the corpus.[48] The representation of artistry also shows evidence of 'leakage' between verse genres in the Old English tradition. In the elegiac lyric *The Seafarer*, for example, allusions are made to aspects of the 'joy in the hall' theme, one aspect of which is a performer entertaining an audience or earning his keep through the patronage of a lord, glimpsed at in the wisdom and artist poems and common in *Beowulf*, and a feature of other literary traditions:

Hwilum ylfete song
dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor
ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,
mæw singende fore medodrince. (19b-22)

At times I made the swan's song serve me for amusement, the gannet's cry and curlew's music for the laughter of men, the seagull's singing for mead drinking.

The poet oscillates between the seafarer hearing the calls of the sea birds, and the vision of the joy in the hall, exemplified by *gomen*, 'merriment', and supported by references to social joy and drinking. The terms *sweg* and *singan* function to further associate the seafarer's solitary joys with the entertainment and companionship found in the hall. This language is reflective of the descriptions of artistry in *Beowulf*: *song* and *sweg*, used to describe the *dream* in Hrothgar's hall, are both used in this passage to describe the sounds made by birds, utilising potential connections existing in the language between avian cries and calls, and human song and music. Their use reveals the poet's

[48] John Miles Foley, 'How Genres Leak in Traditional Verse', in *Unlocking the Wordhoard: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.*, ed. by Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 102.

creativity in applying those connections, while augmenting the poem's referentiality to include those images significant in heroic poetic settings and narrative.

The Riming Poem

The Exeter Book's distinctive *Riming Poem* also contains examples of comparable representation and possible leakage, both in its language and its overall theme. The term *swinsade*, 'sounded melodiously', used in *Widsith* (105) to describe Widsith's performance, is also used in *The Riming Poem*, in a section that also alludes to *gomen*, 'entertainment', and features a notable reference to the harp:

Gomen sibbe ne ofoll,
ac wæs gefest gear, gellende sner,
wuniendo wær wilbec bescær.
Scealcas wæron scearpe, scyl wæs hearpe,
hlude hlynede, hleoþor dynede,
sweglrad swinsade, swiþe ne minsade. (24b-29)

Mirth did not stop, but the year was constant in gifts, harp string resounding, mindfulness of home cut the stream of tears. Men were keen, the harp was clear, sounded loudly, noise echoed, and the heavens rang with music, not greatly diminished.

Although again no specifics are offered in relation to performance technique, and leaving aside this poem's distinctive use of rhyme, the passage contains the familiar associations between performance and success, prosperity and peace that feature in other Old English poems. Indeed, *The Riming Poem* as a whole is a reflection on courtly rule. Among other concerns, the narrator contemplates the tribulations that can arise following the death of a powerful ruler, comparable with the ruminations of Beowulf, Hrothgar, and the Last Survivor in *Beowulf*, as well as with the unnamed characters who forecast the impending doom of the Geatish nation at its close, discussed in Chapter 4. The emphatic tone of *The Riming Poem*, together with the reiterated references to the harp and also to its strings, highlights the association between the instrument and success, particularly as the heavens respond to the music (28-29).

The Phoenix

One significant reference to artistry in an overtly Christian Old English poem occurs in *The Phoenix*, in which joy, together with aesthetic beauty, is once again linked with music and the use of musical instruments. The Old English poet expands creatively on Lactantius's Latin original, *Carmen De Ave Phoenice*, in the following section, in which the bird's song is compared with human musical performances:[49]

Biþ þæs hleoðres sweg
eallum songcræftum swetra ond wlitigra
ond wynsumra wrenca gehwylcum.
Ne magon þam breahtme byman ne hornas,
ne hearpan hlyn, ne hæleþa stefn
ænges on eorþan, ne organan,
sweghleoþres geswin, ne swanes feðre,
ne ænig þara dreama þe dryhten gescop
gumum to gliwe in þas geomran woruld.[50] (131b-39)

The harmony of the music is sweeter and more beautiful than all song-craft and more delightful than every melody. Neither can the cry of trumpets or horns, nor the sound of the harp, nor the voice of any man on earth, nor the organ, the strain of its melody, nor the wings of the swan, nor any of those joys that the Lord created for men's pleasure in this lamentable world match that music.

The Phoenix is a musical bird in this poem. The use of *sweg* to describe its call at 131b invites particular comparison with *The Seafarer*, in which the word refers to the call of the curlew, but also with *Beowulf*, in which it describes the music of men. The *Phoenix* poet sees the human ability to create music with various instruments as one of the God-given gifts which enable joy in our world, in a manner resembling Old English gnomic poems, which, as we have seen, list divinely-attributed artistic abilities such as playing the harp. Here, however, the aim of the poet is not to distinguish types of creative performance, but to compare examples of human musical and other creative endeavour unfavourably with the superior 'music' of the phoenix. *Dream* is the term used

[49] See N.F. Blake, *The Phoenix* (University of Exeter Press, 1990), pp. 24-31; Opland, 1980, pp. 218-20.
[50] For discussion and classification of the instruments referred to in lines 136b-37a, see Blake, 1990, p. 74.

collectively for human pleasures in *The Phoenix*, referring to 'joy', 'music', or both, as is likely, and according to the *Phoenix* poet the purpose of artistry is the amusement and pleasure of men. No further function, such as the praise of God who enabled such pleasures, is specified. As seen elsewhere in the corpus, in this passage the poet exploits *dream*'s ambiguity and semantic range, employing it to summarise the elements that comprise human pleasure. It refers to music, but also to the wings of the swan, thus implying that their beauty also provides joy to humans. There are, however, unusual characteristics in this poem that depart from the representation typical of Old English poems.[51] For example, it is noteworthy that trumpets and horns are seen as examples of instruments that can create pleasure in this poem. Although it is not explicitly stated, the *Phoenix* poet possibly envisaged horns and trumpets in an entertainment role, like harps. As noted in Chapter 2, elsewhere in Old English poetry they function to reflect martial success rather than to instigate communal, social pleasure. This might be seen as reflective of its Latin influence, yet these instruments do not appear in the Latin original.

Riddles

Old English riddles contain the occasional reference to artistry, which figures as a component in the imaginative generation of enigmatic allusion. To some riddles, a musical instrument is the likely solution. For instance, as noted above, 'bagpipe' has been the accepted solution to Exeter Book *Riddle 31*, possibly the only instance of an instrument other than a harp being described explicitly in the context of performing artistry in Old English poetry. Other solutions have been suggested, however, including

[51] Concerning the relationship between the Latin and Old English Phoenix poems, see Daniel O'Donnell, 'Fish and Fowl: Generic Expectations and the Relationship between the Old English *Phoenix*-poem and Lactantius's *De ave phoenice*', in *Germanic Texts and Latin Models: Medieval Reconstructions*, ed. by K. E. Olsen, A. Harbus and T. Hofstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 157-71 (particularly pp. 159-66).

cithara, and so the riddle may refer to an instrument of the harp-lyre class after all.[52]

Riddle 31 reads as follows:

Is þes middangeard missenlicum
wisum gewlitegad, wrættum gefrætwad.
Ic seah sellic þing singan on ræcede;
wiht wæs nower werum on gemonge,
sio hæfde wæstum wundorlicran.
Niþerweard wæs neb hyre,
fet ond folme fugele gelice;
no hwæþre fleogan mæg ne fela gongan,
hwæþre feþegeorn fremman onginneð,
gecoren cræftum, cyrreð geneahhe
oft ond gelome eorlum on gemonge,
siteð æt symble, sæles bideþ,
hwonne ær heo cræft hyre cyþan mote
werum on wonge. Ne heo þær wiht þigeð
þæs þe him æt blisse beornas habbað.
Deor domes georn, hio dumb wunað;
hwæþre hyre is on fote fæger hleoþor,
wynlicu woðgiefu. Wrætlic me þinceð,
hu seo wiht mæge wordum lacan
þurh fot neoþan, frætwed hyrstum.
Hafað hyre on halse, þonne hio hord warað,
bær, beagum deall, broþor sine,
mæg mid mægne. Micel is to hycgenne
wisum woðboran, hwæt sio wiht sie. (1-24)

This world is made wonderful, adorned with beauty variously. I saw a wondrous object singing in the hall, was nothing like her in amongst men, she has strange and fair shape, her head arching downwards, feet and hands like a bird's, yet she could not fly or go much about but yearned to set forth. She began to display her well-chosen arts, often and again circling about among the noblemen, then would sit at the feast, awaiting her turn, the earliest moment when she might make known her skill to those present. Of what they relished she did not share in at all. Animal eager for renown, she remained silent, yet there is a fair sound in her foot, a beautiful gift of song. I thought it wondrous how that creature could play with words with her foot below. Finely adorned, she wore on her neck, on her naked neck, rings, her brothers, when she guarded her wealth, a maiden among kinsmen. What may she be? A wise bearer of eloquence will ponder it well.

If the solution to this riddle is a musical instrument, particularly *cithara*, then it is an elegant instrument, a significant object of the feast viewed favourably by the riddler and

[52] See Paull F. Baum, *The Anglo-Saxon Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1963), p. 36. Donald K. Fry offers an alternative, 'feather-pen': Donald K. Fry, 'Exeter Riddle 31: Feather-Pen', in *De Gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir*, ed. by John Miles Foley (New York: Garland, 1992), pp. 234-49. For the suggestion of *cithara*, see Elaine K. Musgrave, 'Cithara as the Solution to Riddle 31 of the *Exeter Book*', in *Pacific Coast Philology*, 37 (2002), 69-84.

in the world of the poem. The reference to it circling among a gathering intriguingly aligns with Bede's account of *convivia*, discussed in Chapter 6, in which the *cithara* also circulates. This riddle's ambiguity extends to the final exhortation to the reader. In the last line, employing a half-line also used in *The Order of the World* (2), the riddler obscures the identity of the *wis woðbora*; it could refer to the reader, as the 'performer' of the riddle, but also to the instrument's player, who must *hycgan*, 'consider' or 'contemplate' well to enable successful performance. The presence of *woðbora* in the riddles reflects the term's ambiguity and enigmatic possibilities. Another Exeter Book Riddle, 80, with the accepted solution of 'drinking cup', associates feasting, or at least drinking, with a performer: *Oft ic woðboran wordleana sum* | *agyfe æfter giedde*, 'often I give a bearer of eloquence a reward for his words after his lyrics' (9-10a). Although the character is again referred to as a *woðbora*, this passing reference to an artistic performer otherwise provides little further understanding of their place in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination other than that he was possibly an element of conventions involving ritual reward, although even this is inferred.

Lines 1-4 of Exeter Book *Riddle 70*, the first lines of what was once seen as a longer riddle now understood to be fragments of two separate riddles, united through the loss of a manuscript leaf, are the first lines of a thus partially lost riddle with the possible solution 'lyre':[53]

> Wiht is wrætlic þam þe hyre wisan ne conn.
> Singeð þurh sidan. Is se sweora woh,
> orþoncum geworht; hafaþ eaxle tua
> scearp on gescyldrum. His gesceapo dreogeð

There is a wondrous creature for those who do not know its nature. It sings through its sides. Its neck is crooked, wrought skilfully; it has two shoulders sharp on its back. Its shape performs…

[53] See Williamson, 1977, pp. 336-37. Concerning the loss of the leaf, see John C. Pope, 'An Unsuspected Lacuna in the Exeter Book: Divorce Proceedings for an Ill-Matched Couple in the Old English Riddles', *Speculum*, 49:4 (1974), 615-22.

Little can be deduced from such a brief and incomplete allusion, other than that it supports the understanding that the instrument was viewed positively in the poetic imagination. Like the instrument of *Riddle 31*, it was a wondrous, valuable object made with skill.

The sole compounding of *scop* in the poetry appears in Exeter Book *Riddle 8*:

> Ic þurh muþ sprece   mongum reordum,
> wrencum singe,   wrixle geneahhe
> heafodwoþe,   hlude cirme,
> healde mine wisan,   hleoþre ne miþe,
> eald æfensceop,   eorlum bringe
> blisse in burgum,   þonne ic bugendre
> stefne styrme;   stille on wicum
> sittað nigende. (1-8a)

I speak through my mouth a multitude of sounds. I sing with modulation, frequently vary my voice, call loudly, hold to my ways. I do not stifle my speech; an old evening-singer, I bring delight to men in the cities, when I bend with crying voice. Still in their homes, they sit silently.

Commonly interpreted as ‘evening poet’, *æfensceop* could also be appropriately translated as ‘evening singer’; the song of the bird, a nightingale, is being referred to, and associating birdsong specifically with poetry would be possible but rather more tenuous.[54] This instance is of course a symbolic, riddling application. It does tell us that poets could compound the term *scop*, as prose writers commonly did in creating terms such as *sealmscop*, and that it could be used symbolically in the context of a riddle and in reference to its solution. It also suggests that it was understood that a poet performed, possibly sang, melodiously, indicating the beauty of poetry in performance and the positive effect it can have on those who hear it.

Other Poems

This chapter concludes with brief comment on the further instances of *scop* in poetry not yet considered. Neither passage contains a description of performance. Both refer to

[54] Concerning the nightingale as evening poet, see Williamson, 1977, p. 155.

specific, named, historical individuals: Aldhelm, the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon poet and abbot, and Homer, if we are to assume that Homer was an individual as did one Anglo-Saxon poet.[55] Also, both poems have a subject matter distinct from the Germanic context of poems such as *Widsith* and *Deor*. The reference to Aldhelm is found in an Old English poem from a manuscript containing one of his Latin works, the prose *De Virginitate*:

> þus me gesette *sanctus et iustus*
> beorn boca gleaw, *bonus auctor*,
> Ealdelm, æþele sceop, *etiam fuit*
> *ipselos* on æðele Angolsexna,
> byscop on Bretene. (1-5a)

Thus he composed me, the Holy and righteous man, wise in books, an excellent author, Aldhelm, a noble poet. Also he was distinguished in the land of the Anglo-Saxons, a bishop in Britain.

Use of the term *scop* to describe Aldhelm undermines Niles' earlier categorisation of them as Germanic court singers, and it is extremely unlikely that Aldhelm had the role that Opland assigned to *scopas*. He was a literate Christian, who wrote in Latin as well as possibly in the vernacular. North suggests the association between *scop* and Aldhelm's role as a bishop is not accidental, and that *scop* in this instance suggests a reference to Aldhelm's Old English poetry, none of which has survived.[56] The reference to Homer, in the thirtieth *Metre of Boethius*, further undermines the conception of the *scop* as Germanic court poet:

> Omerus wæs east mid Crecum
> on ðæm leodscipe leoða cræftgast,
> Firgilies freond and lareow,
> þæm mæran sceope magistra betst. (1-4)

Homer was the most skilled in tales among the Greeks in that nation, the friend and teacher of Virgil, the best of masters to that distinguished poet.

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[55] Thornbury counts thirteen instances in the corpus of Old English literature of *scop* being used to refer to non-Anglo-Saxon historical figures: 2014, p. 23.
[56] North, 2008, p. 111.

Thornbury's point about *scop* being a term one would wish to be called after death resonates here. Although *scop* can be thought of as referring to a 'poet', and might on occasion refer to a Germanic court poet in particular, it is applied in a wide range of circumstances, to diverse figures of both history and legend.

This chapter has shown that the performer figure was significant in the gnomic imagination, being listed among those who have particular, noteworthy abilities in the catalogue wisdom poems, albeit in the concise, rather restrained manner typical of such poetry. Sometimes however the performer figure is idealised in poems, noted as someone who belongs intrinsically with the people in *Maxims I* (127), for example, and seen as being of great importance in *The Fortunes of Men* (84). Such significance and idealisation applies also to the *hearpe*, the playing of which can relieve longing in *Maxims I* (170). The *hearpe* is singled out as an instrument worthy of inclusion in wisdom poetry, and this primacy is reflected in non-gnomic Old English poems. The manner of artistry's appearance in wisdom writing points to an acceptance, among the Christians who committed the poems to manuscripts, of a diverse array of performance activity, of the past at least.

The accounts of the two 'artist' poems, potentially a rich source concerning performers and their performances, unfortunately provide little information, particularly concerning historical practices and techniques. They depict very different figures, possibly archetypes of early *scop* and *gleoman* figures, as distinguished by Opland. Both poems suggest a life of precarity and transience, but also hint at the (possibly symbolic) importance of patronage for rulers. Performance is merely glimpsed at in other non-narrative Old English poems, which demonstrate the same positive associations as in wisdom writing. Artistry is briefly referred to in the riddles, and instruments are the subject of some of them, all of which supports the conclusion that performance is viewed positively in the poetic imagination. Overall, however, the

concise nature of the references undermines the usefulness of attempts at extrapolation for the purposes of historical conjecture.

Chapter 4 - Multiform Artistry in *Beowulf*

The associations between the wisdom poems and narrative poetry of the Old English tradition have long been recognised. In 1914, Blanche Colton Williams lamented that 'practically no attempt has been made to relate the *Gnomic Verses* with the gnomic mood revealed in sententious sayings of epic and lyric.'[1] While a comprehensive discussion of these relationships is also outside the scope of this thesis, the analysis in this chapter partly serves to consider the ways in which the symbolic associations relating to artistry established in wisdom poetry are reflected in Old English narrative poems. Such poems contain many gnomic elements. The aphorisms concerning the harp in *Christ II* were noted in Chapter 3, but *Beowulf* also features maxims throughout, often at key structural and narrative points. For example, 455b, *gæð a wyrd swa hio scel*, 'fate goes ever as it must', concludes Beowulf's initial address to Hrothgar - his first major speech - and fitt six in the manuscript. This speech is discussed in Chapter 5, from p. 208. Such gnomic statement befits a narrative poetry concerned with the past, as it can offer a generalised and often moral judgement on historically distant events, phrased as concise statement. It features significantly in Old English narrative poems partly because of their common orientation to, and focus on, historical events and concerns.

This chapter asserts additionally that the associations developed in gnomic poems are also a characteristic of non-gnomic aspects of Old English narrative poetry's representation of artistry. In Homeric epic, particularly in *The Odyssey*, the connection

[1] Blanche Colton Williams, *Gnomic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), pp. 1-2 (italics in original). Since Williams's comment, Larrington, particularly pp. 120-60, pp. 184-219 addresses the subject at length, and Poole provides an extensive bibliography of critical material. Shippey, 1976, distinguishes a homogenous group of wisdom poems from the rest of the corpus: see pp. 1-47 (particularly p. 1).

between artistry and feasting is made explicitly, and becomes a recurring aphoristic trait; for example:

> But when they had put away their desire for eating and drinking,
> the suitors found their attention turned to other matters,
> the song and the dance; for these things come at the end of the feasting. (Book 1, 150-52).

Moreover, the lyre is named repeatedly in *The Odyssey* as the referent for artistry and an accompaniment to the feast. Book 8, 98-100 exemplifies this: 'by this time we have filled our desire for the equal feasting | and for the lyre, which is the companion to the generous | feast'.[2] The overt gnomic statements connecting artistry with the feast which feature in Homeric epic do not appear in Old English poetry, with its more allusive style. Also, gnomic elements are not taken as discrete statements from wisdom poetry and simply placed into the narrative; they work with the narrative multifariously. As Niles asserts, 'wisdom … can easily be reified. Too often it is treated as if it were something that is kept on the shelf, applied, and then reshelved.'[3] The same can be said for formulaic, gnomic linguistic structures. Just as traditional formulas operate dynamically within Old English poetic narrative, so too does the application of traditional wisdom. Moreover, just as a compound can substitute for a longer maxim statement, such as the *rædsnottor* example highlighted by Clemoes, discussed below (p. 145), concise maxims are developed into longer performance passages in narrative poetry. Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf, for instance (1700-84), often described as his 'sermon', exemplifies this creative use of conventional wisdom. Human communication, i.e. the speech-act of a lord, places the issue of heroic fame and its attendant dangers, a common subject of aphoristic statement, at the heart of our

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[2] See also Book 17, 268-70; Book 21, 428-30.
[3] John D. Niles, 'Reconceiving *Beowulf*: Poetry as Social Praxis', *College English*, 61:2 (1998), 143-66 (p. 146).

understanding of *Beowulf* as a poem, and its characters' relationships to each other, with concomitant foreboding reference to later narrative events.

The use of traditional wisdom is one aspect of the overall symbolism generated by, and at work within, Old English narrative poems. For Clemoes, narrative poetry 'produced active symbolization by converting symbolic potential into symbolic narrative.'[4] The visions or impressions of idealised community and attendant artistic performance witnessed in episodes from narrative poems exemplify this process of manipulation. Moreover, just as longer passages can be seen as expansions of gnomic statement, compounds and phrases - often structured to coincide with the boundaries of the half-line - acted as condensed versions of the aphorisms found in the gnomic poems. Clemoes claims that

> [l]inguistic symbols … were poetry's inferential equivalents to maxims. *Rædsnottor*, 'one wise in counsel' (*Andreas* 473b), for instance, implied the interaction of potentials which a maxim, 'Ræd sceal mid snyttro' ('Counsel belongs with wisdom', *Maxims I* 22a), made explicit. The two formations referred to the interaction with the same general indefiniteness: the difference was that the one expressed it symbolically and the other explicitly. By a linguistic symbol in this poetry I mean therefore a piece of language through which an interaction of socially recognized potentials of active being was implied in a potentially narrative form culturally designed for blending with definite language.[5]

If Clemoes' argument is accepted, then relevant compound terms such as *gleobeam*, *woðbora*, or *dreamcræft* bear an intrinsic symbolic element, and also carry aphoristic narrative potential exploited by narrative poets. In relation to artistry, this utilisation of symbolic phrasing, and its development into narrative, is demonstrated most clearly in *Beowulf*.

Generality and Idealised Artistry in *Beowulf*

[4] Clemoes, 1995, p. 169.
[5] Clemoes, 1995, p. 129.

In 1936, Tolkien famously observed that '*Beowulf* has been used as a quarry of fact and fancy far more assiduously than it has been studied as a work of art.'[6] His statement remains surprisingly relevant today when considering the poetic representation of artistic performance, and not just in relation to *Beowulf* but to the corpus in general. As discussed in Chapter 1, critics still draw conclusions concerning what it might tell us about real-life behaviours in Anglo-Saxon times or even earlier. This is sometimes the case even when a critic believes that artistry is idealised, as it often is in *Beowulf*, or that it performs a specific stylistic function. It is easy to see why. The poem, which contains a significant proportion of the references to artistry from the corpus of Old English poetic narrative, features a world dominated by performance as cultural praxis enabling society to reflect upon its circumstances and its fate. It is the most detailed imaginative world of artistry in a single extant Old English work, so that it effectively stands alone in the corpus in this regard.

The origins of *Beowulf* has been subject to intense debate over the last two centuries. It is one of the most enduring and elusive issues in all of literary studies. Dating the poem has been particularly problematic.[7] The precise nature of its relationship with oral modes of composition and transmission is also seemingly lost to us, and with it the poem's manner of authorship. At times the issue is avoided altogether; the *Beowulf* poet is conspicuously absent from Andy Orchard's overview of

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[6] J.R.R. Tolkien, '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics', in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 5-48 (p. 5).

[7] Many scholars have offered a view on the date of *Beowulf*, and there have been two edited collections on the topic. Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of* Beowulf, new edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), disrupted a commonly held belief that *Beowulf* was an eighth-century poem upon its original release in 1981, perhaps most strikingly in Kevin S. Kiernan's chapter, 'The Eleventh-Century Origin of *Beowulf* and the *Beowulf* Manuscript', pp. 9-22. The essays in Leonard Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of* Beowulf*: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014) collectively argue for a return to the eighth-century consensus. For an overview of the opinions up to the publication of the Toronto collection, see Chase, pp. 3-8.

the poem, for example.[8] One relatively recent specific theory is that of North, who believes the poem was composed in 826-7 by Eanmund, abbot of the minster of Breedon on the Hill in what would have been Mercia.[9] This specific hypothesis was widely questioned,[10] yet alternative attempts at discerning *Beowulf*'s origins have been tentative and often vague.[11] While this thesis does not attempt to add another layer to the discussion, the subtlety and complexity of the representation of artistry suggests *Beowulf* is the product of a learned figure who was aware of the function of referentiality in oral performance contexts. The diverse representation of artistry in the poem points to someone who could employ a theme that could well have been typical in oral compositions: that of the performer, particularly one in service to a king, a feature of a royal hall, in ways that enable wider structural and semantic functions of that theme. The way he handles the artistry theme suggests a creative, individual poet. I thus follow Paull F. Baum, who notes that

> [i]t may seem odd to picture … an ivory-towered poet in the eighth century, but *Beowulf* is unique in every sense, and in the balance of probabilities the scales incline to even this unlikely assumption: a poet as individual and apart as his style, his plan, and his subject.[12]

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[8] Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2003).
[9] North, 2006, p. vii. On the specific date, see pp. 316-17.
[10] See for example Michael Lapidge, review of *The Origins of Beowulf: From Vergil to Wiglaf*, (review no. 617) [online], <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/617> [accessed: 11 July 2018].
[11] For a critical overview of theories regarding *Beowulf*'s origins, see Robert E. Bjork and Anita Obermeier, 'Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences', in *A* Beowulf *Handbook*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 13-34 (pp. 28-31); North, 2006, p. 2, pp. 24-34; Niles, 2016, pp. 122-24. The range of notions is wide. Edward B. Irving, Jr. supports the oral origins theory; for him, *Beowulf* was an eighth-century Mercian court poem not influenced by Latin literature, which presumably circulated orally, though he does not specify. See Edward B. Irving, Jr., *Rereading Beowulf* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), especially p. 7. In contrast, for an extensive example of the literate, individual author theory, see Arthur Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1959), particularly pp. 6-7.
[12] Paull F. Baum, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', in *An Anthology of* Beowulf *Criticism*, ed. by Lewis E. Nicholson (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 353-65 (p. 365).

In the aforementioned 1936 article, Tolkien stresses the subtlety with which the *Beowulf* poet draws his audience into an enticing and largely coherent world, one that is not, however, to be seen as historical:

> *Beowulf* is not an actual picture of historic Denmark or Geatland or Sweden about A.D. 500. But it is … on a general view a self-consistent picture, a construction bearing clearly the marks of design and thought. The whole must have succeeded admirably in creating in the minds of the poet's contemporaries the illusion of surveying a past pagan but noble and fraught with a deep significance – a past that itself had depth and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow. This impression of depth is an effect and a justification of the use of episodes and allusions to old tales, mostly darker, more pagan, and desperate than the foreground.[13]

The introduction of or allusion to 'old tales', in the form of concise narrative references as well as via extended storytelling performances, is a fundamental characteristic, and a significant function, of artistry in the poem. Also highlighting the primacy that the *Beowulf* poet gives to artistry and its symbolic significance above the more tangible aspects of Geatish and Danish societies, Roy M. Liuzza argues that:

> *Beowulf* strives to set the living world of song and the sustaining power of poetic fame above the insufficiency of material objects to secure lasting memory; the instability and ambivalence of monuments – from Hrothgar's hall to Beowulf's barrow – is unfavourably contrasted with the enduring power of narrative commemoration ("remembering-together").[14]

As stylistic analysis of the episodes featuring artistry will show, this 'living world of song' is not represented routinely or uniformly. Displaying dexterous subtlety, the *Beowulf* poet modifies his implementation of artistry to varying effect, creating individual episodes unique in content, form and function.

The Depiction of Artistry in *Beowulf*

Beowulf features the most detailed and intriguing instance describing the knowledge and technique of someone performing artistry in the extant poetry. It exemplifies the

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[13] Tolkien, p. 27.

[14] Roy M. Liuzza, '*Beowulf*: monuments, memory, history', in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 91-108 (p. 105).

Beowulf poet's ability to represent the artistic skills of an individual, as well as of the more archetypal figures that will be considered later in this chapter. The passage describes the delivery of an unspecified number of performances, some possibly envisioned as being improvised, as executed by a member of Hrothgar's retinue skilled in creative oratory who can be seen as an oral storyteller or poet:

Hwilum cyninges þegn,
guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,
se ðe eal fela ealdgesegena
worn gemunde, word oþer fand
soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian
ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
wordum wrixlan; welhwylc gecwæð
þæt he fram Sigemunde[s] secgan hyrde
ellendædum, uncuþes fela,
Wælsinges gewin, wide siðas,
þara þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston,… (867b-78)

At times a king's thegn, a man filled with eloquent speech, mindful of lyrics, he who remembered a large number of stories, a great many old traditions, found one word after another, bound with truth. The man then began to recount wisely the exploits of Beowulf, and successfully uttered a skilful tale, weaving his words. He recounted everything that he had heard told about Sigemund's brave deeds, many a strange thing, the Wælsing's struggle, his distant travels, those that the children of men did not know fully,…

Attempts have been made to see this passage as relating to the creation of *Beowulf*. Niles sees it as an indication of the poem's oral origin,[15] and Orton sees it as a description of the initial recitation of the first part of Beowulf's story, subsequently passed down until the scribe wrote out the surviving poem.[16] These suggestions are enticing, though not substantiable.

The passage is the most comprehensive description of a character in the role of artistic or creative performer in Old English. However, as with the harpers mentioned in gnomic poems, the *þegn* is nowhere described using a specific identifier relating explicitly to the role such as *scop* or *gleoman*. The poet could have used such

[15] Niles, 1983, p. 37.
[16] Orton, p. 113.

descriptors, because line 867, *cystum cuðe hwilum cyninges þegn*, alliterates on c and not þ. Some critics assume that this performer can be classified as a *scop*, and critical discussion of this section illustrates the way in which the word has been adopted when speaking generally about artistic performers from the period.[17] The meaning of the descriptor used, *þegn*, changed during the Anglo-Saxon period. Originally referring to a member of a king or other ruler's military *comitatus*, it came to denote an English man of particular rank, between *ceorl* and *æþeling*.[18] It is unlikely that the poet was thinking of a particular English rank, as he is dealing with foreign peoples, and the poet would have had a Scandinavian equivalent in mind. Whether or not the poet wished to represent a character with a particular role or status in Danish society is not clear, and it should not be assumed that he intended such precision. As the subject matter is retrospective it is likely to refer to the earlier meaning, particularly if an early date for the poem's conception is accepted. Also, the *þegn* is certainly in the king's service, even if the poet did not feel the need to stress explicitly that producing these performances was an expected part of his role in that service. Clunies Ross argues as a result that the passage suggests 'poetic recitation was an aristocratic pursuit'.[19] J.M. Hill's definition of him as a 'warrior poet, a court poet'[20] seems appropriate, or 'warrior-storyteller'

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[17] Opland (1980, p. 203) and North (2008, pp. 104-05) acknowledge the absence of the term *scop*, yet there are many instances of the assumption, for example: Amodio, 2005, pp. 195-96; Magennis, 2011, p. 40; Niles, 1983, p. 37 and 2003, pp. 11-12; Trilling, p. 10; Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2002), p. 164; Orton, p. 113; Graham D. Caie, '*Ealdgesegena worn*: What the Old English *Beowulf* Tells Us about Oral Forms', in *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, ed. by Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008), pp. 109-20 (p. 114); Kemp Malone, 'Coming Back from the Mere', *PMLA*, 69:5 (1954), 1292-99 (particularly pp. 1293-94). *Scop* is the default term used by modern critics with reference to a poet figure in a broad sense, particularly a 'Germanic' one, regardless whether the poet originally used the term. The *þegn* is a *scop* only in the sense that the latter word might have meant 'poet' or 'performer' in a very general manner.

[18] See Henry Royston Loyn, 'Gesiths and Þegns in Anglo-Saxon England from the Seventh to the Tenth Century', *EHR*, 70 (1955), 529-49 (pp. 540-43). Cf. the servant in Heorot termed a *þegn* earlier in the poem: see below (p. 166).

[19] Clunies Ross, 2016, p. 13.

[20] J.M. Hill, 2002, p. 313.

perhaps, as storytelling is his primary mode. He can be seen as one of Hrothgar's warrior band, though the poet could additionally have intended this character to hold a specific role as creative recorder, eulogiser and performer.

In addition to doubts concerning the status and role of the *þegn*, there are no specifics concerning performance practice, though we know the group are travelling on horseback, and are thus outside the hall, the typical performance space in *Beowulf*. He appears to be providing entertainment as a pastime during travel, though Opland, characteristically questioning of assumptions, notes the problems of interpretability, and ultimately sees his performances as part of a eulogistic tradition rather than a recreational one, the purpose being emotional release rather than entertainment.[21] As well as relating Beowulf's exploits, the *þegn* tells of Sigemund's fight with a dragon and subsequent increase in fame, and the failures of Heremod, an earlier ruler of the Danes. However, the wording is unknown because the tale is probably not a quotation but the narrator's paraphrase of the *þegn*'s stories, challenging the notion that it was necessarily in verse. Niles sees the ambiguity between narrator and character as indication that the *Beowulf* poet was identifying with his performer.[22] The passage would then be a form of autobiography. The lack of acknowledgement of this identification in the poem unfortunately leaves Niles' suggestion as unprovable speculation. It is only with caution and acknowledgement of a lack of evidence that the creators of Anglo-Saxon poems can be conflated with the fictional performers depicted within their works.

Analysis of the poem's language and phrasing enables a more appropriate and assured consideration of this passage's function, though interpretative questions persist. For example, the use of *hwilum*, 'at times', 'sometimes', at 867b indicates that the poet

[21] Opland, 1980, pp. 202-05 (particularly p. 204).
[22] See Niles, 1983, p. 38.

is referring to multiple performances over a period of time, rather than describing one specific scene of performance. As will be shown, the *hwilum* conjunction is used elsewhere in the poem when describing performances. Such generality is regularly applied as a rhetorical device, developing the impression that artistry was commonplace in *Beowulf*'s Danish society, and challenging the understanding that episodes of artistry depict individual performances. The specific chronology of the performances remains unclear, however. It could be read that the *þegn* told a few unspecified tales (869-71a) before then concentrating on one concerning Beowulf and another concerning Sigemund, as indicated in my translation above. He could alternatively have undertaken a general, non-narrative biographical preamble to 871a, and also the actions of Beowulf and Sigemund could have been recounted within one story, though this is less plausible. Edward B. Irving, Jr. speculates that the Beowulf and Sigemund material is told by the *þegn*, who he calls a 'scop', but the material concerning Heremod is the product of the poet-narrator, because it 'belongs to a category of Christianized exemplum much more likely to be told by a pious king or a Christian poet than by a Danish scop…'[23] Moreover, the particular mode of the performances cannot be determined with confidence. North identifies three genres in the terms *gilp*, *gied* and *ealdsegen*, yet acknowledges the lack of clarity concerning Old English classificatory terms for performance.[24] Concerning the terminology further, the phrase *word oþer fand | soðe gebunden* 'found other words, truly bound' indicates that there was effective ordering or joining of words. Hill interprets the use of *findan* 'to find' as evidence of the *þegn*'s inventiveness.[25] For Barbara Nolan and Morton W. Bloomfield, *soðe gebunden* refers to

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[23] Edward B. Irving, Jr., 'The Nature of Christianity in *Beowulf*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 13 (1984), 7-21 (p. 8).
[24] North, 1991, p. 39.
[25] Hill, 2002, pp. 313-14.

the 'proper' nature of the words in performance.[26] Yet the line could be a specific technical reference to poetic alliteration and/or variation.[27] If this was the case, then we have the most convincing evidence for the argument that fictional characters were imagined as performing in the manner of, or in a style similar to, the poem within which they appear. As Fulk et al. and Tolkien and Gordon suggest, the phrase recalls *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (35): *lel letteres loken*, 'truly linked letters', a similarly equivocal and much debated line that could refer either to the effective joining together of words in alliteration, or to the relationship between staves.[28] Although the phrase hints at the skill and effectiveness of the *þegn*, therefore, 870b-871a does not reveal conclusively the manner in which he delivered his performances.

Fundamental to the poet's representation of the *þegn* in this passage however is the description at 868a-70a. After he is introduced at 867b, 868-70a stresses the distinctive store of knowledge he holds, which enables him to deliver his performances successfully, through the use of three phrases that correspond to the genres perceived by North. The first is *gilphlæden*, a compound of the senses 'glory' or 'pride', and 'laden', the second component's Modern English reflex, which Fulk et al. translate as 'well furnished with words of praise' and alternatively 'supplied with glorious words'.[29] Any association with words could have been a meaning created as a result of this particular compounding or of its context, although Modern English 'yelp' is *gilp*'s reflex, and had a core meaning related to oral utterance exploited in certain uses, such as in *The*

[26] Barbara Nolan and Morton W. Bloomfield, '*Beotword*, *Gilpcwidas*, and the Gilphlaeden Scop of *Beowulf*, *JEGP*, 79:4 (1980), 499-516 (p. 509).
[27] See for example Hugh Magennis, *Translating Beowulf: Modern Versions in English Verse* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), p. 30; Orton, p. 114.
[28] Fulk et al., 2008, p. 166; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 2nd edn, ed. by J.R.R. Tolkien, E.V. Gordon and Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 72; see also *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by Paul Battles (Toronto: Broadview, 2012), p. 32, n. 4.
[29] Fulk et al., 2008, p. 166 ; p. 386.

Wanderer (69), where its meaning is akin to 'boast'.[30] The second phrase, *gidda gemyndig*, 'mindful of tales', is similarly ambiguous, though it confirms the *þegn*'s knowledge. The third phrase, *ealfela ealdgesegena worn gemunde*, 'remembered a great many old traditions', describes the ability the *þegn* has to recall the legends and tales of the past. Through variation with these phrases, the poet gives considerable emphasis to the *þegn*'s knowledge, with all three associating the product of performance with the human store of knowledge required to deliver it successfully. Subsequently, from 871-74a, his ability is stressed. More important than being made aware of his technique, the poem's audience is to understand that the *þegn*'s performances were tales effectively produced by a competent performer, regardless of the manner in which they were performed. Though the passage suggests a man with particular knowledge and abilities, whether he regularly told traditional stories is not stated. Moreover, these tales were not necessarily intended to be well known either to the *þegn*'s fellow Danes or to *Beowulf*'s early audiences: at 878 the narrator states that he relates *þara þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston*, 'those [tales] the children of men did not fully know'. People are not entirely aware of some of the knowledge that the *þegn* is able to recall, at least concerning parts of the tale of Sigemund. This statement is curious, given that Sigemund would probably have been regarded as one of the principal legendary heroes for these Scandinavian peoples, though it could be suggested that the poet intended the *þegn* to have had a more detailed understanding of such tales than was common, to the extent that he was able to fill gaps in others' knowledge through his performances. This knowledge, together with the ability to perform it, marks him out from the rest of the troop in the poet's mind.

The passage additionally contains an intriguing though brief and allusive phrase that could refer obliquely to technique: the *þegn ongan wordum wrixlan*, 'began to link words' or 'began to mix words'. Michael Alexander argues that the phrase refers to the

[30] *Gilp* is considered in Nolan and Bloomfield, especially pp. 501-02, pp. 507-11.

practice of poetic variation and could thus have a similar purpose to *word oþer fand | soðe gebunden* as a comment on the construction of the *þegn*'s stories.[31] This is not certain, however, as the phrase is also used in an address by Wulfgar referring to Beowulf's wish to speak with Hrothgar at 366, and so can mean 'exchange words'. Elsewhere in Old English poetry, the phrase is used in *Vainglory* (16) to refer to the typical communication among groups of men indulging themselves at feasting and drinking, and a similar phrase, *wrixleð woðcræft*, is used in *The Phoenix* (127) to describe the singing technique of the bird. Janie Steen translates *wrixleð woðcræft* as 'modulates verse', which emphasises an association between the bird and poetry; 'change the art of song' is more literal, if no less anthropomorphic.[32] It appears to have been a formulaic phrase with meaning encompassing formal or creative verbal communication, and also conversation.[33] An interpretation that it was some type of speech-performance is appropriate, especially given that much conversation in *Beowulf* is a relatively formal exchange of set-piece dialog, but little certainty can be gleaned from its use concerning the *þegn*'s performance technique. The poetic quality of the *þegn*'s performances overall have been stressed, particularly in relation to Old English alliterative verse. Hill for example sees in the originality of the performance suggested by terms such as *findan* 'the high oral art of a wise composer'.[34] Such interpretation could be the consequence of an inclination to see these poems containing glimpses of analogous poetic content. The passage offers more detail in this regard than any other in the corpus, but the *þegn*'s mode of delivery remains uncertain.

Hill also attempts to define the overall characteristics of the *þegn*'s performance, although such attempts are undermined by the fact that multiple performances are being

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[31] Alexander, p. 70.
[32] Steen, p. 40.
[33] See Opland, 1980, pp. 224-25.
[34] Hill, 2002, pp. 313-14. Caie is similarly enthusiastic: 2008, pp. 114-15. See also Clunies Ross, 2016, p. 14.

described. He argues that '[the *þegn*'s] performance here is a mixture of oral composition and oral recitation, the whole involving a complex stitching together of an antithetical triptych', the components of the triptych for Hill being stories each concerning one figure: Beowulf, Sigemund, and Heremod.[35] Hill identifies originality with regard to the *þegn*'s story of Beowulf, highlighting the use of the terms *gidd* (868) and *spel* (873):

> [a]lthough almost as generically amorphous as *gidd*, a *spel* need not be a song or an alliterative tale; and more often than not in *Beowulf* it is a grievous tiding. Yet in *Beowulf* it is always something new: here in the thane's artful construction, later in the sorrowful news of the mother's revenge, and later still in the messenger's speech to the wise Geats awaiting news of Beowulf's combat with the dragon.[36]

Spel almost certainly refers to the production of material related to Beowulf's deeds, and the *þegn* combines the creative recollection of those recent events with other material (*giedd*), such as that concerning Sigemund. Although the poet possibly intended some of the material to have been newly created, Eliason long ago doubted the inevitability that the *þegn* was an improviser, and the material relating to recent events builds on the praise of Beowulf by other characters.[37] Indeed, the narrative position of the description of the *þegn*'s artistry, following the defeat of Grendel, provides us with clues concerning the purpose for its inclusion. For instance, there appears to be a need to give performances, concerned with Beowulf, that echo the statements of admiration accorded to him by the returning riders just before the *þegn* is introduced:

> Ðær wæs Beowulfes
> mærðo mæned; monig oft gecwæð
> þætte suð ne norð be sæm tweonum
> ofer eormengrund oþer nænig
> under swegles begong selra nære
> rondhæbbendra, rices wyrðra. (856b-61)

[35] Hill, 2002, p. 313.
[36] Hill, 2002, p. 313.
[37] Norman E. Eliason, 'The Improvised Lay in *Beowulf*', *Philological Quarterly*, 31 (1952), 171-79.

Beowulf's glory was there related. Many often said that south or north, between the seas, over the wide world there was no other, greater shield bearer under the sky's expanse, more worthy of power/of a kingdom.

The *þegn* thus acts as the interpreter of heroic events already being communicated in the social domain, possibly transfiguring them into a more formalised piece of artistry.

If the evidence of the paraphrase of the Sigemund episode (884b-915) is anything to go by, then these events were presented by the *þegn* as being historical narratives, notwithstanding the fantastic subject matter concerning the dragon. Through this sober representation, the poet associated the story of Beowulf with his other material, and urges the audience to consider Beowulf's bravery, witnessed in the fight with Grendel and confirmed by the wider society of men, as being reminiscent of Sigemund's bravery, and Beowulf's success and popularity can be contrasted with Heremod's failure to live up to acceptable standards of kingship, an account to which the narrator turns after he tells of Sigemund. The *þegn*'s performances also foreshadow future events in the poem's narrative. In particular, the tale of Sigemund's battle with a dragon prefigures Beowulf's comparable encounter later in the poem. They thus allude to diverse elements in *Beowulf*'s wider narrative, concerning events both within the poem's core plot and extraneous to it. The reference to the tales also functions as a structuring device, enabling the *Beowulf* poet to shift from the triumphant horse-riding to stories of Sigemund and Heremod, which continue until the poet returns again to the horse-riding at 916 , reprising the anaphoric *hwilum*: *hwilum flitende fealwe stræte* | *mearum mæton*, 'at times the horses traversed, competed on tawny roads'. The *þegn*'s memory of tales and the ability he has to communicate them are of central importance, whilst particulars concerning his status and performance technique are apparently of no concern. He is a non-symbolic, purely functional figure. However, he has the ability to introduce symbolic events that develop the poem's temporal depth and heroic-historic character, and expand the cultural milieu. His knowledge of the past enables

performances concerning fictional and historical events, and he is a figure who represents the imagined past through these performances. He carries no further significance or referents other than this, developing symbolic and structural associations through the performance of his knowledge rather than by being a symbolic character in himself, as other, less individuated performers are in *Beowulf*, notably those archetypes termed *scopas*.

Scopas* in *Beowulf

Speaking generally, but clearly relying on contexts supplied by *Beowulf*, Peter Ramey stresses the potential for societal unity that can be achieved through performance, together with its symbolic power:

> when Anglo-Saxon poets wish to invoke metonymically the joy of community, they almost inevitably mention singing and harp-sounding. The song of the *scop* is not merely an element of the poetic image of *dream* (OE: "mirth, joy") but the very culmination of it, the moment where, at the height of communal delight, members of this heroic society achieve a kind of union through collective dreaming. It is this communal meaning of the *scop*'s song, naturally, that Grendel cannot endure.[38]

Passages in which a *scop* is mentioned certainly lead to the impression that they are associated with collective social action. As will be shown, however, this invocation is not presented uniformly each time the *scop* and his artistry appears in Hrothgar's hall; the poet varies his representations of communal joy in each instance. Moreover, as Opland has pointed out, the *Beowulf* poet is unique among Old English poets in associating the *scop* with music, the harp, and joy in the hall.[39] The term is first used early in *Beowulf*, when the monster Grendel, present outside,

> …dogora gehwam dream gehyrde
> hludne in healle. Þær wæs hearpan sweg,
> swutol sang scopes. Sægde se þe cuþe
> frumsceaft fira feorran reccan,
> cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga eorðan worh(te),… (88-92)

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[38] Ramey, p. 620.
[39] Opland, 1976, p. 452.

> [Grendel] heard joy each day loud in the hall. There was the sound of the harp, the clear song of the singer. He who was able to tell of far back in the creation of mankind said that the almighty made the earth…

This passage, together with the image that the poet goes on to present (89-98), is the earliest of the 'joy in the hall' instances which punctuate *Beowulf*. As with the account of the *þegn*, it too enables the introduction of material of cultural significance to the peoples being depicted, this time the briefly-summarised creation myth. It is a description of more than one occurrence, daily in this instance, rather than a single scene describing a specific performance. Though Hill believes it is part of the celebration of the Hall's completion,[40] the poet does not specify whether he intended this depiction of daily revelry to be understood as ongoing, routine hall-life, or part of a time-bound festival period in response to Heorot's initial construction specifically. Characterisation is absent, the phrasing is passive, and the song of the *scop* is introduced rather than the *scop* himself. It could be inferred that music or song was of greater significance or symbolic value than the *scop* for the poet at this point. The focus on song and harp sound, rather than those who produced it, reflects the plot's concerns, given the significance of Grendel hearing what happens in the hall. As will be shown, however, the *scop* is introduced differently each time one appears in *Beowulf*.

As well as the lack of individualisation, further fundamentals are uncertain, for example the number of performances being described and what the *scop* is specifically supposed to have done, or indeed whether there was more than one performer. The poet blurs any potential distinction between instrumental music, singing and myth-telling performance, compounding the lack of interpretability. This lack of clarity is exacerbated by the fact that it is unclear whether the same performances take place daily. Whether or not they are seen as uniform, it is not necessary to assume that the

[40] Hill, 2002, p. 311.

hearpan sweg, *swutol sang scopes*, and the story of creation are intended to be a single performance by an individual performer, as Opland has pointed out.[41] Graham D. Caie asserts that 'the harp and poetry are inextricably linked' at this point, yet the poet might not have envisioned the *scop*'s song to have been accompanied by the harp sound, though their proximity suggests that he did wish to imply at least some kind of association between harp and song.[42] Rather than the first two elements (89b, 90a) being variation referring to the same performance, it is instead likely to be parallelism.[43] The poet's intentions concerning any possible links between harp playing and vocal performance are thus unclear. Moreover, neither harp nor song necessarily had any connection with the performance of the creation myth, other than that all the artistry took place within Heorot. The reference to the ability and knowledge of the character who told the creation myth is reminiscent of the *þegn*'s representation rather than that of the other two *scopas* in the poem. There is no punctuation in the *Beowulf* manuscript that might point towards a particular reading of the section, except that there is almost certainly a punctus in the manuscript after *dream gehyrde* at the end of line 88, suggesting that the scribe envisioned a distinction between Grendel hearing *dream* from outside and the description of elements that comprise the joy: the events within the hall,[44] though the form '*hludne*' (89) suggests that this interpretation is unlikely. Whether the scribe had a source text informing his punctuation, or he punctuated to reflect his own understanding of the narrative, this would challenge the editorial choices

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[41] Opland, 1980, p. 193.
[42] Caie, p. 113.
[43] Fulk et al. use these half-lines to exemplify parallelism: '[p]arallelism … is generally understood to comprise the apposition of non-synonymous elements, e.g. *sweg* 89b and *sang* 90a, which, though similar in meaning, refer to the sound of the harp and the singer, respectively': Fulk et al., *Beowulf*, 2008, p. cxviii, n. 2. See also Brodeur, p. 40.
[44] Julius Zupitza acknowledges this, and punctuates his facsimile edition to include a punctus in the form of a full stop at the end of 88, and omits the punctuation from 89: *Beowulf: A Facsimile Edition*, EETS, o.s. 245, ed. by Julius Zupitza (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 5.

made by Klaeber/Fulk et al., as quoted above, and by Dobbie in the ASPR, who places a semicolon at the end of 89a and so begins a new clause with 'there was…'[45] These editions place stress upon the performances in isolation, rather than on the juxtaposition of Grendel outside the hall and the performance inside which is arguably the more noteworthy concern at this point.

As well as the problem of interpreting who did what, there is also uncertainty concerning the modes and techniques of delivery, as there is little naturalistic description. Even if it is accepted that the *scop* performed the creation myth, there is no reason to consider *sægde* (90b) and *cwæð* (92a) in the introduction to the myth as verbs referring to anything other than a storytelling performance, with these terms meaning 'said' rather than 'sung'. One can speculate that the poet had his own alliterative line in mind, and an Anglo-Saxon audience may have had knowledge of the expected method of delivery. As with the Sigemund episode, the audience is not made aware of any specific mode or content, as the narrator summarises rather than quotes his performer. This is necessary, because there would have been incongruity between the daily occurrence of the myth-telling and the verbatim account of one particular myth. Although the *Beowulf* poet was a Christian, the biblical Genesis would have been anachronistic. The audience, however, may have assumed this to be the biblical Creation. Alternatively, they may have had another story in mind, taken from a shared stock of communal tales, or may have been aware of non-Christian creation myths, such as those retained in Norse literature, for example.[46] Unfortunately, there are aspects of

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[45] *Beowulf and Judith*, ASPR IV, ed. by E.V.K. Dobbie (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 5.

[46] Norse creation myths are outlined in both the Poetic and Prose Edda: *Vǫluspá*, stanzas 3-20 in Dronke, 1997, pp. 7-24; see also her discussion of the myth, pp. 32-40. In prose, the myths appear in 'Gylfaginning': Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), pp. 7-55 (in trans.: Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. and ed. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Dent, 1987), particularly pp. 9-21). See also Fulk et al., p. 121.

detail and referentiality in the paraphrase of the creation myth that the modern reader cannot comprehend fully.

Though it is likely that the poet intended the creation myth to have been spoken, association of the verb *sang* with the *scop* offers a strong possibility that the poet wished to describe sung performances, undermining a link between singing *scop* and spoken creation myth. Indeed, though Fulk et al. for example suggest both possibilities in their glossary, the *scop* is more likely to be a singer than particularly a poet.[47] That the poet intended to suggest the *scop* sang each day is by no means certain, however. As discussed in Chapter 2, *sang* describes Grendel's wail of defeat, almost certainly not to be taken literally as the delivery of a song. The *sang* is described as *swutol*, 'clear', 'evident', 'manifest', 'distinct', 'open', or 'public', and the *Beowulf* poet uses *sweotol* elsewhere in the poem to refer to that which is on display and bearing significance, for instance when Beowulf exhibits Grendel's arm following his victory in the fight:

Þæt wæs tacen sweotol
syþðan hildedeor hond alegde,
earm ond eaxle - þær wæs eal geador
Grendles grape - under geapne hr(of). (833b-36)

That was a clear sign, after the war-fierce one placed his hand, arm and shoulder - there was all of Grendel's grasp together - under the lofty roof.

It similarly refers at 141 to a *tacen*, 'token', 'sign', of the wrath of Grendel, which leads the warriors to desert the hall. At 90a, therefore, the poet may not have wished to refer to aesthetic characteristics of the performances such as volume or acoustic clarity at all. He may instead have intended them to be clear, audible *evidence* to Grendel of the revelry within the hall. He does however use *hador*, which does not appear to have had the 'manifest' meaning, in a similar manner.[48] Of course, alliteration requirements could

[47] Fulk et al., p. 428.
[48] See below, p. 167.

have led him to use the term; in general, however, *sweotol*'s subtle ambiguity serves to highlight the manifest nature, as well as the clarity and volume, of the performances.

Whatever the poet's intentions concerning the mode of delivery for the myth and the *sang*, and who delivered them, both difficult to determine conclusively, the conceptions generated through phrases such as *hearpan sweg* (89b) and *swutol sang scopes* (90a) function symbolically. They may or may not have been intended as separate events, by different performers, but ultimately this is of little consequence. The purpose of the two phrases is the same: to exemplify joyous and successful society in action through reference to artistic performances within Heorot, which are heard by Grendel. For the purposes of the plot and the initiation of symbolic and referential meaning, the poet does not need to describe the performer, only mention their 'song', or the music of their harp. Whether or not Opland's theory that people defined as *scopas* did not use instruments is historically accurate, the poet builds a collective impression, an image of regular performance among Hrothgar's society of men, through the use of the two phrases, which are associated thematically and through proximity, even if there was no specific intention to describe singing and harping being performed together. Rather than facilitating a detailed description of events, artistry in the form of *scop* 'song', harping and creation myth functions to contrast Danish hall society with the apparent isolation of the exiled Grendel. As this is a description of regular events rather than one specific occasion, the fact that the singing is consistently *swutol* demonstrates the poem's idealising style, and uniformity is this passage's defining characteristic. They are routine daily occurrences, possibly ritual performances relating to the building of the hall. Indeed, there is an overwhelming impression of ritual: a creation myth is thematically associated with hall creation together with routine artistry, if only through proximity.

From just these two passages in *Beowulf* featuring artistry and its performers, the description of the *þegn* (867b-78) and the hall artistry (88-92), it is clear that there are many interpretative cruces raised even by the brief episodes that involve artistic performance in Old English narrative poems. The situation is exacerbated by Fred Robinson's argument that we should be careful when accepting lexicological and lexicographical decisions, and the dictionaries and translations that result from those decisions, as fact.[49] Because of the many unknowns concerning purpose, and the lack of detailed, naturalistic description, the passages are not valuable for the understanding of historical practices, though it is easy to see why they have stirred the critical imagination. It is more fruitful to analyse their literary functions and effects; more assured conclusions are achievable through such interpretation of the relevant material.

In both passages, the poet introduces performers with knowledge of tales from the legendary and historical past. They also have the skill required to perform those tales to others in the community. We learn marginally more concerning the delivery technique of the *þegn* than the *scop*. Rather than devote attention to detailing performers and their technique or mode of delivery, the poet is concerned to emphasise his characters' abilities, and the authority they have to deliver effective performances at particular points in the narrative is evident. However, this is the case for both figures only if it is assumed that the *scop* did perform the creation myth. Indeed, the ability and knowledge of the *scop* is not stressed in any of the passages that refer to him. Unlike *Beowulf*'s principal characters, these performers are not given their own voice; the paraphrases of the tale of Sigemund and the creation myth are full of imagery hinting at

[49] Fred Robinson, 'Lexicography and Literary Criticism: A Caveat', in *Philological Essays in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt*, ed. by James L. Rosier (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 99-110. See also Wyatt and Chambers on the perils of translating: *Beowulf and the Finnsburg Fragment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. xxiv; For a broader consideration of manuscript translation, see Derek Updegraff, 'The Translatability of Manuscript Pages Containing Old English Verse (with an Illustrative Translation of *The Exeter Book*, Folios 98r–101r and 124r–124v)', *TSLL*, 56:1 (2014), 1-41.

being the product of a creative performer, yet both are summarised by the narrator. What the performances consist of exactly, and how they are performed, is unclear; it is also apparently of little consequence to the poet. The passages are introduced and constructed through concise phrasing and statement, a style informed by the requirements of Old English poetics and allusive symbolic intent rather than by the desire for detailed, naturalistic description.

Functionally, the poet uses *þegn* and *scop* as judiciously-positioned literary devices, figures who possess respectively the ability to effectively perform and sing clearly material that comes to constitute narrative elements in the poem: almost certainly the story of Sigemund, and possibly the creation story. The narrator's paraphrase of the stories is enough to indicate that their content resonates with events in Beowulf's life, or symbolises collective origins, prosperity, happiness and community. A contemporary audience could have had further referential understanding of the content and form of such material, and were likely aware of the specific connections and associations with their own cultural history. Ramey argues that *scopas* 'do not merely depict traditionality; they are used continually to activate it';[50] such performers possess the function of engendering artistry, which serves to trigger traditional associations in the imagination of the poem's audience. It also instigates plot events and develops impressions concerning artistry in *Beowulf*'s societies. Early on in the poem, artistry angers Grendel. Then, upon the Geats' arrival at Heorot (484-98), involvement in storytelling is encouraged, and the importance of artistry in Hrothgar's hall is stressed repeatedly from then onwards. It regularly features within Hrothgar's court during periods of success, whether harp playing, recital by an oral poet or singer, or the telling of myth and other stories. A picture thus begins to emerge of the *Beowulf* poet having a general conception of what performances and their content symbolise, or at least what

[50] Ramey, p. 621.

he believes the artistry of fictionalised Scandinavians symbolise, inherited from his cultural forebears: community, harmony, joy.

A *scop* appears twice more in *Beowulf*: first when the Geats, led by Beowulf, arrive at Hrothgar's hall, and second during a gift-giving scene following the defeat of Grendel. At the Geats' arrival, after Hrothgar welcomes them and invites them to sit down and enjoy the hall experience (489-90), the poet introduces a functional servant *þegn* and a performing *scop*:[51]

Þegn nytte beheold,
se þe on handa bær hroden ealowæge,
scencte scir wered. Scop hwilum sang
hador on Heorote. Þær wæs hæleða dream,
duguð unlytel Dena ond Wedera. (494b-98)

A þegn observed his duties, he who bore in his hands an ornamented ale-cup poured out a clear sweet drink. A singer sang clearly at times in Heorot. There was the joy of men, a great host of Danes and Weders.

This passage shares similarities with the earlier instance featuring a *scop*: artistry is again placed specifically within Hrothgar's hall. It too features a brief reference to artistic performance among a wider description of collective society in action, a vision abruptly disturbed and challenged by Unferth, Hrothgar's *þyle*, 'speaker', 'advisor',[52] in the following scene. Such disruption of happiness invites comparison with that initiated by Grendel earlier in the poem. Hill argues that the placement of this instance, before Unferth's interjection,

> strengthens the case for an "instrumental" – that is, more than decorative and merely celebratory – use of harp and recitation in Beowulf … I see no reason to consider the preceding reference to bright singing and warrior joy as merely terminal atmosphere. Here bright song is both the pleasure it is and the drawing out of an unpleasant, powerful onlooker (shades of Grendel?).[53]

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[51] It is unclear whether the *scop* is delivering the performance alluded to by Hrothgar at 489-90 as part of his welcoming invitation, discussed below (p. 206).
[52] For discussion of Unferth as *þyle*, see D.E. Martin Clarke, 'The Office of Thyle in *Beowulf*', *RES*, 12 (1936), 61–66; Ida Masters Hollowell, 'Unferð the Þyle in *Beowulf*', *Studies in Philology*, 73:3 (1976), 239-65. See also Fulk et al., 2008, p. 150.
[53] Hill, 2002, p. 312.

Although the *scop*, ritual formalities and joy are separated from Unferth's interjection by the beginning of a new fitt in the manuscript, undermining Hill's point somewhat, 'joy in the hall' passages featuring artistry are juxtaposed with malevolent forces at work in the narrative, chiefly the monsters and the threat they pose. Society, epitomised by the performance of artistry, is jeopardised by such threats. This juxtaposition figures in other literature that features 'joy in the hall' passages, in Laȝamon's *Brut*, for example, discussed in Chapter 8.

The *scop*'s method of delivery in this passage is also comparable to the earlier instance (90). *Singan*, a verb in this instance, is the key term. Sung delivery was therefore again likely, with the caveats stated earlier concerning the use of descriptive language in poems. Thus, whether or not the *Beowulf* poet intended *scop* to refer to a reciter of poetry, he almost certainly conceived of him as a singer in both instances discussed thus far. Moreover, the description of the *scop*'s singing as *hador*, a term comparable with *swutol*, meaning 'clear' or 'bright' - although it does not appear to have had the 'manifest' meaning, possibly indicating that both *sweotol* and *hador* are likely to mean 'clear' or 'bright' in *Beowulf* - shows further similarity with the *scop* of 90, and exemplifies the routine associations held by the poet concerning artistry: clarity or brightness is significant in his imagining.[54] *Hwilum* (496), used in the *þegn* on horseback passage, as well as in Beowulf's own recollection of artistry in Hrothgar's hall, discussed below (p. 177), indicates that the poet is once again describing not one particular scene of performance, but occasional performances over a period of time, constituting part of the *hæleða dream*, 'joy of men' (497), in the hall. Amodio suggests that the use of *hwilum* indicates that the *scop* 'sings at various times during the course

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[54] See *DOE* [online], 'hador', <https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/> [accessed 11 August 2017].

of the feast, perhaps during lulls in other activities.'[55] This is speculative. However, the acknowledgement of multiplicity is appropriate. The use and recurrence of *hwilum* in the description of artistic performance episodes, in addition to the daily occurrence of harping and the reciting of myths, indicates further that the poet's concern is with general representation rather than specifics.

Despite their similarities, there are also differences in representation between this instance and the *scop* performances that earlier enrage Grendel, undermining the notion that these passages can be seen as equivalent themes, particularly in the stricter oral-formulaic sense as defined by Lord. For example, at 496 the poet's phrasing means that he pointedly introduces the *scop* himself, rather than just his *sang*. Additionally, this passage does not serve to introduce a particular performance of cultural significance such as the creation myth; the narrative remains in the hall and the poet does not digress to provide a paraphrase or summary of a particular tale. Moreover, though there is more than one performance and thus the description could not strictly be classified as a single scene of artistry, the reference in this passage is to one particular occasion, upon the Geats' arrival, rather than to a daily event.

The final appearance of a *scop* in *Beowulf* occurs after the hero has defeated Grendel, in another passage involving artistry within Heorot; *scop* characters in *Beowulf* are thus hall-bound:

> Þær wæs sang ond sweg samod ætgædere
> fore Healfdenes hildewisan,
> gomenwudu greted, gid oft wrecen,[56]
> ðonne Healgamen,[57] Hroþgares *scop*
> æfter medobence mænan scolde
> Finnes eaferan; ða hie se fær begeat,
> hæleð Healf-Dena, Hnæf Scyldinga

[55] Amodio, 2005, p. 196, n. 50.
[56] There is a punctus at the end of 1065 in the manuscript.
[57] Although commonly translated as 'hall-joy', it has been suggested that *healgamen* (1066) is the name of the *scop*. See Harris and Reichl, p. 158; Fulk et al., pp. 180-81. The capitalisation of the term in Fulk et al. reflects this view.

in Freswæle feallan scolde. (1063-70)

There was song and music together before Healfdene's commander. The wood of entertainment was touched, a tale often performed, when, along the mead bench, Hrothgar's storyteller must provide hall-entertainment about Finn's sons; when that sudden attack came upon them, Hnæf of the Scyldings, warrior king of the Danes, must fall in the Frisian slaughter.

Before introducing the *scop*, the poet stresses once more the frequency of performance events in the hall: *gid oft wrecen*, 'tale often performed'. In this instance, however, the way in which the figure of the *scop* is employed differs significantly. Though as with the *scop* instance at 496 the narrator refers to a particular time-bound event containing several performances, one performance is singled out at this point: the tale of the Frisian slaughter. The *scop* is clearly a conduit of historical material here, both for the *Beowulf* poet's purpose in relation to the poem's structure and allusions, and in the Danish hall within the narrative. He is explicitly identified as the figure who tells the tale of the Frisian slaughter, and he functions in the same manner as the *þegn* who clearly relates the story of Sigemund. One other association with the *þegn* episode is that, as Hill points out, the term *mænan*, 'tell of' (1067) is also used in relation to the stories in praise of Beowulf by the mounted Danes (857) and to the lament for Beowulf by his mounted companions at the close of the poem (3172).[58] Hill considers the *Beowulf* poet's diverse use of this term, noting with reference to the tale of the Frisian slaughter and other uses that 'such an utterance is often a complaint, a sorrowful speech in *Beowulf*',[59] but in the horse riding passage 'it is sheer, kinetic joy'.[60] Such wide-ranging application precludes an understanding of the exact nature of this *scop* performance.

The passage bears similarity to the way in which the daily creation myth is introduced, though only if we are to assume that it was performed by the *scop* of line 90. Here, however, there is no doubt that the *scop* tells a specific tale, that of the Frisian

[58] Hill, 2002, p. 312. Concerning *mænan* and its possible objects, see Fulk et al., p. 180.
[59] Hill, 2002, p. 312.
[60] Hill, 2002, p. 312.

slaughter, on one specific occasion following Grendel's defeat. He functions as a device enabling the poet to depart for an extended section of the narrative from the present of the hall. Thornbury describes this passage as 'the only indisputable instance of performed verse in *Beowulf*,'[61] yet there is nothing to suggest that the *scop* is doing anything other than storytelling. Because of the length and complexity of the poet's paraphrase of the Frisian slaughter episode, which takes up ninety lines of the poem, we can be reasonably sure that the poet wished his audience to understand that this *scop* is delivering a relatively long narrative rather than a short poem or lyric song; this is an extended, tragic tale. Otherwise, once again little attention is given to performance technique. The poet does refer to the *scop*'s relationship with Hrothgar his king (1066), and defines his role, which is to entertain those on the mead benches by telling the tale of the Frisian slaughter in the service of his lord. This could suggest that the *Beowulf* poet intended this character to be a court poet-storyteller of the type envisioned by Opland, although poetry is not explicitly stated and, as noted earlier, the earlier *scop* references in *Beowulf* seemingly refer to singers generically. Hrothgar's *scop* appears in the line following the description of the *gomenwudu*, 'wood of entertainment', being *greted*, 'touched', just as mention of the *scop*'s song immediately follows the *hearpan sweg* in the introduction to the creation myth. Although the poet's concern might not have been to either represent reality or stress simultaneity, there is thus a strong indication that the poet imagined harp playing and storytelling performances taking place concurrently or being performed by the same person at this point. The use of *samod ætgædere*, 'with each other', 'together', at 1063 appears to confirm this. Such simultaneity poses another challenge to Opland's view that people described as *scopas* did not play harps and performed unaccompanied, in the *Beowulf* poet's imagination at least.

[61] Thornbury, 2014, p. 18.

Whether or not the *scop* produced one tale only, the story of the Frisian slaughter, depends on the relationship between the general references to artistry (1063, 1065) and the actions of the *scop* (1066 onwards). This in turn rests largely on whether *ðonne* (1066) is translated as 'then' or 'when'. The grammar suggests 'when', and editors such as Klaeber/Fulk et al. and Dobbie support this, placing a comma at the end of 1065.[62] This interpretation associates the two images. Indeed, Fulk et al. declare that it cannot be translated as 'then' in the context of the passage, although no specific reason is given.[63] This could be another instance in which the punctus indicates either the scribe's interpretation or his source text. However, there is a punctus at the end of 1065 between *wrecan* and before *ðonne* in the manuscript, which Julius Zupitza acknowledges in his facsimile edition by inserting a full stop before *ðonne.*[64] Opland also argues that 'then' is the more likely interpretation.[65] 1065-67 could thus be read as two distinct references to performance, the first general and the second concerning the *scop*'s tale in particular, divided by the punctus. They would therefore be separate, at least for the scribe. Opland also considers the possibility that they are separate performances, although his discussion focuses specifically on whether or not the *scop* plays a harp, a matter on which this punctuation crux also rests.[66] My translation would remove the association between *scop* and harp, and support Opland's argument at this point. This interpretation would resolve the inconsistency of having *gid oft wrecen* referring to what appears to be one particular performance of the Finn episode. Even if the harping and telling of tales are intended to be considered as separate from the *scop* telling of Finn, however, their proximity means that they form an individual image of revelry, at the same time enabling the *Beowulf* poet to introduce the events of the

[62] Fulk et al., p. 37; Dobbie, 1953, p. 34.
[63] Fulk et al., p. 180.
[64] Zupitza, 1959, p. 50.
[65] Opland, 1980, p. 196.
[66] Opland, 1976, p. 454.

Frisian slaughter, which the *scop* certainly relates and could even be read as a quotation. Fulk et al. claim that 'many edd. treat the Finnsburg episode as a direct quotation', yet this is not substantiated.[67] Overwhelmingly, translators have not detected direct speech in this section either. Moreover, at this point there is also no punctuation in the manuscript indicating a passage of speech. However, the ambiguous way in which the Finn episode is introduced means that either the narrator or his character could be speaking. There is a reference to the present within the speech: *swa nu gyt deð*, 'as they still do now' (1134), which might have clarified matters, but whether this phrase refers to the narrative present or the *scop*'s present is uncertain. The technique is used at 2859 to refer to the narrator's present: *wolde dom Godes dædum rædan | gumena gehwylcum, swa he nu gen deð*, 'the judgement of God would determine the deeds of every man, as it still does now' (2858-59). 2859 is undoubtedly not within a speech, however, and as a result it is clear that the narrator is communicating to the poem's audience.

Just as there has been a tendency overall to view the performers who appear in Old English literature collectively, as reflections of generic historical figures, so too the poetic figure of the *scop* as depicted in *Beowulf* has been seen as a mono-functional character, represented consistently, indeed formulaically. Opland's table of recurrent words that feature in the Heorot passages (Table 2) aims to exemplify such consistency:[68]

88-91	dream				sang(n)	sweg	hearpan	scopes
496-8	dream				sang(v)			scop
1063-8		gomenwudu healgamen		gid	sang(n)	sweg	(gomenwudu)	scop
1159-61		gamen	gleomannes	gyd gid	asungen(v)	bencsweg		
2105-10		gomenwudu	gleo	gyd			hearpan	
2262-5		gomen	gleobeames				hearpan	
2457-9								

[67] Fulk et al., p. 180.
[68] Opland, 1976, p. 446-47.

3020-4	(gleo)dream	gomen	gleo(dream)			sweg	hearpan

Table 2: Recurring words in passages of artistry in *Beowulf*, according to Opland.[69]

However, there is actually little formulaic in the poet's phrasing, particularly in terms of the chronology of pertinent terms. Opland reordered the words in constructing his table. As a result, the passages appear to bear greater similarity to each other, and seem more formulaic than they actually are. Opland does not argue that these instances constitute a theme in Lord's narrower sense of the term, though such similarity would enable such an argument to be put forward. Word order is actually far more variable. At 88-91, for example, the order is *dream*, *hearpan*, *sweg*, *sang*, *scopes*. Comparable terminology suggests a routine understanding of performers and artistry by the *Beowulf* poet, and could also have initiated corresponding referential meaning in each occurrence. However, the *scop* operates differently in each of his appearances. He is placed within the hall space as an element in a joyous image each time, yet the images' constructions and functions vary. In the first instance, the *swutol sang* of the *scop* is heard daily in Heorot as part of the *dream* that enrages Grendel. In the second, the *scop* appears during one particular occasion, performing in a 'joy in the hall' scene as the Danes welcome the visiting Geats. In the third, the *scop* operates more like the *þegn* on horseback than the *scop* of the previous passages. He is explicitly described as being in the service of Hrothgar, as similarly the *þegn* is described as the king's *þegn*. Also, just as the *þegn* performs the story of Sigemund with which the poet digresses, so the *scop* in the third instance also performs a specific digressive tale, the story of the Frisian slaughter. The three passages also have distinct symbolic functions. The earliest instance suggests the inclusivity of the community within the Danish hall, in contrast with the external, monstrous other in exile; the scene upon the arrival of Beowulf and his band of Geats at

[69] Opland, 1976, p. 449.

the hall forms part of the welcoming formalities; the episode following Grendel's defeat represents celebration, the praise of the hero, and the hall space's return to normality (for the time being). Only loosely could they could be grouped as consistent 'joy in the hall' themes in the oral-formulaic sense, and a phrase such as 'passage containing artistry' aggregates them appropriately, as it does not bear the particular semantic weight carried by 'theme', or the implication concerning the term 'scene' that one particular moment in time is being described.

The connection between these instances lies instead in their symbolism. In these passages and elsewhere in *Beowulf*, as in other Old English poems, associations are repeatedly established between artistry and its performers and concepts of joy, social community and revelry. Rather than being descriptions of particular performances, passages featuring artistry are general allusions. They are components of suggestive images, overall visions of successful society in action. It is this expression of happiness and of the successful society of men that incurs the wrath of Grendel, whose kind live on the margins of human society being, according to the narrator, descendants of the exiled Cain. The visions establish and confirm that Heorot has a successful and prosperous society living within it, or reflect renewed optimism, stressed by the key term *dream* (88, 497), the *Beowulf* poet's use of which is discussed below. The *scop* and his artistry create joy for the Geats and Danes, yet his mere presence can also function to represent joy. This is in part because linguistic and cultural associations are present, developed also by the poet's lexical decisions and narrative construction. Such representative style suits the concise nature of the poetry, because it enables terse description to suggest wider concepts as part of broader cultural allusions, of which an Anglo-Saxon audience were likely aware, through the technique of traditional referentiality.

Gleoman* in *Beowulf

The *scop* disappears after the tale of the Frisian slaughter; he is thus a feature solely of the poem's first third. Subsequent events are largely preoccupied with life outside the hall, and conflict in particular, while the *scop* remains a figure unique to hall society. The only reference to a *gleoman* in *Beowulf* occurs just after the close of the Frisian Slaughter tale, which is thus is framed by references to its performer, called a *scop* before it (1066) and a *gleoman* after its close: [*l*]*eoð wæs asungen,* | *gleomannes gyd*, 'the song was sung, the glee-man's tale' (1159b-60a). However, *gleoman* in *Beowulf* does not refer strictly to a particular performer, but a performance: the delivery of the tale of the Frisian slaughter. The poet uses *gleoman* in variation and for alliteration, and the term thus functions purely as an aspect of poetic style rather than to reveal any additional descriptive detail concerning the role, performance technique or status of the *gied*'s performer.

As to what the *gleoman* produces in *Beowulf*, *gied* has numerous possible interpretations, as discussed in Chapter 2. In this instance, the reference is to a *leoð*, 'tale', which also supplies alliteration, having been *asungen*, 'sung'. All references to the *scop* in *Beowulf* are thus associated with singing, but again with the caveats mentioned earlier concerning poetic application. As noted above, *mænan* is used to describe the delivery before the tale, indicating that it was told, but not necessarily sung. The use of variation at this point undermines any attempt to decipher a specific meaning for the terms in this particular instance. Here, the *Beowulf* poet had no issue with using *gied* in variation of *leoð*; the two are conflated. The fact that *leoð* and *gied* are both used in contexts where they support the requirements of alliteration may suggest that poetic requirements prompted their use. They refer in this instance to a comparatively long and rather tragic narrative tale concerning the Frisian slaughter, a significant event in the Danes' cultural past.

After the *gleomannes gied* of 1160, there is no further reference in *Beowulf* to appointed though unnamed performers identified through the use of one of the six terms listed by Thornbury. Also, the representation of artistry shifts stylistically and functionally. After the defeat of Grendel's mother, Hrothgar urges Beowulf to enjoy himself at a *symbelwynn*, 'pleasure feast' (1782), but no specific mention is made to artistry or its performers. The hero is exhausted following his second encounter (1792-95) and Hrothgar is in contemplative mood, as shown in his 'sermon' speech (1700-84); he too is weary (1791), and the mood is one of relief, that no further hall-companions have been lost, rather than celebration. As the poet turns to Beowulf's return home, and the closure of this period of his life, the conclusion to this section also brings to an end the brief illustrations of artistry in the context of the communal hall. Artistry re-emerges in a different fashion in the latter part of the poem, as will be discussed below.

The Harp in *Beowulf*

Tolkien, referring to the representation of human society in *Beowulf*, describes the illustrative abilities of the poet:

> [a]t the beginning, and during its process, and most of all at the end, we look down as if from a visionary height upon the house of man in the valley of the world. A light starts – lixte se leoma ofer landa fela (the light shines out over many lands) – and there is a sound of music; but the outer darkness and its hostile offspring lie ever in wait for the torches to fail and the voices to cease. Grendel is maddened by the sound of harps.[70]

Present in two episodes previously discussed in this chapter, the early joy in the hall that enrages Grendel and before the tale of the Frisian slaughter, the harp is the symbolic musical instrument of artistry in *Beowulf*, and in Old English poetry more generally. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 2, it is the only instrument that features principally outside a martial context in the narrative poems. Tolkien sees the instrument as a significant component in *Beowulf*'s human world of light, and it regularly symbolises the social

[70] Tolkien, p. 33.

domain in Old English poems generally. Moreover, in the poem, as Tolkien suggests, it represents the existence of society and its successes. The relationship between harp and society in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination is thus comparable with that between performer figures and society.

As Tolkien infers, the harp's *sweg*, 'sound' or 'music', is one of the features that constitutes the *dream* in Heorot that enrages Grendel early in the poem. Subsequently, all references to harps occur within speeches, reflecting a concern to incorporate the harp's symbolism into the domain of men's communications, as a verbal symbol in the poem's cultural world which can also act as referential trigger for its audience. This concern is best exemplified when Beowulf recalls the harp being played at times in Heorot, part of his lengthy homecoming speech to Hygelac, which is discussed in Chapter 5 (p. 212):

Þær wæs gidd ond gleo;   gomela Scilding,
felafricgende   feorran rehte;
hwilum hildedeor   hearpan wynne,
gome(n)wudu grette,   hwilum gyd awræc
soð ond sarlic;   hwilum syllic spell
rehte æfter rihte   rumheort cyning;
hwilum eft ongan   eldo gebunden,
gomel guðwiga   gioguðe cwiðan,
hildestrengo;   hreðer (in)ne weoll
þonne he wintrum frod   worn gemunde.   (2105-14)

There was song and music. An old Scylding, having learnt of many things, told of long ago. Sometimes a brave one struck the joyful harp, the wood of entertainment, at other times he told a tale, true and mournful. Sometimes the great hearted king narrated a strange story correctly, at other times an age-bound old warrior proceeded to lament his youth, his vigour for battle. His heart surged within when he, old in years, recalled many things.

The brief representation of the harp leaves open the possibility that it was envisaged as a communal instrument; specific harpers are not identified, except for this instance. However, as acknowledged by Opland, the chronology and nuances of the passage's events cannot be deduced with certainty, and Fulk et al. argue that '[i]t would be futile to try to determine what exact relation there is between verbal arts (*gidd*) and harp

playing (*gleo*) in this recollected scene.'[71] Moreover, as with the *scop*-harp-creation myth episode, the number and roles of characters being portrayed is unclear, and this ambiguity extends to the actions of the king. Published translations reflect the diverse interpretative possibilities. For example, John R. Clark-Hall has Hrothgar recounting tales but without the use of a harp,[72] while Seamus Heaney claims rather noncommittally that 'the king gave the proper turn to some fantastic tale'.[73] Thornbury considers the possibility that there are separate people performing here, which is suggested in my translation, but she also argues that, given the applications of the descriptive *gomela Scylding* and *hildedeor*, here and elsewhere in the poem, it is more likely to be one person, the king.[74] Other critics, notably Fulk et al., have also felt that Beowulf is describing Hrothgar himself performing with the harp at this point.[75] Whatever the poet's intention, the repetition of the conjunction *hwilum* structurally distinguishes four elements: harping, the telling of tales, the king's stories, and an old warrior lamenting after his youth.

Martin Stevens believes Hrothgar is shown to touch the harp and possibly sing or at least recite tales, and he argues that the king can be considered a *scop* in this passage.[76] This would override the semantic labelling posited by Opland and discussed earlier, which distinguished the roles of *scopas* and *gleomen*. Whether or not Opland's point is valid, could a king be imagined as a *scop*? There is nothing in the Old English tradition to suggest this, and while warrior-poets were common in Old Norse literature, there does not appear to have been king-poets in medieval Scandinavian literature or culture. However, Thornbury's argument that *scop* did not identify a person with a

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[71] Opland, 1980, pp. 199-201; Fulk et al., p. 233.
[72] Clark-Hall, 1950, p. 127.
[73] Heaney, p. 54.
[74] Thornbury, 2014, pp. 18-19.
[75] See Fulk et al., p. 234.
[76] Martin Stevens, 'The Structure of *Beowulf*: From Gold-Hoard to Word-Hoard', *MLQ*, 39:3 (1978), 219-38 (p. 234).

particular role in society leaves the possibility open. The passage does suggest at least that the harper was a brave person (2107). All rests on what a critic means by *scop*, and this is not acknowledged or discussed by Stevens. More than merely being a character that one might categorise as a *scop*, the king participates in a world in which non-artistic characters, who are not given an Old English descriptor relating to artistry such as *scop* or *gleoman*, regularly deliver performances, particularly storytelling performances (considered in Chapter 5). Classifying heroes and kings as something that primarily they are not, i.e. artistic performers, overlooks the fact that artistry is an intrinsic characteristic in the world of *Beowulf*, regardless of prescribed roles. If being referred to as a *scop* had a particular emphasis or resonance in this cultural setting for an early audience, then describing the Geatish king as one would undermine the associations created through the use of the term. He performs, but need not be labelled because of his actions.[77] Old English labels for performers have been applied by critics to other characters in *Beowulf*. For example, Norman Eliason suggests that Unferth is a *scop*.[78] However, the poet does not show an interest in such potentially confusing subtleties concerning roles, and named characters such as Hrothgar and Unferth crucially do not carry the symbolic associations that the poet regularly wishes to make through mention of *scopas*. They do not perform the same function, either as linguistic referents or as poetic representations.

Given the uncertainties concerning the events taking place in Beowulf's recollection, attempts to determine what happens are again less profitable than consideration of poetic technique. The structure at 2107-10 is reminiscent of the distinction implied between different forms of artistry - harping, storytelling, and possibly singing and poetry - elsewhere in *Beowulf*, and also in wisdom poems, being

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[77] Cf. the warrior-poet of Scandinavian literature.
[78] Eliason, 1963, pp. 281-84.

listed, proximate though independent, punctuated in this instance by the anaphoric *hwilum*. The repetition of *hwilum*, used four times in this passage as stated above, gives the impression once more that performance is a regular occurrence in Hrothgar's hall. Moreover, using *hwilum* to create generalised images exemplifies the way in which Beowulf employs the technique of the narrator himself in his storytelling speech, though it could be suggested that the *Beowulf* poet's lack of nuance in characterisation explains his lack of distinction between narration and speech. Beowulf opens his description of the artistry with an authoritative introductory statement, *þær wæs gidd ond gleo* (2105), reminiscent of the phrase introducing performance events in Heorot: *þær wæs sang ond sweg* (1065). The authoritative style of the characteristic 'there was' statement is used commonly in *Beowulf*; Opland notes the repeated use of the phrase in relation to artistry (89, 497, 1063, 2105).[79] It is also used to introduce artistry outside the Old English tradition in Laȝamon's *Brut*, as will be shown in Chapter 8. In Beowulf's description a harp is played at times, possibly by the king but it could be another brave person, presumably a warrior, and storytelling is performed concerning the characters' past, among other subjects. Perhaps singing is too, although this is conjectural; no term such as *sang* is used. Finally, storytelling and the harp feature in close proximity, as they do in the *scop*-creation myth episode and before the tale of the Frisian slaughter.

The primary symbolic utility of this passage is the effect and consequences of wisdom, age and memory; experience and knowledge are associated with artistry, and the ability to perform in particular. Beowulf describes one of the performers, possibly the king, as being *wintrum frod*, 'old in years', having a particular store of knowledge that 'results from the ageing mind properly seasoned', in Corey Zwikstra's

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[79] Opland, 1976, p. 447.

understanding.[80] *Frod* is a frequently used poetic term that only appears once in non-poetic material, as a gloss for *grandeuus*, 'aged'.[81] North notes that Hrothgar himself uses the phrase (1724); in doing so, Hrothgar demonstrates his suitability as a sermoniser to Beowulf.[82] Knowledge is emphasised further when the old Scylding, whether the king or an ageing retainer, is described as *felafricgende*, 'many minded', 'well informed'. Through such language, Beowulf is stressing that not only is the performer that he witnessed in Hrothgar's hall old, he is symbolically old, possessing valuable cultural knowledge and the ability to engage in performance, possibly ritual, representing the (former) glory of his society. Moreover, his ability to perform is inextricable from his age, experience, and possibly his status. The process of ageing in the correct manner thus facilitates the ability to perform and recount, reflecting the abilities of the *scop* and *þegn* stressed earlier in the poem. The overall tone of this passage is one of profound seriousness. Its themes allude to the wisdom accumulated through the passage of time that enables reflection and nostalgia to be elucidated effectively, with accompanying nods to the waning of physical and possibly political power. The presence of the king as performer, possibly the figure ageing and lamenting after his useful strength, is apposite for Beowulf's audience. Death and succession are hinted at here.

Among this sombre reflection concerning the assorted artistry described in this passage, Beowulf reserves any association with joy for the harp, recalling the instrument as being one of the principal pleasurable elements in the life of the hall. At 2107, the phrase *hearpan wynne*, 'harp joy', identifies the positive social function of the instrument, emphasised through variation at 2108a. In addition to joy, the relationship

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[80] Corey J. Zwikstra, '"Wintrum Frod": Frod and the Ageing Mind in Old English Poetry', *Studies in Philology*, 108:2 (2011), 133-64 (p. 134).
[81] In MS Cotton Cleopatra A III.
[82] North, 2008, p. 106.

between performer and instrument is stressed by *gomenwudu grette*, 'touched the wood of entertainment'. As discussed in Chapter 3 (p. 116), the method of using *hearpe* and varying with a poetic compound is also applied in *Christ II*. It is also reminiscent of the reference to touch in relation to the harp in *The Gifts of Men* and *Maxims I*; this formulaic half-line phrasing will be discussed further below. Other than the fact that the harper is also brave (2107), possibly therefore a notable warrior, which undermines the notion that being a harper was seen as an exclusive role for the *Beowulf* poet at least, little can be discerned.

References to the harp in *Beowulf* following the fifty-year transition at 2200 occur in situations where perception of its absence symbolises negative events and portents concerning the Geats' fate. In the latter part of the poem, artistic performance is associated with memory, nostalgia and lament for the loss of aspects of society, including harp sound and the joy of hearing it. The harp takes on an additional symbolic dimension, as an element in the cultural memory of *Beowulf*'s characters. Beowulf's recollection of artistry in Hrothgar's hall on his return to Hygelac, before the fifty-year transition, pre-empt this association between the harp and prosperous society in action later in the poem. This technique of performing recollection is common in Old English poems; it is often through concise mental visions or images generated through memorisation and recollection that the audience glimpses the joys of the hall, illustrated for example by reminiscences in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, discussed below (p. 198 and p. 184, respectively).

The harp appears shortly after the fifty-year transition, when the narrator describes a lament addressed to the earth by a speaker commonly known as The Last Survivor. Following the demise of his people, The Last Survivor reflects that he experiences the sound and joy of the harp no more. He delivers what is likely to be a

spoken address, because just before his lament at 2246b we are told that he *fea worda cwæð*, 'said a few words':

> 'Heald þu nu, hruse,   nu hæleð ne m(o)stan,
> eorla æhte.   Hwæt, hyt ær on ðe
> gode begeaton;   guðdeað fornam,
> (f)eorhbeal(o) frecne   fyra ge(h)wylcne
> leoda minra,   þ(o)n(e) ðe þis [lif] ofgeaf;
> gesawon seledream(as).   Nah hwa sweord wege
> oððe f(orð bere)   fæted wæge,
> dryncfæt deore;   dug(uð) ellor s[c]eoc.
> Sceal se hearda helm   (hyr)stedgolde,
> fætum befeallen;   feormynd swefað,
> þa ðe beadogriman   bywan sceoldon;
> ge swylce seo herepad,   sio æt hilde gebad
> ofer borda gebræc   bite irena,
> brosnað æfter beorne.   Ne mæg byrnan hring
> æfter wigfruman   wide feran,
> hæleðum be healfe.   Næs hearpan wyn,
> gomen gleobeames,   ne god hafoc
> geond sæl swingeð,   ne se swifta mearh
> burhstede beateð.   Bealocwealm hafað
> fela feorhcynna   forð onsended.'   (2247-66)

'Now hold you, earth, what heroes cannot: the possessions of nobles. Listen! Brave men won it at first from you; death in war, horrid carnage, took away every one of my tribe, those who gave up this life; they saw hall joy. I have no one who dons a sword, or brings forth the cup ornamented with gold, the valuable drinking vessel; the noble warriors have departed to another place. Now must the hard helmet, adorned with gold, be deprived of its decorations; they sleep who should adorn the war-masks. The armour too, which stood the stroke of swords in battle, amid the crash of shields, perishes as does the fighter; nor may the ringed mail fare far and wide with the warrior, side by side with mighty men. There is no joy of harp, entertainment with the joy-wood; no good hawk sweeps through the hall, nor does the swift horse pound the courtyard. Violent death has sent forth many of the race of mortals.'

In this passage, the harp is one of three clustered images relating to a site of habitation, along with the hawk sweeping through the hall and the horse in the courtyard. The images serve to close a section concerned with the effect of war, the loss of society's ritual adornments such as the gold-adorned cup, and the accessories of battle: sword, armour, and helmet. The passage is thus reminiscent of the way in which battle and artistry feature proximately in gnomic poems such as *Maxims I* (127-28) and *The Gifts of Men* (51b-52a). Like the possessions buried by the Last Survivor, the joy and sound of the harp were significant, resonant cultural phenomena in the society now extinct. Gold, weaponry and armour have lost their cultural significance, their reason for being

held in possession, as has the harp. The harp is imagined as a communal instrument in this passage, relevant in social circumstances; other people are required. Present, in contrast, is the Last Survivor, and his speech, his lament for the downfall of his society and those companions who *gesawon seledream(as)*, 'saw hall joy(s)'. After estrangement and loss, he is still able to deliver a performance, the only agency left to him in relation to his former society following his burial of the cultural artefacts, just as performance is the only agency left to certain unnamed figures in relation to their lord Beowulf during his funeral. These figures are discussed later in this chapter.

In this passage, the emotional resonance that the harp can embody and create operates symbolically. The instrument represents the life of the hall and its society of men. Details such as delivery and technique, or the harp's physical attributes, are not specified. Notably, given the presence of Germanic round lyres among archaeological finds, the harp itself as buried object, one of the articles of human society, is not mentioned, though the poet may have intended the audience to consider it as one of the *eorla æhte*, 'possessions of noblemen', of 2248a. The discovery of lyres in high-status Anglo-Saxon burials such as Sutton Hoo, Suffolk and Taplow, Buckinghamshire indicate that the instrument, its sound, or the pleasure derived from it, were of importance to the high-ranking noblemen with whom the treasures were buried, whatever the status of those who played the instrument - if harping was indeed a socially distinct role. It is tempting to hypothesise that lyres were included in Anglo-Saxon burials to provide entertainment, joy, good fortune or even a pastime after death, to mitigate against such losses endured in the present life by those like the Last Survivor who have become exiled from or outlived their societies. This in turn offers the possibility that the buried men were harpers.

There is a similar reminiscence of the harp in *The Seafarer*, in which the loss of the instrument itself is lamented rather than its joy or sound. As with the Last Survivor

instance, the harp in *The Seafarer* is also a symbol of society and its pleasures, one of the illustrations of human relationships listed within the context of a rejection of contemplative nostalgia. The seafaring man thinks not of the joys of land-dwelling men, the harp being one of those joys, but of the sea:

> Forþon nis þæs modwlonc mon ofer eorþan,
> ne his gifena þæs god, ne in geoguþe to þæs hwæt,
> ne in his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten to þæs hold,
> þæt he a his sæfore sorge næbbe,
> to hwon hine dryhten gedon wille.
> Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge ne to hringþege,
> ne to wife wyn ne to worulde hyht,
> ne ymbe owiht elles, nefne ymb yða gewealc,
> ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað. (39-47)

For there is no man on earth so confident of temperament, nor so generous of his gifts, nor so bold in his youth, nor so courageous in his deeds, nor his lord so gracious to him, that he never worries about his seafaring, as to what the lord will bring him; he will give no thought to the harp, nor to the receiving of rings, nor to the pleasure of a woman, nor to trust in that which is of this world, nor about anything else, but only about the surging of the waves. And yet he who strives on the sea always has the yearning.

The harp represents the earthly pleasures rejected by the seafaring man, symbolising human society in general. Because, unlike in the Last Survivor's lament and elsewhere in *Beowulf*, the object itself carries the symbolism rather than its sound or joy, an Anglo-Saxon audience evidently did not require the poet to expand on a mere mention of the *hearpe* as object to understand its implied associations, because it embodied them. Inclusion of the harp in a list of society's pleasures from which the seafarer is distanced is otherwise stylistically comparable to the Last Survivor instance; the symbolic associations are the same, although the tone of *The Seafarer* is one of rejection rather than lament.

A contrast between 'joyful' performance in a functioning, if threatened, society, witnessed at earlier points in *Beowulf*, and lamentation after that joy and the loss of society later in the poem, is also apparent in Beowulf's tale of mourning for the loss of a son, delivered when dying following his encounter with the dragon. His speech refers to

Hrethel, the father of his former lord Hygelac, and tells of harp music being heard no more following the death of Herebeald, Hrethel's son and one of Hygelac's brothers:

> Gesyhð sorhcearig on his suna bure
> winsele westne, windge reste,
> reot[g]e berofene; ridend swefað,[83]
> hæleð in hoðman; nis þær hearpan sweg,
> gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu wæron.
>
> Gewiteð þonne on sealman, sorhleoð gæleð
> an æfter anum; þuhte him eall to rum,
> wongas ond wicstede.
> Swa Wedra helm
> æfter Herebealde heortan sorge
> weallinde wæg;... (2455-64a)

With sorrow and care he sees in his son's dwelling the wine-hall desolate, the windswept resting place despoiled of joy; the riders sleep, the champions in the grave; there is not the music of the harp, entertainment in the courts, such as there once was. He goes then into the bed and sings one sorrowful song after another, alone. He thought it all too spacious, the fields and the dwelling. So the protector of the Weders' heart surged with grief and sorrow after Herebeald…

Comparison with the Last Survivor instance reveals significant similarities. The absence of the harp symbolises Herebeald's death, and loss in society, although here the absence of its sound or music is lamented rather than its joyous effects. *Gomen in geardum*, 'entertainment in the courts' (2459a), also alludes to the court space and its positive connotations, and engenders wider parallelism from the symbolism of the harp music. Thus, the *Beowulf* poet uses the harp as object, the harp's music, and the joy that can result from hearing or playing the instrument, in his different allusions to the instrument.

In another comparable instance towards the end of the poem, the music of the harp will no longer awaken the men following the demise of society that a Geatish messenger predicts will occur because of Beowulf's death:

> '… þa sceall brond fretan,
> æled þeccean - nalles eorl wegan

[83] For the possibility that there are references to musical instruments at 2457, see Osborn, 442-46. There is disagreement about *reote*'s meaning especially; see Fulk et al., p. 246. Page argues, not very decisively, that '[r]otta was probably not known in Anglo-Saxon England, save perhaps in restricted circles': 1981, p. 163.

maðđum to gemyndum, ne mægð scyne
habban on healse hringweorðunge,
ac sceal geomormod, golde bereafod
oft nalles æne elland tredan,
nu se herewisa hleahtor alegde,
gamen ond gleodream. Forðon sceall gar wesan
monig morgenceald mundum bewunden,
hæfen on handa, nalles hearpan sweg
wigend weccean, ac se wonna hrefn
fus ofer fægum fela reordian,
earne secgan hu him æt æte speow,
þenden he wið wulf wæl reafode.' (3014b-27)

'…then the flame must consume the fire-thatch - no man shall wear these treasures in remembrance, no woman shall have ring-adornment on her neck, but must, sad-hearted, deprived of gold, often, not once, tread in alien land, now the cohort-leader has put aside laughter pleasure and joy of music. Therefore shall many a spear, in the cold morning, be grasped with fingers, raised in the hands: Harp sound shall not wake the warriors, but the black raven, eager over doomed men, shall recount much, and the eagle will say how he succeeded at eating, whilst he plundered the dead with the wolf.'

This passage closes the messenger's 128 line speech, the second longest in the poem. Understatedly, he refers to Beowulf having 'put aside laughter, pleasure and merriment'. The hero has relinquished the joys of the hall; *gamen*, 'entertainment', and *gleodream*, 'joy of music', are again examples of that which has been lost. There is also a symbolic image created through juxtaposition of the harp sound and the 'beasts of battle' that signify the loss of human life on the battlefield, which is discussed below (p. 194). Moreover, from 3016b-3021a the messenger groups the treasures and the articles of war with pleasure and artistry as symbols of a flourishing society. Indeed, tension between the harp and battle appears repeatedly in *Beowulf*, being mentioned in close proximity, for example in the Last Survivor's speech and in Beowulf's recollection of Hrothgar's hall. Both are recognised as forces that can both reflect and affect the fate of society. War is not considered entirely negatively in the poem; it is acknowledged that success in battle enables society, and its nucleus the hall, together with the harp playing as one of its symbols, to continue. After all, Hrothgar's military success has enabled him to build the ultimate hall in which to host artistic and other entertainments.

The Old Testament contains analogues for such representation of the harp as symbol of loss. In Isaiah, 24, the Vulgate has the following:

> Luxit, et defluxit terra, et infirmata est; defluxit orbis, infirmata est altitudo populi terrae. Et terra infecta est ab habitatoribus suis, quia transgressi sunt leges, mutaverunt jus, dissipaverunt foedus sempiternum. Propter hoc maledictio vorabit terram, et peccabunt habitatores ejus; ideoque insanient cultores ejus, et relinquentur homines pauci. Luxit vindemia, infirmata est vitis, ingemuerunt omnes qui laetabantur corde; cessavit gaudium tympanorum, quievit sonitus laetantium, conticuit dulcedo citharae. Cum cantico non bibent vinum; amara erit potio bibentibus illam. Attrita est civitas vanitatis, clausa est omnis domus, nullo introeunte. Clamor erit super vino in plateis, deserta est omnia laetitia, translatum est gaudium terrae. Relicta est in urbe solitudo, et calamitas opprimet portas. (Verses 4-12)

The earth mourned, and faded away, and is weakened: the world faded away, the height of the people of the earth is weakened. And the earth is infected by the inhabitants thereof: because they have transgressed the laws, they have changed the ordinance, they have broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore shall a curse devour the earth, and the inhabitants thereof shall sin: and therefore they that dwell therein shall be mad, and few men shall be left. The vintage hath mourned, the vine hath languished away, all the merryhearted have sighed. The mirth of timbrels hath ceased, the noise of them that rejoice is ended, the melody of the harp is silent. They shall not drink wine with a song: the drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The city of vanity is broken down, every house is shut up, no man cometh in. There shall be a crying for wine in the streets: all mirth is forsaken: the joy of the earth is gone away. Desolation is left in the city, and calamity shall oppress the gates.[84]

Although the loss of symbols of artistry results from the curse placed on transgressors, and additional instruments are mentioned - timbrels or tambourines - this bears a striking resemblance to the *Beowulf* passages, as well as instances in elegiac lyric poems such as *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*. Moreover, there is an association, reflective of the ‘joy in the hall’ theme, between song and drinking. If this verse was any direct influence on Old English poetry, and no direct influence is assured, then loss imagery in the prophecy of the wrathful destruction of Judah in the Vulgate was transmuted into the imagery of loss of society through war in heroic contexts in Old English poetry. A similar though more concise reference to artistry features in 1

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[84] Douay-Rheims translation, dating from the Renaissance period. Concerning this translation as being most appropriate for understanding Anglo-Saxon biblical interpretation, see Richard Marsden, ‘Wrestling with the Bible’, in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching*, ed. by Paul Cavill (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 69-90 (pp. 83-84).

Maccabees 3:45, which contains the following lament in the style of classical Hebrew poetry:[85]

> Et Jerusalem non habitabatur, sed erat sicut desertum: non erat qui ingrederetur et egrederetur de natis ejus. Et sanctum conculcabatur: et filii alienigenarum erant in arce; ibi erat habitatio gentium: et ablata est voluptas a Jacob, et defecit ibi tibia et cithara.

Now Jerusalem was not inhabited, but was like a desert: there was none of her children that went in or out: and the sanctuary was trodden down: and the children of strangers were in the castle, there was the habitation of the Gentiles: and joy was taken away from Jacob, and the pipe and harp ceased there.

Harps appear regularly in the Bible, almost always among reference to other instruments - the mention of the pipe is not characteristic of Old English poetry, though it is a feature of later references to artistry in English literature - and also singing. The function of musical instruments as tools for Christian praise is regularly and overtly stated, particularly in the *Psalms*. However, as in Old English poems, the instrument's performer is seldom mentioned. Assuming that Christian doctrine figured prominently in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination, it is tempting to conclude that a similar manner of representation is seen in *Beowulf* because of some influence, whether conscious or unconscious, a Christian concept applied to pagan circumstances.

A comparison of the phrases in which the simplex *hearpe* is used in the latter part of *Beowulf* reveals formulaic similarities, though only within the span of the half-line, in which the poet links the instrument with a term referring to either 'joy' or 'song', 'music', 'sound':

> hearpan wynne (2107b)
> næs hearpan wyn (2262b)
> nis þær hearpan sweg (2458b)
> nalles hearpan sweg (3023b)

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[85] The observation concerning the poetic nature of this verse is noted in many bible commentaries, but see John R. Bartlett, *The First and Second Books of the Maccabees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 45.

Thus, even when a compound is not used, sound and joy are associated with the harp as physical object in these instances through the construction of the b half-line. Regardless how aware the poet was of these similarities, such phrasing appears to be embedded in the *Beowulf* poet's conceptions. That such concepts are linked in the poet's mind is further evidenced by the similar *þær wæs hearpan sweg* (89), also a b half-line, in which the presence of harp song represents the success of Danish society. Robert Boenig believes this earliest reference to the instrument to be 'a material sign for Hrothgar's agenda of political conquest and the transforming of chaos into order.'[86] This is a stirring view; there is signification, and artistry represents Hrothgar's success, particularly if it is seen to be celebrating the building of Heorot, indicative of his superior power. Strictly speaking, however, the *Beowulf* poet does not focus on the instrument itself, but its music. Perhaps Boenig meant that the music was the material sign, but non-materiality is a feature of the phrasing at this point, as well as in the other half-lines listed above. Whereas, as indicated earlier, in *Maxims I* and *The Seafarer* the harp as object is stressed, in *Beowulf* the references are often to non-physical elements when the *hearpe* simplex is used: the sound and joy that result from playing the instrument. A string of referents is thus generated in which role and ability enable the sound and the resultant joy, reflecting simultaneously the prosperity of Hrothgar's hall society.

Boenig elsewhere attempts to extract evidence from Old English poetry as part of an attempt to gather organological evidence concerning harps in the Anglo-Saxon period.[87] In doing so, he acknowledges the limitations of such an attempt, and stresses the symbolic purpose that the instrument has, suggesting that 'the *Beowulf* poet is more

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[86] Robert Boenig, 'Musical Instruments as Iconographical Artefacts' in *Material Culture and Cultural Materialisms*, ed. by Curtis Perry, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), pp. 1-15 (p. 15).
[87] Boenig, 1996, pp. 290-91.

interested in metaphorical than literal harps'.[88] In a later work he later pursues this point: '[f]or the *Beowulf* poet … the hyperreality of the instruments is … more important than their reality. Why else would Grendel attack immediately after the poet describes the *scop*'s performance?'[89] Overall, Boenig's focus is on cause and effect, the order of events, and the meanings created by that order. Whilst the symbolic associations that he hints at are present, the *Beowulf* poet is arguably not interested in representing harps or lyres as musical instruments, whether material or immaterial, in this initial instance. If anything, he is instead interested in harp sound, and more importantly what it serves to represent and instigate: the prosperous hall and the wrath of Grendel respectively.

We do get a sense of the harp's materiality when the *Beowulf* poet employs poetic compound terms. He twice uses the term *gomenwudu*, 'joy-' or 'entertainment-wood', which is unique to *Beowulf*, although other compounds associating the same concepts, such as *gleobeam*, are present elsewhere in the corpus as well as in *Beowulf*. Examples of what Clemoes envisions as 'units of binary thinking' and symbolic construction,[90] they are expanded in the half-line to include reference to playing the instrument, and in the long line the product of performance is indicated:

> gomenwudu greted, gid oft wrecen (1065)
> gome(n)wudu[91] grette, hwilum gyd awræc (2108)

The half-line thus forms a unit that enables the construction of a relationship between instrument and the act of performance, just as *hearpan sweg* and *hearpan wynne* enable a link between instrument and product or effect. Doubtless the requirements of alliteration inform the poet in both instances. Both times the *gomenwudu* is *greted* 'touched' or 'greeted', and the 'a' half-lines are formulaic phrases that infer the

[88] Boenig, 1996, p. 295.
[89] Boenig, 2001, p. 15. Note the assumed link between harp and *scop* here.
[90] Clemoes, 1995, pp. 127-28; p. 128, n. 12.
[91] The manuscript has the likely erroneous *gomelwudu* at 2108.

successful playing of the instrument. Moreover, the product of this operation is a *gied* in both instances, though only if it is accepted that they refer to the same performances as the harping. This is not necessarily the case, particularly at 2108 where they can be seen as distinguished from the harping by the construction using *hwilum*. The sense in the long line is thus not one of inextricable connection; each half-line can be interpreted as being loosely associated with the other, or as a distinct concept.

Formulaic phrasing combined with use of the compound indicates that the poet's concern is poetic style, technique and referential effect rather than the *gomenwudu* as instrument. He links human action (*grette*) with a symbolic compound for an object that associates materiality (*wudu*) with an emotion or activity for which the object has purpose or function (*gomen*). *Maxims I* contains the similar *hearpan gretan* (170), the notion of touch or address again being linked with the instrument. Such half-lines form a concise cluster of ideas concerning the relationship between musical instruments, human action, and society. As Clemoes puts it, 'the function of human craftsmanship was to render a material's innate potentials operational: wood of a certain sort became *gomenwudu*, "wood for mirth" (*Beowulf* 1065a and probably 2108a), when, made into a lyre, it provided entertainment.'[92] The components of such a compound suggest the relationship between the raw material from which the instrument was made, the human action required to work the material into the desired shape, and the skill needed to provide entertainment with the resultant instrument.

If these compounds are seen as kennings, that the harp is often described using a compound could reflect its symbolism and transcendence. However, kennings may be figurative, but could also be seen as redundant metaphors, inserted simply to meet the requirements of alliteration. This would undermine the argument that they are consciously applied symbols, and the poet would therefore not have intended any

[92] Clemoes, 1995, p. 75.

symbolic meaning; it is already applied in the language. For instance, the harp reflects the pleasures of society in the poems, but then compounds commonly link the instrument with the concept of pleasure regardless of their narrative context. *Gomenwudu* and *gleobeam*, for example, contain their symbolism inherently, within the compound's construction. It seems that signifier and aspects of the signified are inseparable, possibly the consequence of a particular 'active being' present in earlier Anglo-Saxon society. This would undermine the task of teasing out any particular intentions on the part of the poet, who inherited pre-existing linguistic symbolism from his forebears.

However, Clemoes' argument concerning the vitality of these linguistic constructs still applies.[93] Moreover, even if such terms were redundant, the creativity in implementing these linguistic tools enables their successful operation in the narrative. For example, although *gomenwudu* and *gleobeam* are in apposition with the simplex *hearpe* (2107-08 and 2262-63 respectively), the simplex alone is preferred when the loss of the instrument or its music is being lamented, or during ominous circumstances. *Gleobeam* is used in more than one poem, in *Christ* and the *Gifts of Men* as well as in *Beowulf*, and poets may have drawn upon a stock of compounds, symbolic dualisms that were on hand ready to apply. However, an Anglo-Saxon poet could have invented a compound for a particular poem. For instance, the *Beowulf* poet alone uses *gomenwudu* in the extant poetry, as stated earlier, and could have invented it to enable particular associations or a specific desired meaning. Moreover, certain associations pre-existed in the language, regardless how free poets were to invent compounds, but they were also developed in the manipulation of poetic form and narrative. For example, adding the human 'touch' or 'greet' element to the unit creates a symbolic half-line with the potential for powerful referential associations in addition to any literal meaning. As

[93] See above (p. 53).

Clemoes argues, the poet must apply the language effectively, and they are shown to do this in creative ways.[94]

The Performing 'Beasts of Battle'

As well as language being employed creatively and effectively in *Beowulf*, theme is too, as we have seen in 'joy in the hall' instances. In *Beowulf* another traditional early-medieval theme, the 'beasts of battle', is employed in a similar manner to the loss of harp and other joys of the hall, being used to prefigure the Geats' impending fate.[95] Whereas the artistry theme symbolises harmony in society, community, success, and the pleasures of men, and reference to its absence symbolises the loss of such inclusive circumstances, or exile from them, the beasts of battle symbolise loss of life on the battlefield. The unique way in which the *Beowulf* poet implements the theme has long been celebrated. Adrien Bonjour points out that it is the only instance in the corpus in which an actual battle or fight is not described in the narrative at the point of its inclusion.[96] For him, its placement is apposite, as well as its significance as part of the poet's concern to signify fate, and he also notes the juxtaposition with the harp. Bonjour argues:

> [f]or the *Beowulf* scop … to have used [the beasts of battle] … in a prophetic anticipation of the tragic destiny of a whole nation, as a symbol for the ultimate triumph of death, further, to have used it in a moving opposition to the motive of music and the harp as a symbol of life and rejoicings - a motive already applied elsewhere in the poem with rare success as a foil to the powers of darkness - really gives us a measure of his art in turning a highly conventional theme into a thing of arresting beauty and originality.[97]

Amodio also observes that in *Beowulf*, the theme is 'divorced from a martial context and so departs from its traditional template'.[98] Moreover, he states that it

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[94] Clemoes, 1995, p. 117.
[95] The passage is quoted above (p. 186).
[96] Adrien Bonjour, '*Beowulf* and the Beasts of Battle', *PMLA*, 72:4 (1957), 563-73 (pp. 568-69).
[97] Bonjour, 1957, p. 571.
[98] Mark C. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), p. 52.

> retains its affective impact. In signalling the inevitable martial defeat and physical suffering in store for the Geats, the appearance of the carrion animals at the conclusion of *Beowulf* powerfully and economically betokens the awful and tragic destiny that awaits the Geats.[99]

Just as the *hearpe* signifies fate in *Beowulf*, so too do the beasts of battle, society's reflexivity being a preoccupation of the *Beowulf* poet. Yet his departure from the typical template and context in his employment of the 'beasts of battle' theme has other unique features and effects. As E.G. Stanley points out, the poem features the sole instance in the corpus in which the different beasts communicate with one another.[100] The *wonna hrefn*, 'black raven', and the *earne*, 'eagle', recounting their deeds, can be seen as ominous substitutes for the harp that is lost. Such representation, which employs the notion of interaction within the standard analogy of death on the battlefield, is entirely appropriate, in keeping with the *Beowulf* poet's concern to create a world of communication through the medium of storytelling and performance. It is thus additionally appropriate that the 'beasts of battle' passage features within one of the poem's key speeches, that of the Geatish messenger, which is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Dream in *Beowulf*

As noted above, *dream* at line 88 encapsulates the elements that incur the wrath of Grendel, and thus initiates the principal events in *Beowulf*'s earlier phase. The audience is shown how revelry is a common occurrence in Heorot, and a daily performance is mentioned in which a creation myth, presumably a fundamental belief of the society, is communicated. If the translation on p. 159 is accepted, then *dream* at least partly comprises *hearpan sweg*, 'harp music', *swutol sang scopes*, the 'singer's clear/manifest song', and also the performed account of Creation. Moreover, the *dream* is *hlud*, 'loud',

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[99] Amodio, 2004, pp. 52-53.
[100] E.G. Stanley, *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature* (London: Nelson, 1966), p. 109.

loud enough to be *gehyrde*, 'heard' by Grendel (88-89). Adjacent words thus point to an emphasis on clarity or presence and volume as a key element of *dream*'s sense in this instance, rather than delight or joy as mere abstracted emotion; it is the 'noise and reckless mirth' envisioned by von Lindheim.[101] So Grendel hears music in the form of harp song, plus the recitation of poetry and/or storytelling, as well as any other general sounds of joyous revelry. *Dream* in this instance is generally translated in the manner of Fulk et al.: 'gladness', 'delight', 'rejoicing', 'festivity', or similar.[102] Yet its association with the accounts of performances suggests its meaning partly comprises music and poetry as it is used in this instance. The poet presents a vision of social delight, formed partly of vocal and musical performance; it is a vision that the audience shares with Grendel, and to which he reacts with his attacks.

As asserted in Chapter 2, there are no particularly Germanic, or for that matter Christian, elements inherent to *dream* in Old English; Von Lindheim mistook context and compounding for intrinsic meaning. However, there is something fundamental to its semantic range relating to the general experience humans have of belonging to society which is utilised in *Beowulf*. For example, following the image of artistry and the account of creation, *dream* is alluded to again:

> Swa ða drihtguman dreamum lifdon,
> eadiglice, oð ðæt an ongan
> fyrene fre(m)man feond on helle;… (99-101)

So those retainers lived prosperously in joy, until one began to perform evil acts, a fiend from hell…

This subsequent reference to *dream* supports and confirms the image, a final glimpse of success and joy in the hall before a fifteen-line section (100-14) associating the exile of Grendel, the monstrous humanoid, with his apparent ancestor, Cain, the morally monstrous human. These characters are contrasted with prosperous, inclusive human

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[101] See the quote by Lindheim above (p. 83).
[102] Fulk et al., p. 365.

society. Grendel is later described as *dreamum bedæled* on the doorstep of Heorot (721a), and upon his defeat (1275a). *Dreamum bedæled* is typically translated as 'deprived of joys', but he is additionally shown to be deprived of society. A morally judgemental aspect to *dream*'s meaning is emphasised in *Beowulf*, and an association with fate, experience of it or being deprived of it correspond with inclusion or exile respectively. Outside of *Beowulf*, the phrase is also used in the Junius Manuscript poem *Christ and Satan* to refer to the expulsion of the sinful to hell (68, 343), and in *Guthlac*, referring to Guthlac's self-imposed separation from the joys of mankind in order to serve God (740). Although the *Guthlac* example indicates that absence of *dream* is not imagined as being exclusively negative and fated beyond one's control, its presence generally indicates success and belonging. Poetic narrators label certain individuals through the presence or absence of *dream*, and demand in turn the judgement of the poem's audience. Overall, it is clear that Anglo-Saxon poets perceived *dream* to be something integral to communal society, and morally virtuous, as is the artistry from which the *dream* is collectively comprised.

Dream has powerful sensory connotations in *Beowulf*. As well as being heard by Grendel, it has visual suggestiveness, like the lights, the torches of society, which illuminate the world of humans for Tolkien. On his triumphant return home, for example, Beowulf describes the joy he witnessed in Hrothgar's hall to his lord Hygelac:

> Weorod wæs on wynne; ne seah ic widan feorh
> under heofones hwealf healsittendra
> medudream maran. (2014-16a)

The company was in joy. Never in my life have I seen under the vault of heaven greater mead-joy among men sitting in hall.

Dream, and particularly the joy of communal drinking as implied by the compound *medudream*, is a phenomenon experienced by a social group and observable by a subject, Beowulf or Grendel for example, on whom it has profound effects. Beowulf experiences a vision of successful human society in action, and Grendel hears the sound

of that society, its revelry and its performers. The term thus binds the experience of societal being with the entertainment that enriches that experience. Such association figures elsewhere in Old English poetry. In *The Wanderer*, for example, the narrator considers how the exiled man experiences visions and memories of successful society, and *dream* has significant referential effects. The final question posed by one reminiscing character in the *ubi sunt*, 'where are they?', section of the poem is *hwær sindon seledreamas*?, 'Where are the joys of the hall?' (93), reminiscent of the Last Survivor's contemplation in *Beowulf*. The key symbolic unit in the section's climactic question, *seledreamas*, 'hall-joys', associates *dream* - with all of its complex allusions, ephemeral and palpable - with the site of human habitation. The other symbols listed in the *ubi sunt* section are more concrete aspects of community: *mearg*, 'horse', *mago*, 'man', 'warrior', *maþþumgyfa*, 'giver of treasure', and *symbla gesetu*, 'seats of the banquets'. Although the poem concerns wanderers, travellers, the question 'when' might have been more appropriate; where in time? The joys have gone, and have become a feature of the reminiscing character's past. Asking the question 'where?' invites attention to the character's present physical state of exile; can such joys be located again? *Dream* incorporates temporal and spatial tangibility at this point, or at least denotes a yearned for time and space.

Elsewhere in *The Wanderer*, the narrator tells in gnomic fashion that

ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið
þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,
swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard (73-75)

A wise hero must realise how terrible it will be when all the wealth of this world lies waste, as now in various places throughout this middle earth.

He goes on to say:

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

The wine-halls are crumbling, the rulers are lying, deprived of joy, the whole company has fallen, proud near to the wall.

The rulers are certainly deprived of joys at this point. However, as is often seen when *dream* is associated with the monstrous, the exiled and the morally corrupt in *Beowulf*, particularly when Grendel dies, this is also a striking example of poetic understatement. Like Grendel, the rulers are in fact deprived of life. Old English poets associate *dream* not just with pleasure and community, but also with the existence of, and existence within, human society.

Artistry towards the end of *Beowulf*: Anonymous Lament

In *Beowulf*, anonymous characters regularly perform artistry, or are described using terms relating to it, but, like the *þegn* on horseback and King Hrothgar, they are not referred to by a specific descriptor listed by Thornbury, and they do not play a musical instrument. However, they are similarly associated with their society's fate. Moreover, they communicate their perception of that fate. Such characters primarily appear towards the poem's close, when the uncertainties of succession and the threat of neighbouring tribes prey on the minds of members of Geatish society, and performance is an outlet for despair.

The Woman's Lament

At the end of *Beowulf*, as in the episode featuring the Last Survivor, the poet creates conditions for the Geatish people in which the ability to give ritual performances is seemingly all that remains to them. For instance, in a section at which point the manuscript has unfortunately been damaged to the extent that numerous half-lines have been destroyed or are illegible,[103] a woman, possibly Hygd, Hygelac's widow and

[103] The legible text has been refreshed by a later scribe. See Zupitza, 1959, p. 144.

perhaps Beowulf's widow too,[104] mourns Beowulf at his funeral, though her lament additionally relates to the impending decline of her people which may be brought about by his death. The brevity of the description indicates that the poet is more interested in the subject of her performance than her character:

> swylce giomorgyd (Ge)at(isc) meowle
> (æfter Biowulfe b)undenheorde
> (sang)[105] sorgcearig, sæ(id)e (ge)neah(he)
> þæt hio hyre (here)g(eon)gas[106] hearde ond(r)ede,
> wælfylla wo(r)n, (w)erudes egesan,
> hy[n]ðo ond hæf(t)nyd. Heofon rece swealg. (3150-55)

Also a mournful Geatish woman with bound hair sang a sorrowful song of Beowulf, said repeatedly that she sorely dreaded an army invasion/devastation, an abundance of slaughter, terror for the company of men, humiliation and captivity. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

However the passage, with its numerous lacunae, is translated, a performance is depicted characterised by repetition, possibly a ritual and possibly sung, mourning the death of her king and fearing for the fate of her society. Although it is not specifically stated, the mourner's prediction concerning the Geats' fate is presumably to be associated with the death of their heroic leader. The ritualistic nature of the performance, as well as the notion of despair, is emphasised through elaborate use of variation (3154-55a). Overall, it reflects the concerns expressed by Wiglaf and the messenger in their speeches, both of which are discussed in Chapter 5. According to Mustanoja, this woman is archetypal and generic, and the poet had no concern for who she was. His intention was to represent a traditional funeral, with accompanying mourners expected as part of the occasion.[107] Fulk et al. similarly describe her as having a 'socially sanctioned role' as female mourner.[108] Primarily, she is a conduit for the expression of fate, and also functions to relate the poem's narrative with historical

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[104] Despite attempts to name her as Hygd, she is anonymous. See Fulk et al., p. 270.
[105] *Song* has also been suggested: See Fulk et al., p. 107.
[106] Various alternatives to *heregeongas* have been offered, though all suggestions relate to the overall theme of impending fate. See Fulk et al., p. 107.
[107] Tauno F. Mustanoja, 'The Unnamed Woman's Song of Mourning over Beowulf and the Tradition of Ritual Lamentation', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 68:1 (1967), 1-27 (p. 27).
[108] Fulk et al., p. 270.

circumstances, given the Geat's demise in their Swedish homeland. There has been particular debate over her only specified physical characteristic, her hair, because it is unclear from the manuscript whether she is described as *wundenheorde* 'with wavy hair' or *bundenheorde* 'with hair bound up' at 3151b. The latter is generally preferred,[109] but the former might be more appropriate for a modern reader, because the hair could then be seen to symbolise the loss of control in society, in keeping with her figurative status.

Beowulf's mourner is by no means the only female performer in Old English poetry. The narrator of the Exeter Book poem *The Wife's Lament* is a prominent example, and towards the end of *Exodus*, another woman gives voice to similar feelings following conflict:

> Hreðdon hildespelle, siððan hie þam herge wiðforon;
> hofon hereþreatas hlude stefne,
> for þam dædweorce drihten heredon,
> weras wuldres sang; wif on oðrum,
> folcsweota mæst, fyrdleoð golan
> aclum stefnum, eallwundra fela. (574-79)

They made victory by battle-tales, after they went forth in war against that army; the war-bands lifted loud voices, they hallowed the Lord for that deed-work; men sang of glory. Women in another, the greatest of folk-troops, lamented a war-song of many all-wonders in a dismayed voice.

In the context of a victorious encounter, this woman can be seen as a composed presence, who is able to comprehend events and their wider implications, and express them in her performance. Such mourning characters as those in *Beowulf* and *Exodus* embody a society experiencing unfavourable circumstances, and give voice to their circumstances through ritual performance.

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[109] See Fulk et al., p. 270; Dobbie, 1953, p. 97. See also Zupitza, 1959, p. 144.

The Riders' Lament

The Geatish woman and her lament forms part of a series of performances marking the closure of *Beowulf* that stress the correlation between Beowulf's demise and that of his society, in which the performance of fate is shown to be a principal subject of ritual mourning. The poem's final scene features another ritual performance, by twelve mounted retainers encircling Beowulf's barrow:

> Þa ymbe hlæw riodan hildediore,
> æþelinga bearn, ealra twelf(e),
> woldon (care) cwiðan (ond c)yning mænan,
> wordgyd wrecan, ond ymb w(er) sprecan;
> eahtodan eorlscipe ond his ellenweorc
> duguðum demdon - swa hit gede(fe) bið
> þæt mon his winedryhten wordum herge,
> ferhðum freoge, þonne he forð scile
> of l(i)chaman (læ)ded weorðan. (3169-77)

Then around the mound rode the battle-brave, sons of nobles, twelve in all, they wished to bewail their sorrow, to mourn their king, to recite lyrics, and speak about the man; they praised his heroic deeds and his works of courage, exalted his majesty. As it is fitting, that one honours his friend and lord in words, cherish in one's spirit, when he must be led forth from his body.

The language used in this description, particularly *sprecan*, points to spoken elegy. Additionally, as noted in Chapter 1, *wordgyd*, the product of the riders' lament, is often translated 'dirge'. However, this interpretation relies heavily on context and ignores the compounding that would suggest a more neutral sense, for example 'word-tale'. As with the episode featuring the mourning woman at Beowulf's funeral, this passage features substantial variation and parallelism, which can be divided into an initial section lamenting the death of Beowulf and mourning for him up to 3172, followed by a transition at 3173 into a section praising his heroism and skills as a leader. This is an image of a performance in which, through the proliferation of terms such as *cearu*, 'sorrow', *mænan*, 'mourn', 'lament', *eahtodan*, 'praised' and *duguðum deman*, 'judge highly', celebration is woven together with elegy. In comparison with the woman's performance, the riders perform a controlled, heroic elegy for a fallen lord, fitting for the poem's close; they do not speculate or express any fears they might have concerning

the future. Indeed, the style towards the end of this passage is gnomic; the riders are doing what they should do in such circumstances, and they embody general expectations concerning cultural behaviour.

Comparable scenes depicting the collective performance of mourning are found elsewhere in Old English poetry. The passage from *Exodus* has already shown a group of men singing *wuldres*, 'of glory'. Elsewhere, in *The Dream of the Rood*, Jesus's followers sing or cry a tale of mourning for him:

> Ongunnon him þa sorhleoð galan
> earme on þa æfentide, þa hie woldon eft sīðian,
> meðe fram þam mæran þeodne. Reste he ðær mæte weorode. (67b-69)

The wretched then began to cry a tale of sorrow in the evening-time, then they wanted to go again, wearily from the glorious prince. He rested there with little company.

The principal verb relating to the followers' performance, *galan*, 'to cry', at 67, appears twice in *Beowulf*, although it is unrelated to artistry in both instances: once to describe Grendel's anguished cry during his fight with Beowulf (786), and later to describe the sound of a war horn (1432). In *Beowulf* there is an urgent, dramatic aspect to the term. The *Beowulf* poet also uses the third person form of *galan* in the half-line *sorhleoð gæleð* (2460), otherwise equivalent to the phrase in 67b of the *Dream of the Rood*, during Beowulf's dying speech when he tells of Hrethel's mourning for Herebeald, discussed above, p. 186. The compound *sorhleoð* associates sorrow with the performance of a tale or song, as does *sorhword*, used in *Genesis* (789) to describe the dialogue between Adam and Eve following their expulsion from Eden. Performances such as the ones represented in *The Dream of the Rood* and at Beowulf's funeral should be categorised as laments rather than poems. Although it is not universally applicable, overwhelmingly the verbs used in their representation are distinct from those used to describe artistry in positive circumstances. In *Beowulf* they are used to reflect on the heroism of the poem's principal character, and relate his actions and the implications of his life and death to the poem's cultural setting. The voices of minor characters offer a

perspective on the moral universe presented in the poem, represented in relation to the machinations of fate. Their words are bound up with Beowulf's deeds.

This chapter has demonstrated that the most significant source of information concerning artistry in the Anglo-Saxon poetic imagination is also the most diverse. From archetypal *scop* figures to the characters without identifiers relating to artistry who nevertheless perform, a culture of performance is depicted in *Beowulf*. Though they are commonly brief, what might be seen as uniform scenes of performance activity, particularly in the hall, each in fact have differing purposes and functions. The glimpses we get of artistry in *Beowulf* mirror the brief allusions in non-narrative poetry, with the *hearpe*, for example, being a positive social symbol. The difference is that these allusions interrelate with the long poem's narrative and structural concerns. Indeed, in *Beowulf*, Old English poetic themes are utilised in unique ways, notably for example in the way in which the beasts of battle 'perform'. Moreover, artistry's function shifts as the poem progresses; symbolising the social cohesion of the Geats and Danes in the first third, it becomes a sign of loss after the fifty-year jump. These brief, associative allusions to the culture of performance, including musical activity and the performance of song and poetry, are overshadowed, however, by the principal mode of artistry in *Beowulf*, storytelling.

Chapter 5 - Storytelling as Performance in *Beowulf*

Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl maintain that 'all successful communications in *Beowulf* are oral, and the many formal speeches, boasts, flytings, and so on might, in real life, have been "performances" by modern standards.'[1] Taking this view, while avoiding the consideration of any possible relationship between the poetry and 'real life', I consider that among such communications the principal mode in *Beowulf* is storytelling. It is the type of performance represented most comprehensively in the poem, and the only one indisputably performed by named, principal characters. Whereas other performance acts represented in *Beowulf* may not be poetry, storytelling's mode is clear. It occurs within speeches, and like all of the poem's speech it is thus demonstrably and necessarily, if fictively, executed in the form of poetry, in the Germanic alliterative long line. Storytelling's primacy results partly from the fact that it is suited to the poem's psychological focus. Michael Lapidge argues that '*Beowulf* is very much taken up with reflection – on human activity and conduct, on the transience of human life', and that '[a] central concern of the *Beowulf* poet … is with human perception of the external world and with the workings of the human mind'.[2] Storytelling is the most prevalent and detailed expression of this reflection and perception. This chapter explores the representation of storytelling in the poem, arguing that speech acts by certain characters - often, though not always, named protagonists - regularly perform a function similar to that of the unnamed, generic artistic figures discussed in Chapter 4. That is, they are, among other things, tools enabling the poet to weave digressive historical or legendary

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[1] Harris and Reichl, p. 158.
[2] Michael Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period*, ed. by Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michican University Medieval Institute, 1993), pp. 373-402 (p. 374).

material, as well as matter related to the poem's events, into the narrative, and they also serve to comment on cultural events. They are also usefully seen as exemplars of the poet's rhetorical creativity.

The prominence of storytelling in the poem is illustrated from the moment at which Beowulf and his band of Geats arrive at Heorot. At 489-90, Hrothgar encourages Beowulf: *site nu to symle ond onsæl meoto, | sigehreð secgum, swa þin sefa hwette*, 'sit now at the banquet and disclose your thoughts to men, glory of victory, as your mind encourages you'. Unfortunately, a conclusive reading of these lines has not been agreed upon, as evinced by the various attempts at translating them.[3] Clark-Hall has specified that Beowulf is being asked to listen to Danish storytellers.[4] Yet it has also been translated as an instruction for either the Geats, or Beowulf in particular, to tell of their own deeds, either impending or from their past.[5] Some translators commit themselves to stressing that Hrothgar is asking for Beowulf to tell of how he intends to rid Heorot of its invader,[6] though others are less explicit.[7] The poem's referential and interperformative character might have indicated to a contemporary audience the type of stories being proposed by Hrothgar at this point. The tale of the Frisian slaughter and the deeds of Sigemund, related elsewhere in the poem, can be seen as examples of the typical subject matter of performances. They are the type of stories – historical or legendary, heroic, and relevant to collective cultural memory - that Hrothgar might wish

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[3] See Fulk et al., p. 147.

[4] Clark-Hall, 1950, p. 45: 'sit now at the banquet and in due season listen to the victorious deeds of heroes, as inclination moves thee'; Heaney, p. 17: 'Now take your place at the table, relish | the triumph of heroes to your hearts content'

[5] For example, Fulk et al. translate 489b-90a as 'disclose your thoughts, glory of victory, to these men': Fulk et al., p. 147.

[6] For example, Bradley, p. 424: 'Now, sit down to the feast and unfold to the men what you are deliberating, a glorious victory, as your spirit prompts you'; Dick Ringler, *Beowulf: A New Translation* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), p. 28: 'Now sit at the banquet | and say what you think | tell us how you hope | to triumph over Grendel.'

[7] For example, Heaney's translation quoted above, n. 3; Kevin Crossley-Holland, *Beowulf: A Verse Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 17: 'But first, sit down at our feast, and in due course, | as your inclination takes you, tell how warriors | have achieved greatness'.

the visiting Geats to deliver or to experience. Although heroic deeds are clearly the subject matter of choice for Hrothgar, lines 489-90 are otherwise ambiguous. Yet, however they are translated, they provide an impression of a culture of storytelling, shown either to be a part of hall life or expected of guests. Because a *scop* is introduced shortly afterwards, at 496, it could be inferred that Hrothgar is inviting Beowulf, with his band of Geats, to hear him perform. This reference to the *scop* has been discussed in Chapter 4. From this point onwards, storytelling is fundamental to the social world created in *Beowulf*, particularly concerning the interrelationships that figure in the society of Hrothgar's hall and the need for expression concerning the Geats' fate later in the poem.

The distinction between storytelling and other kinds of speech act is not always clear in *Beowulf*; many speeches feature communication of events briefly, among other concerns. However, of the thirty-nine speeches in *Beowulf* identified by Robert E. Bjork,[8] all or part of eleven of them have enough pertinent content to be defined as storytelling performances. That is, a character tells of historical or legendary events, which could be recollections, predictions or imaginings, in the course of a relatively extended speech act, and the poet appears to have given the character a storytelling function intentionally.

Lines	**Addresser**	**Addressee**	**Length of speech (lines)**
407-55	Beowulf	Hrothgar	49
457-90	Hrothgar	Beowulf	34
506-28	Unferth	Beowulf	23
530-606	Beowulf	Unferth	77
958-79	Beowulf	Hrothgar	22
1322-82	Hrothgar	Beowulf plus an additional general sense	61
1652-76	Beowulf	Hrothgar	25

[8] Robert E. Bjork, 'Speech as Gift in Beowulf', *Speculum*, 69:4 (1994), 993–1022 (pp. 1017-18).

1700-84	Hrothgar	Beowulf after a general introduction	85
2000-151	Beowulf	Hygelac	152
2426-509	Beowulf	His retainers	84
2900a-3027	Geatish messenger	Warriors	128

Table 3: Storytelling speech acts in *Beowulf*.[9]

Somewhat inevitably, storytelling is typically a feature of the poem's longer speeches, although it is present in three speeches that are twenty-five lines or less. The length of the storytelling element in each speech is not always discernible because of the poem's style; where storytelling begins and ends is open to interpretation. Also symptomatic of the poem's allusive style, the speech act of a character and the narrator's voice is often not clearly distinguished, and Bjork argues that speeches become increasingly indiscernible from the narrator's voice as the poem progresses.[10] Whilst this could be seen as a weakness in the poet's character-voicing skills, I assume that the characterisation in each speech is intentional and should be considered on its own terms, as a discrete performance act.

Fittingly, the earliest storytelling performance in the poem is Beowulf's address to Hrothgar on his arrival at the Danish court (407-55). The address chiefly concerns Beowulf himself, acting as a formal introduction of the poem's hero to Hrothgar and his company. Before the speech, the poet ceremonially anticipates its formality with two images: initially, he alludes to Beowulf's physical location: *he on heorðe gestod* 'he stood on the hearth' (404), and then describes his skilfully wrought, shining battle dress (405b-06). Line 404 is one of only three references to an artistic performer's location in their performance space in Anglo-Saxon poetry, the others being the *þegn* on horseback and the harper sitting at the feet of a lord in the *Fortunes of Men*, the latter being a

[9] Table adapted from Bjork, pp. 1017-18.
[10] Bjork, p. 999; pp. 1008-09.

general figure rather than a particular individual. Unfortunately, the *heorð* location is not specified. As Beowulf would not have stood *in* the hearth, the poet presumably envisioned him to have been close to it, perhaps at a central location in the room; the hearth is understood to have occupied a central position in larger halls.[11] Terms such as *heorðgeneatas*, 'hearth companions', 'those who sit at the hearth', used five times in *Beowulf* (261, 1580, 2180, 2418, 3179), and in *The Battle of Maldon* (204), which also features the synonymous *heorðwerod* (24), suggest that the hearth represents an important symbolic social space in the hall. The effect is thus to demonstrate the significance of Beowulf's position upon delivery of his speech, near to a significant feature of the hall space. In mentioning Beowulf's battle dress at lines 405b-06, the poet disrupts the usual introductory formula: *Beowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþeowes*, 'Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow', which appears seven times in the poem, instead using *Beowulf maþelode on him byrne scan | searonet seowed smiþes orþancum*, 'Beowulf spoke; on him the byrnie shone, a net of armour sewn by smith's skill'. This introduction is unique; no other speech in *Beowulf* is prefaced with such descriptive detail. Niles believes that the byrnie is 'deictic', in the sense that reference to it forms 'an exclamation point signifying the importance of what is about to be said',[12] 'iconic', serving 'as an index of certain abstract qualities, as an emblem of worth in particular',

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[11] See, for example, the reconstruction of the excavated ninth- to tenth-century Anglo-Saxon hall at Cheddar in Somerset: Eric Fernie, *The Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1983), p. 20. Although hearths in other halls appear to occupy the same central position, at Yeavering and in three out of four buildings at West Stow for example, one hall at Goltho in Lincolnshire had a hearth at one end; see H. Hamerow, 'Timber Buildings and their Social Context', in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. by Helena Hamerow, David A. Hinton and Sally Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 128-55 (pp. 138-43).

[12] John D. Niles, 'Sign and Psyche in Old English Poetry', *American Journal of Semiotics*, 9:4 (1992), 11-25 (p. 13).

and has 'metaphoric significance';[13] moreover, it has 'symbolic significance, in that it shines.'[14] Niles says, in summary, that

> [t]he hero's shining byrnie … is one of a number of indices that mark him out as a culture hero in a context wherein "culture" is literally radiant and above all denotes great buildings, the precious objects that circulate there, and the ceremonious speeches and songs that are the chief forms of interaction of a warrior class.[15]

Significant aspects of heroic/Germanic culture: hall space, noteworthy armour, and creative verbal ability coalesce at this point. The stylistic formality continues into the ceremonious first half-line of the speech. According to Fulk et al., 407a: [*w*]*æs þu, Hroðgar, hal!*, 'hail to you, Hrothgar!', is 'a common Germanic form of salutation'.[16] It is also used in *Andreas* at 914: *Wæs ðu, Andreas, hal*, and also as a ritual address in *Metrical Charms 1* (69) and *4* (28). It also echoed in Laȝamon's *Brut* (7141): *Lauerd king wæs hæil*.[17]

Following a boast about his strength, and his renown for that strength among his people, the storytelling element of Beowulf's speech is initiated at 419. From then until 424a he relates previous heroic endeavours battling giants and sea monsters. Then, having provided evidence of his credentials, he turns to his awareness of the situation concerning Grendel and his intention to resolve the trouble. This section (424b-51) includes much speculation, and he deliberates on his own fate and that of his troop. In the final line of the speech, 455, Beowulf discloses his familiarity with Germanic myth, describing his byrnie as *Welandes geweorc*, 'Wayland's work', expressing his awareness of his armour's quality and cultural significance. The byrnie thus frames his speech performance. He completes this final line with a gnomic statement (noted above,

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[13] Niles, 1992, p. 14.
[14] Niles, 1992, p. 15.
[15] Niles, 1992, pp. 15-16.
[16] Fulk et al., p. 141.
[17] Laȝamon takes this address by Rouwenne from Wace's *Roman De Brut*. The phrase is not understood by the British King, Vortigern, and must be explained by the wise man Keredic, who describes it as a customary Saxony greeting involving drink along with formal words.

p. 143) which reveals his attitude to the forthcoming possibilities following his decision to battle Grendel, and simultaneously demonstrates his understanding and acceptance of the workings of fate more generally: *gaeð a wyrd swa hio scel*, 'fate goes ever as it must'. Beowulf's speech thus shows him to be a man aware of his own abilities and keen to speculate, yet at the same time focused on wisdom and judgement. He understands and accepts that what is to be will be.

Appropriately, Hrothgar replies with a storytelling performance of his own (457-90). Demonstrating his own awareness of cultural history and his importance as a key protagonist within it, he initially describes his previous relationship with Ecgtheow, Beowulf's father, and recounts a feud started by Ecgtheow involving the Wylfing people and Hrothgar's own Danes. Then he too turns to focus on the present tribulations concerning Grendel (473-88). The speech concludes with his formal invitation for Beowulf to settle down in the court and hear, or tell, of heroic deeds. As in Beowulf's opening speech, Hrothgar's reply demonstrates self-consciousness; he is recollecting his own experiences and circumstances. Moreover, he too demonstrates his awareness of the influence of fate, admitting that *wyrd* is influencing his rule:

is min fletwerod,
wígheap gewanod; hie wyrd forsweop
on Grendles gryre. God eaþe mæg
þone dolscaðan dæda getwæfan! (476b-79)

My hall-troop, my band of warriors, is lessened. They have been swept away by fate in Grendel's terror. God can easily put an end to the wicked ravager's deeds!

Hrothgar is aware that, if He chooses to, God can lead Beowulf to victory. This balanced interchange between Beowulf and Hrothgar introduces the two most significant human characters of the first part of the poem formally to each other. It reveals their awareness of the conventions expected of them as heroic troop leader and king respectively, facilitates the welcome of the Geatish band, and endorses the social

bond between the two peoples who will be present during Beowulf's encounter with Grendel, even if they are ordered not to assist physically in the fight.

At 2000-2151, upon his return home to Geatland, Beowulf delivers *Beowulf*'s most significant, dynamic, and rhetorically gymnastic storytelling speech act. At 152 lines, it is also the poem's longest. The speech is positioned at the heart of the poem's bipartite temporal structure, following the events in Denmark and before the fifty-year jump to the latter phase during which time Beowulf is king of the Geats. Bjork notes that it occurs 'on the threshold between his victories over Grendel and Grendel's mother and his own kingship'.[18] The principal mode of this key speech is storytelling, and upon its close the narrator refers to it as a *gied* (2154), associating it with other creative performances in the poem. Indeed, comparisons have been made between the speech, particularly 2024b-69a, and the tale of the Frisian slaughter.[19] The rhetorical and stylistic elements of this speech have been discussed extensively. Seth Lerer describes it as 'a social performance full of pun and wordplay'[20] and asserts that 'Beowulf becomes an entertainer here'.[21] Lerer argues elsewhere that the 'pace, allusiveness, and verbal play' of the speech forms 'a characteristically Scandinavian verbal act'[22] with Eddic and skaldic features, showing 'familiarity with Eddic tales of Thor and his escape from Skrymir's glove' and also 'a certain courtly sensitivity to puns and wordplay and to the self-consciousness of poetic telling'.[23] Brodeur, meanwhile, considers the personal, behavioural characteristics indicated by the speech and its context, stating that

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[18] Bjork, p. 1013.
[19] For example, Earl R. Anderson, 'Formulaic Typescene Survival; Finn, Ingeld, and the *Nibelungenleid*', *English Studies*, 61:4 (1980), 293-301. Anderson believes they are comparable type-scenes, which he defines as 'tragic court flyting' (p. 293). He also categorises 'music and joy in the hall' as one of the principal themes of Old English poetry (p. 293).
[20] Lerer, 1991, p. 27.
[21] Lerer, 1991, p. 27.
[22] Seth Lerer, 'Grendel's Glove', *ELH*, 61:4 (1994), 721-51 (p. 736).
[23] Lerer, 1994, p. 737. Scandinavian influence can be seen in the phrasing as well as plot and style; Fulk et al. observe that the phrase *uncer Grendles* (2002) is 'an instance of the archaic "elliptic dual" construction common in Old Icelandic': 2008, p. 228.

> [i]n this whole scene the admirable qualities of Beowulf are directly and dramatically presented: first through his own words to Hygelac, and through his demonstration of his love and loyalty in his gift to Hygelac of the rewards received from Hrothgar.[24]

Moreover, Alistair Campbell sees in this account evidence of influence from Virgil, because of the infrequency of the apologue in epic verse.[25] Concerning Beowulf's narratives about himself, Campbell observes that '[t]he *Beowulf* poet stands practically alone in using the Homeric-Virgilian device of an inserted narrative in its original structural function'.[26] The purpose of these inclusions, for Campbell, is not purely to introduce plot elements, but 'to illuminate the character and background of their heroes.'[27]

Addressing his lord Hygelac, Beowulf initially summarises his victory over Grendel in Denmark over the first ten lines (2000-2009a). Then a more detailed description of his arrival at Heorot with his band of Geats and the formalities and merriment in the hall is provided (2009b-2024a), incorporating information not previously revealed by the narrator. For example, he describes the distribution of a ritual cup by Freawaru, the King's daughter, who, we now discover, performed the task in addition to her mother Wealtheow. Having introduced Freawaru, he then digresses to consider the possible effects of her betrothal to Ingeld, a marriage intended to be part of a peace accord between the Danes and the Heathobards (2024b-2069a).[28] Although this can be understood as a prophecy, Brodeur argues that 'Beowulf is not predicting, but merely expressing his opinion of the probable outcome.'[29] Wisdom and understanding

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[24] Brodeur, p. 180.
[25] Campbell, 1971a.
[26] Campbell, 1971a, p. 284.
[27] Campbell, 1971a, p. 283.
[28] Fulk et al. refer to this part of the speech as 'the Ingeld or Heaðobard Episode', and following Klaeber note its similarity to the tale as told by Saxo Grammaticus. They also provide an overview of commentary on this section: Fulk et al., pp. 229-30.
[29] Brodeur, p. 178. Brodeur discusses the poet's skill in constructing the Ingeld or Heathobard Episode, pp. 177-81. See also Fulk et al., pp. 229-30.

relating to the ties of marriage and troop loyalty are shown to be one of Beowulf's diplomatic sensitivities at this point, because of the way in which he focuses on these themes in the opening and closure to this section of his speech. Ruminating in increasing detail concerning the doomed peace between the two tribes, Beowulf recounts the hypothetical speech (2047-2056) of an *eald æscwiga* 'old spear warrior' (2042), before concluding the digression more generally, describing the ultimate collapse of both marriage and peace (2057-2069a).

In the subsequent phase of the speech, Beowulf returns to his own exploits at Hrothgar's hall via a self-conscious link: [*i*]*c sceal forð sprecan* | *gen ymbe Grendel*, 'I shall speak further, more about Grendel' (2069b-2070a). His account of the fight with the monster (2072b-2100) also gives the poem's audience additional information to that provided earlier in the narrative. For example, Beowulf reveals the name of the warrior eaten by Grendel before the fight (739-45a) to be Hondscio (2076). As Sisam suggests, this naming reflects the poet's wish to emphasise that Beowulf is in the Geatish court at this point.[30] It is necessary, because Hondscio would have been known to Hygelac, so for Beowulf to refer to him generically, as 'a warrior' or similar, would not have been sufficient. Similarly, elsewhere in the poem, Æschere is also unnamed in the initial narrative description of his death at the hands of Grendel's mother (1294-95), only being named by Hrothgar when telling Beowulf what has happened (1322-24). Another new piece of information offered by Beowulf has less justification but instead highlights Beowulf's storytelling prowess. This concerns Grendel's *glof*, 'glove', *eall gegyrwed deofles cræftum ond dracan fellum*, 'all made of devil's skill and dragon skin' (2087b-88), a device into which Grendel would like to have placed his victims' bodies. Fulk et al. do not see the earlier omission of this information as a fault in the work. They believe that this new information 'evidences narrative embellishment rather than

[30] Kenneth Sisam, *The Structure of* Beowulf (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 47.

inconsistency'.[31] Because the name Hondscio means 'hand-shoe', i.e. a glove, there has been speculation that the poet intended some kind of association between pouch and warrior,[32] though it is unclear what, in particular, other than the semantic relationship.

This leads Beowulf to the section that has been discussed earlier describing the entertainment at court following the defeat of Grendel and the possible description of Hrothgar as artistic performer (2101-16). Beowulf then continues his account, describing Grendel's mother's revenge (2117-41), and focusing on her abduction and murder of Æschere and his own success in battle with her. In doing so, Beowulf replicates the earlier narrative structure of the poem through the chronological recollection of the two monster battles, which sandwich the artistry at court. He does not recount the encounters together as one event; they are kept separate, in a linear, episodic narrative. Moreover, he depicts the conduct of a prosperous group of men, similar to the other impressions of Heorot created by the poet earlier on in the poem. The hero of *Beowulf* and its narrator thus perform comparable functions as illustrative storytellers, and a narrative 'double scene' is produced.[33] Beowulf's speech act ends with an account of the gifts given by Hrothgar, enabling a return to the narrative present in Hygelac's hall, as he offers these gifts to his king.

Even if the introductory and conclusive elements of Beowulf's speech to Hygelac were disregarded, its storytelling element covers approximately 137 lines,

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[31] Fulk et al., p. 233.

[32] A summary of criticism concerning Hondscio is offered in Fulk et al., p. 233

[33] If *Beowulf* were performed in a royal hall, for example, then the narrative events set in a hall, including those of revelry and artistry, would be 'double scenes' according to Lars Lönnroth's conception: 'something that occurs in the course of an oral performance whenever the narrative appears to be enacted by the performer or his audience on the very spot where the entertainment takes place': Lars Lönnroth, 'The Double Scene of Arrow-Odd's Drinking Contest', in *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1979), pp. 94-119 (p. 95). It is perilous however to suggest categorically that the forms of artistry displayed in Heorot were reflective of the performance of *Beowulf*, as Frank points out: Frank, 2013, p. 85.

(2009b-147). It includes a significant number of rhetorical and creative devices,[34] for example: summary followed later by detail on the same subject (2002-09a summarise 2071b-100); opining on that which he is narrating in order to place stress upon the significance of an incident (2014b-16a); gnomic statement (2029b-31); urging the audience to understanding (2032-34); use of speech within his speech, thereby effectively acting out the part of the old spear warrior (2047-56); indicating a change of focus through a brief summary (2069b-70a); symbolic language and kennings, for example *heofones gim*, 'heaven's gem'=the sun (2072); and self-conscious references to his heroics and to the possibilities and limitations of his own storytelling performance: *to lang ys to reccenne hu i(c ð)am leodsceaðan yfla gehwylces ondlean forgeald*, 'too long is to tell how I repaid the people's enemy for each of his evils in retribution' (2093-94).

The extravagant inclusion of this prolonged storytelling speech performance functions partly as an aide-memoire and narrative embellishment for the audience. It also displays Beowulf's wisdom, effectiveness as a warrior, sagacity, and foresight. For example, Brodeur argues that '[t]he poet was not concerned to tell the story of Ingeld as it was known already to his hearers; he wished to use it to illustrate Beowulf's wisdom and political insight.'[35] Tragically, he does not have such judgement when it comes to his own deeds later on in the poem; he overreaches in his fight with the dragon, arguably the consequence of his determination to battle alone. The heroic urge stands outside ordinary sensibility. In this speech, though, Beowulf presents an autobiographical account detailing his successful deeds, while simultaneously exhibiting his skill with words. Beowulf becomes consummate performer at this point in

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[34] Bjork provides further discussion concerning the rhetorical style of this speech, focusing on its grammatical features (1994, pp. 1012-13).
[35] Brodeur, p. 178.

the poem, and his performance is a standard to which the storytelling turns of other characters, for example that of the Geatish messenger, can be compared.

Not content with demonstrating Beowulf's wisdom, heroism, and skill with words through the speech alone, the narrator then articulates his own high opinion of his hero, revealing to his audience that Beowulf had to overcome and disprove the low opinions of his fellow men:

Swa b(eal)dode bearn Ecgðeowes,
guma guð(um) cuð, godum dædum,
dreah æfter dome; nealles druncne slog
heorðgeneatas; næs him hreoh sefa,
ac he mancynnes mæste cræfte
ginfæstan gife þe him God sealde
heold hildedeor. Hean wæs lange,
swa hyne Geata bearn godne ne tealdon,
ne hyne on medobence micles wyrðne
(dry)hten Wedera gedon wolde;
swyðe (wen)don þæt he sleac wære,
æðeling unfrom. Edwenden cwom
tireadigum menn torna gehwylces. (2177-89)

Thus he showed his bravery, the son of Ecgtheow, man noted in war for good deeds, he led his life for glory; never, having drunk, slew his hearth-companions; a tempestuous heart was not in him, but he possessed mankind's greatest might, an ample gift, which God gave to him, battle-brave. Long had he been abject so the sons of the Geats did not esteem him good, nor to him on the mead-bench would the lord of the Weders grant much honour; they especially said that he was slack, no bold noble; a reversal came to the glorious man for each of these miseries.

This panegyric, situated between the accounts of Beowulf's gift-giving, represents the height of the narrator's praise for his hero. It displays Beowulf's generosity and his social capabilities, immediately before Hygelac presents him with land and a prestigious sword, leading to the close of the poem's earlier phase. Just as the poet praises his hero at this point, so critical opinion of this speech has been overwhelmingly positive. As indicated above, the *Beowulf* poet has largely been given the benefit of the doubt, his creative choices defended and rationalised. Deviations and additions in Beowulf's account from the earlier narrative at the Danish court are seen as conscious and effective poetic decisions. If such commendation is accepted, all of this implies a work carefully constructed by its poet, who had an awareness of the knowledge required, both by

Beowulf's audience of Geats and Danes within the poem, and that of the poem's early audience. Additionally, it suggests overwhelmingly a deliberate desire to demonstrate Beowulf's creative skills as storyteller.

During *Beowulf*'s later stages, portentous communication in a similar vein to the technique employed by Beowulf when describing the Ingeld-Heathobard episode becomes the principal mode of storytelling performance. For example, though it would be a stretch to consider his speech to be storytelling, Wiglaf's admonition after Beowulf's death (2864-91), which begins with a plea for the warriors who had fled their lord's side to recall how Beowulf generously obeyed the code of kingship, then turns into a prophetic warning, reminiscent of the woman's lament at his funeral. Specifically, Wiglaf signals that their land will be lost to invaders (2885-88). The content and tone of this speech is developed in the subsequent speech by a Geatish messenger into a lengthy storytelling performance, comprising 128 lines (2900-3027), the final section of which has been discussed earlier because of its references to the harp and the depiction of the 'beasts of battle'. The messenger's speech is the second longest in the poem after Beowulf's 152-line address to Hygelac. Addressed to companions who have fled from the fight with the dragon, the messenger's speech similarly predicts the fate of the Geats. Its opening section (2900-10a) is, at ten and a half lines, of comparable length to Beowulf's introductory summary, with a similar focus; the messenger reports the current situation to his fellow warriors: the outcome of Beowulf's fight with the dragon, and Wiglaf's observance over his lord. Much of the rest of the speech is otherwise made up of rather critical accounts of Geatish military exploits. From 2910b, the messenger speculates concerning the fate of his people, predicting that the Franks, the Frisians and the Swedes will not hesitate to attack the Geats. He also tells of previous battles engaged in by these neighbouring peoples. This forms the main storytelling element of the speech (2910-98), featuring intricate cultural references and significant descriptive

detail. Initially, from 2910b-21, he reminds his audience of the events surrounding Hygelac's raid on Friesland and his subsequent defeat, thus expanding on the poem's earlier brief allusion to Hygelac's fate (2200-01). Then, turning his attention to the Swedes at 2922-98, he tells of Ongentheow's killing of Hæthcyn, paying considerable attention to the military manoeuvres during the battle at Ravenswood at which the killing took place. Then from 3001-07a he predicts that the Geats will lose their homeland, echoing Wiglaf's prophecy (2884-90a). The speech ends with a lament for the loss of society that will result from his predictions, including the references to the harp, hall-joy, and the beasts of battle.

In comparison with Beowulf's speech to Hygelac, the messenger's speech is less self-conscious. Bjork claims that there are no first-person pronouns used between 2922a-3000b, his voice 'indistinguishable from the bard's.'[36] However, this is rather disingenuous, as the messenger employs such a pronoun pointedly at 2922a: *ne ic te Sweoðeode sibbe oððe treowe* | *wihte ne wéne*, 'nor do I expect peace or truce from the Swedes at all'. This admittedly remains the sole instance of self-referentiality in the speech. A multifaceted style is otherwise evident here, though, and it contains a rhetorical technique similar to that in Beowulf's long speech. As well as the rhetoric of expectation, there is figurative language, such as *folces hyrde*, 'guardian of the people' (2981a), used to describe Eofor, and extensive use of imagery in describing military action. The depiction of the violent struggle between the brothers Eofor and Wulf, and Ongentheow (2961-81) is particularly detailed and graphic.

As with Beowulf's long speech to Hygelac, the messenger's speech exemplifies the significant role that storytelling plays in generating *Beowulf*'s structural complexity and cultural-imaginative interrelationships. It functions as a synthesis of historical or quasi-

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[36] Bjork, p. 1008. Bjork notes that this impersonal aspect is a common feature in the later speeches in the poem.

historical material (i.e. Hygelac's raid on Friesland (2913b-21, the Battle of Ravenswood, (2922-98)) and speculative suggestion (2910b-13a) which embeds the political concerns of tribal Germanic Europe within the morality engendered by the figurative heroism of the individual in mythic combat, whether battle leader or resilient troop member.

Beowulf delivers another storytelling speech just before he proceeds to fight the dragon (2426-2509). It begins with reminiscence of his own early life, when King Hrethel adopted him (2426-34). These memories lead him to digress (2435-71), recollecting the accidental killing of one of Hrethel's sons, Herebeald, by his brother Hæthcyn, and the mourning of their father, discussed earlier because of its reference to the harp. Woven into this reflection on Hrethel's mourning is a general contemplation on the sorrows of losing a child, and the impossibility of being unable to avenge a brother-killing according to society's laws. In doing so, Beowulf creates images of a civilisation that has died following the loss of the child. The fact that this is creatively produced storytelling by an apparently fictional character has not prevented Joseph Harris from speculating about this part of the performance, suggesting that these images are a vision experienced by the old man as he visits his son's room.[37]

Following this, like the messenger and Wiglaf, Beowulf alludes to battles between the Swedes and the Geats (2472-89), albeit only historical encounters and no impending ones in this instance; Beowulf remains silent concerning his view of the fate of Geatish society after his death. In keeping with Beowulf's circumstances and his concerns as his fight with the dragon looms, boasting is also a feature of this performance, particularly when he recollects killing Dæghrefn the Frank without the need for a weapon (2501-02). He opens his speech with confident reflection, too: *Fela*

[37] Joseph Harris, 'A Nativist Approach to *Beowulf*: The Case of Germanic Elegy', in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. by H. Aertsen and R. Bremmer (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), pp. 45-62 (p. 50).

ic on giogoðe guðræsa genæs, | orleghwila; ic þæt eall gemon, ‘Many rushes of battle I survived in youth, times of war; I remember all that’ (2426-27). Here, the hero recollects as well as prepares mentally; his performance embodies the threshold between the successes of the past and the awareness of impending trial. Bjork observes that a forty-five line section of this speech (2434-78) contains no personal pronouns, supporting his view that the speakers become indistinguishable from the narrator,[38] but this is again being selective with the evidence, as there is considerable self-reference during the rest of the speech, particularly through the use of *ic* at 2426, 2427, 2432, 2484, 2497, and 2501. Indeed, the narrator only interrupts the speech at 2510-11a and 2516-18a to stress that these are Beowulf’s final words. Otherwise, the entire speech spans 2426-537, and the section from 2518b-37 contains nine instances of *ic*, eight of them in its first eleven lines. Clusters of self-reference thus frame the storytelling elements of the speech, which, as should be expected, features little self-reference, being about wider matters.

Shorter speeches also contain storytelling elements. Often categorised as a flyting, Unferth’s challenge about Beowulf’s swimming contest with Breca does so.[39] The difference in style between the two speeches reflects and distinguishes the characters contesting the flyting. As Greenfield states, Beowulf’s performance is ‘for the most part measured and thoughtful’ in comparison with Unferth’s ‘direct, aggressive’ speech.[40] Greenfield points out the short clauses used by Unferth contrast with the more extensive *þæt*-clauses preferred by Beowulf. He concludes that ‘[s]yntax may thus be taken as something of the measure of the man’.[41] The storytelling

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[38] Bjork, p. 1008.
[39] See Carol J. Clover, ‘The Germanic Context of the Unferð Episode’, *Speculum*, 55:3 (1980), 444-68.
[40] Stanley B. Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 130-31.
[41] Greenfield, 1972, p. 131.

component of Unferth's speech (513-24) is an exercise in emotional, persuasive rhetoric, emphasising for example the general turbulence of the sea through dramatic imagery: *weol | wintrys wylm*, 'welled, in winter's swells' (515b-16a). Beowulf, having actually been there, is able to provide specific descriptive detail in his account. The hero's longer response contains storytelling, too, functioning deftly as a first-hand response to Unferth's own recollection of events, and as a demonstration of Beowulf's descriptive ability. Beowulf claims to have been aided in the water by his armour (550-53a), for example, reinforcing the significance of the reference to it earlier in the welcoming scene in Heorot, in the introduction to his first speech to Hrothgar. Such detail in performance, along with rebukes in his speech concerning Unferth's drinking and lack of heroism, appears to secure Beowulf victory in the flyting.

Storytelling in *Beowulf*: Conclusions

Central characters in *Beowulf* are imagined as expressive, skilful storytellers, and storytelling is a principal component in the ceremonial style of the poem's heroic speeches. This 'heroic storytelling' consists of three elements: first, recollection or prefiguration of courageous deeds concerning the self. For example, Beowulf's boasts about his own strength and abilities. Second, the past and future military deeds of the neighbouring societies: Franks and Swedes, Geats and Danes. Third, events concerning mythical or legendary heroes. In doing so, storytelling reinforces the poem's significant cultural referents and associations, and storytelling performers act as a conduit through which the poet develops the wider context of the poem's world, particularly its partly-imagined cultural history, as do the anonymous *þegn* on horseback and Hrothgar's *scop* of 1066, for example. Storytelling speeches reveal a tension between foresight and fate, allowing the audience to judge the characters and their actions. Beowulf, for instance, displays significant foresight, yet also acknowledges the limits of human will in the face of fate's controlling influence over thought and action. Moreover, the structure of the

speeches often develops the relationship between the events described through storytelling and the present narrative circumstances. For example, speeches commonly begin by discussing the present or the recent past, digress into storytelling, and then return to the present. In *Beowulf*, storytelling is the principal mode of reflection concerning the self and cultural events, previous and impending, and the diverse rhetorical techniques in the speeches demonstrate and express creativity.

Artistry in *Beowulf*: Conclusions

In *Beowulf*, artistry is executed within society at times of celebration and lamented during periods of loss or misfortune. It is also used to express mourning for that loss. The poet might not have been an expert or historian of performance practices. Indeed, he appears not to have believed such detail to be important to recount. He instead repeatedly uses performers, performances and instruments as symbolic literary tools associated with the revelry of success and the mourning of absence and loss, and frequently they aid or facilitate deliberation on the mechanisms of fate. While he stresses the knowledge held by certain performers through concise statement - emphasising the distinctive knowledge of the *þegn* who delivers performances on horseback and of King Hrothgar through variation, for example – the knowledge held by others is demonstrated through extensive quotation of their storytelling performances. The ability certain members of society have as performers is also important to him. He also draws on characters referred to as *scopas* (496, 1066), in circumstances generally conforming to Opland’s definition: in the royal hall, at times where solidarity is needed - to defeat Grendel for instance - or to praise, for example by performing the tale concerning Finn and the Frisian Slaughter following heroic success, i.e. Grendel’s defeat. Additionally, in his first appearance, a *scop* forms part of the joy experienced by the social group before Grendel’s attacks. Rather than explicitly being an oral poet in particular, however, the *scop* is depicted, concisely, as predominantly a

singer or storyteller. The appearance of artistic characters and their performances forms part of a poetic construction of pleasure and belonging in society, also symbolised by harp playing, speech performances, and non-artistic acts such as feasting and gift-giving. Along with ability and knowledge, the association with the successful operation of society and alliances between peoples is another fundamental element in the understanding of artistry expressed and presumably inherited by the *Beowulf* poet.

Another purpose for the inclusion of artistry is structural and narrative function. It enables the narrative to move from core events concerning Beowulf to culturally significant stories, deviations from the central plot. This enriches the world of the poem and enables signification through the introduction of events and heroes from the legendary and historical past.[42] Artistry is thus related to these stories dynamically, and could be seen as evidence of the poem's oral origins, because the inclusion of artistry as narrative component can be seen as a tool enabling a link between narrative present and cultural past for the oral storyteller. If *Beowulf* developed from content performed by oral poets, then the inclusion of instances of artistry is particularly intriguing, as it introduces characters with a similar function to those early transmitters. They would have been imagining and performing the self, using self-referentiality as poetic technique. This is only the case, however, if the artistry within the poem is conceived of as being in the form of Germanic, alliterative poetry, which is by no means certain in any of the instances outside the quoted speeches.

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[42] The understanding that earlier critics saw material unrelated to Beowulf's three fights as digressions has been overstated. Klaeber clearly saw it as contributing to the 'lack of steady advance': Frederick Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn (New York, NY: D.C. Heath & Co., 1950), pp. lvii-lviii, contrasting the three fights with the 'number of apparently historical elements which are introduced as a setting [to the three fights]… by way of more or less irrelevant digressions' (pp. xii-xiii). By 1950, however, Bonjour did not see all deviations from the principal plot events as such; he saw the tale of the Frisian slaughter as an 'episode', for example, as it is 'a moment which forms a real whole and yet is merged in the main narrative', whereas a digression for Bonjour is 'more of an adjunction and generally entails a sudden break in the narrative', such as the allusion to Offa; see Adrien Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), p. xi.

Beowulf never offers a physical description of briefly sketched figures such as the *scop* or the *þegn* on horseback, and they are not given direct speech, precluding an analysis of the verbal content of any performances. Speeches meanwhile relate to events in the action from the main plot or from the wider cultural imagination, from which the characters' behaviour can be judged. Through these concise representations, artistry becomes part of a generic theme in *Beowulf*, like the 'hero on the beach' or 'arming' themes, in which an impression of society is created: at peace, in prosperity, feasting, and enjoying the wealth resulting from success in battle and the reign of a powerful lord. This style of representation has significant comparable precedents in Homeric poetry, and also has analogues in later English poetry, as will be discussed in Chapter 8.

However, artistry is not always used to introduce culturally relevant stories. In the passage featuring the *scop* at 496, no specific tale is alluded to or embarked upon, and we remain in the hall to witness Unferth's interjection. At this point in *Beowulf*, there is no requirement for artistry to function as a link between narrative present and cultural past. This hints at a break from the structure effective in oral transmission, the use of artistry as a concatenating device, towards the structurally isolated theme that is a feature of the early Middle English *Brut*, as will be shown in Chapter 8. Illustrations of artistry are skilfully incorporated into the narrative using diverse methods, with varying aims. The artistry theme is thus not treated uniformly. This diversity can be seen to reflect the transitional nature of the poem. Creed accounts for the preservation of *Beowulf* by considering its creator to be an excellent performer, adaptive to changes in Anglo-Saxon culture:

> He is more than master. He is a *virtuoso* performer who might have had much to do with the fact that his performance has somehow survived… it was his remaking of the tale of the beneficent heathen god into the tale of the beneficent

> hero that attracted the attention of those who could command the resources of the scriptorium[43]

The virtuosity of the *Beowulf* poet reveals itself not only in his mastery of poetic language and form, but also in the creative and diverse ways in which he introduces, associates and implements his subject matter, including artistry. In doing this, he presents a generous hero, as Creed suggests, who embodies the favourable art of performance and possesses knowledge, ability, effectiveness and moral surety in the role of performer. This chapter has shown that it is in the manipulation of storytelling instances, within speeches, that the *Beowulf* poet displays this skill most thoroughly.

[43] Robert P. Creed, 'The Remaking of *Beowulf*', in *Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context*, ed. by John Miles Foley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), pp. 136-46 (p. 146) (Creed's emphasis).

Chapter 6 - Ambivalence towards Artistry in Anglo-Saxon Culture

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 identified that, whilst it varies stylistically and functionally, especially in *Beowulf*, the representation of artistry in Old English poetry has congruent characteristics across the tradition in many instances. For example, it is routinely valuable, there are associations with joy and belonging, and the particular abilities that individuals have relating to performance are emphasised. Depictions are often brief, however. Such recurrences often combine in *Beowulf* and can be perceived collectively as a theme, employed consciously though implemented diversely. The associations established in *Beowulf* reflect gnomic statements catalogued in Old English wisdom poems which conceptualise links between the artist and wider society. The following three chapters of this thesis pursue a comparative approach, commonly adopted by proponents of oral theory, to discover whether similar conceptualisations, associations and methods of representation, and comparable attitudes towards the kinds of artistry depicted in the poetry, can be determined in Anglo-Saxon written material more widely and consequently in the culture, and also in other poetic traditions outside Old English.[1] Another purpose is to discern whether a particularly poetic notion of artistry in Anglo-Saxon England can be perceived, and whether a tradition of representation, and the poetic imagination that engendered it, can be determined across literatures and periods, particularly concerning one of the chief characteristics of the poetic tradition: idealisation, and the impression that artistry is a necessarily positive phenomenon.

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[1] The comparative work of Amodio is considered in Chapter 8. For additional examples of comparative analysis with an oral-formulaic approach, see Albert. B. Lord, who compares *Beowulf* with Parry's Serbo-Croat field notes and with Homer: 1960, pp. 200-02, and Jeff Opland, '"Scop" and "Imbongi" - Anglo-Saxon and Bantu Oral Poets', *English Studies in Africa*, 14:2 (1971), 161-78.

This chapter considers Old English prose chronicling or relating to Anglo-Saxon culture and history, together with epistolary and canonical material, in order to assess what it can reveal about Anglo-Saxon conceptions of artistic performance. Comparison will be made with the poetry to discover the extent to which the illustrations, associations, symbolism, and perceptions of the status of performing artistry created in the poems figure in non-poetic writing. As summarised above, one purpose is to develop an understanding of the extent to which artistry in the poetic imagination reflects wider Anglo-Saxon sociocultural understanding. The attitudes of the religious hierarchy are particularly significant. As a result of this analysis, the chapter concludes that assuming a seamless transition between the cultural concerns and values of the poets and those of the recorders of and commentators on Anglo-Saxon society when attempting to determine historical cultural circumstances is problematic.

Michael Swanton argues that 'relatively little [Anglo-Saxon] prose sets out to be consciously "literary" in the way that all poetry by definition must'.[2] This does not mean that Anglo-Saxon prose purporting to be historical account contains no creativity or invention, intentional or otherwise. Indeed, it is difficult to determine the authenticity and accuracy of accounts in such material. An Anglo-Saxon historian may claim to have verified sources, or to be recording first-hand report, but such claims are not to be taken at face value, and much writing from the period purporting to be the account of historical events is inaccurate to varying degrees. One method of assessing the extent to which a depiction is historically accurate is to determine, when possible, the proximity in time and place of these writers to the events they describe. Whatever the proximity, however, political allegiance and other influences and intentions, together with literary creativity, must be borne in mind. Critics have considered the material analysed in this chapter extensively to discern information concerning Anglo-Saxon artistry, and their

[2] Michael Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (London: Phoenix, 1993), p. x.

work will be referred to as appropriate. As with the poetry, though perhaps more appropriately, critical inquiry has largely focused on what the literature tells us about the performance of historical Anglo-Saxon song, music and poetry, and oral poetry in particular. Doubts concerning veracity means that critics have been forced to weigh up the likelihood of the material being accurate, and hence useful for an understanding of historical behaviours, just as they have with the poetry. Happily for the purposes of this thesis, what the treatment and creativity in non-poetic material reveals about the characteristics, function and place of artistry in Anglo-Saxon society can inform the understanding of its significance for, and place within, the Anglo-Saxon imagination. Indeed, the attitudes represented and the creativity employed in the material can prove valuable characteristics for comparison with those in poems.

According to Opland, particular extant written sources from the period can provide evidence concerning the settings in which certain Anglo-Saxon artistry took place:

> a meal or feast provided the usual context for the production of music to the harp as a form of entertainment. Sidonius's description of a day spent with Theoderic confirms this, as does Bede's description of Cædmon's friends and perhaps Alcuin's letter to Hygbald in 797.[3]

As we have seen, artistry in the context of the feast, including music to the harp, is a recurring presence in Old English poetry. While it does not feature in such contexts in Eddic poetry, as noted in Chapter 7, it does so in later English poems, as will be discussed in Chapter 8. However, whether this was actually routine practice in Anglo-Saxon England, and for all sections of society, is not clear. Moreover, the reliability of the three sources listed by Opland can be called into question; these three sources, together with additional material, will now be considered.

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[3] Opland, 1980, p. 148. The recipient of Aluin's letter is now believed to be Bishop Unuuona of Leicester. See Donald A. Bullough, 'What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 22 (1993), 93-125.

The first piece of evidence, a letter by the fifth-century Gallo-Roman aristocrat Sidonius Apollinaris to his brother-in-law, Agricola, is written by and about the behaviours and culture of one Continental court. Sidonius is particularly effusive in his praise of the court's ruler, Theodoric II, king of the Visigoths. The letter is dated *c.* 454, which corresponds with the early period of Anglo-Saxon migration. Although Theoderic ruled over a Germanic people, it should not be assumed that activities at his court, located in southern Gaul, corresponded to activity in any contemporary or later Anglo-Saxon halls. Moreover, despite Opland's suggestion that the letter's relevant passage is useful for evidence about performance contexts, Sidonius is at pains to point out the *lack* of artistry at Theodoric's court:

> sane intromittuntur, quamquam raro, inter cenandum mimici sales, ita ut nullus conviva mordacis linguae felle feriatur; sic tamen quod illic nec organa hydraulica sonant nec sub phonasco vocalium concentus meditatum acroama simul intonat; nullus ibi lyristes choraules mesochorus tympanistria psaltria canit, rege solum illis fidibus delenito, quibus non minus mulcet virtus animum quam cantus auditum.

It is true that occasionally (not often) the banter of low comedians is admitted during supper, though they are not allowed to assail any guest with the gall of a biting tongue. In any case no hydraulic organs are heard there, nor does any concert-party under its trainer boom forth a set performance in chorus; there is no music of lyrist, flautist or dance-conductor, tambourine-girl or female citharist; for the king finds a charm only in the string music which comforts the soul with virtue just as much as it soothes the ear with melody.[4]

It is not clear whether the absence of artistry at Theodoric's court is characteristic of fifth-century Germanic courts in general, though Sidonius's expectations in relation to artistry can be seen as evidence that is was a common feature at courts and during feasts elsewhere. Yet the importance of artistry at Theodoric's court is limited, even were string instruments certainly a feature,[5] particularly as Sidonius has specifically observed an absence of lyre music and female citharists. Other instruments, music, and

[4] *Sidonius: Poems, Letters 1-2*, trans. by W. B. Anderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), pp. 344-45.
[5] O. M. Dalton offers a translation that excludes instruments altogether, 'the king cares for no strains but those which no less charm the mind with virtue than the ear with melody': Sidonius Appolinaris, *The Letters of Sidonius*, 2 vols, trans. by O. M. Dalton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), I, p. 6. *Fidibus* almost certainly refers to string instruments, however.

entertainment is also notably absent. Instead, entertainment extolling virtue is accepted and valued, along with the limited music prized for its melody. Artistry is perceived of as a sober phenomenon, with morals seemingly informing Theoderic's preferences. Because it emphasises the preferences of an individual king, among other reasons, it has limited value as an indication of the life of artistry in an early, pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon royal court. It exemplifies that the attitudes of one person, the ruler, towards certain kinds of artistry could influence court customs and behaviour significantly, which would thus likely have varied from place to place and over time. Thus, in the early Anglo-Saxon period, we are likely to have seen diversity in the presence of artistry in different locations of England.

The remaining evidence discussed in this chapter is from post-Conversion Anglo-Saxon England, centuries after the initial Continental migrations. In this evidence, individual preferences concerning artistry are conceived in relation to wider cultural norms, particularly religious perspectives, and when such norms are being challenged. For example, the canons drawn up at the 747 council of *Clofesho* provide valuable evidence concerning the attitude of the Anglo-Saxon hierarchy, as it was attended by diverse members of the political and religious elite.[6] Sections of canons 12, 16, 20 and 21 are particularly relevant:

12: Ut presbyteri sæcularium poetarum modo in ecclesia non garriant, ne tragico sono sacrorum verborum compositionem ac distinctionem corrumpant vel confundant, sed simplecum sanctamque melodiam secundum morem Ecclesiaæ sectentur…[7]

Priests should not babble in church in the manner of secular poets, nor should they corrupt and distort the order and division of the sacred words with a tragic tone, but rather aim to follow the simple, sacred melody, according to the custom of the Church.

[6] See Simon D. Keynes, *The Councils of Clofesho*, VPAE, 38 (Leicester: University of Leicester, 1994).
[7] *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols, ed. by Arthur Haddan and William Stubbs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869-78), III (1871), p. 366.

16: …non admixtis vanitatibus, uti mos est plurimis, vel negligentibus, vel imperitis, id est, in ludis et equorum cursibus, et epulis majoribus…[8]

…not being mixed with their vanities, as is the custom with many, or through the neglect of, or the inexperienced, that is, in the games and horse races, and larger banquets…

20: …et non sint ludicrarum artium receptacula, hoc est, poetarum, citharistarum, musicorum, scurrorum; sed orantium, legentium, Deumque laudantium habitationes, et ut non habeant sæculares quique vagandi licentiam per inconvenientia sibi loca, vel discursus per interiora monasterii domuncula…[9]

…and should not be sporting activities, receptacles for the arts, namely, of poets, of cithara players, of music, of rogues; but earnestly, our readers, to praise God in houses, and not have seculars who do not have the permission to go plundering where they do not belong, in places they are not allowed, or running about through the interior of monastery houses…

21: …sed pura ac sobria sint eorum convivia, non luxuriosa neque deliciis vel scurrilitatibus mixta…[10]

…and pure and sober are their banquets, not luxurious nor delicious or mixed with scurrilousness...

These regulations apparently comprise formal expressions of prevalent opinions concerning proper behaviour at religious occasions and in Church spaces. A component of this behaviour which needs to be suppressed is musical entertainment, poetry or singing, and other entertainments. The style of singing is also questioned; secular poets apparently have a particular *garrio*, ‘chatter’, ‘babble’, that is to be avoided. The possible cause of this behaviour is the presence of undesirables, but the conduct appears widespread given the repeated calls for people to pursue appropriate action in the eyes of the religious and political elite. This call for discipline among the hierarchy at the council of *Clofesho* is reflected in the opinions of other significant religious figures from the period. The scholar and cleric Alcuin was a prolific epistolarian, with many connections with the Continent, owing in particular to his time at Charlemagne’s court in Aix-la-Chapelle, in present-day Germany.[11] In letters to the Continent he can be seen

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[8] Haddan and Stubbs, p. 368.
[9] Haddan and Stubbs, p. 369.
[10] Haddan and Stubbs, p. 369.
[11] See Douglas Dales, *Alcuin: His Life and Legacy* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), which contains extensive discussion of his written communications.

as a tireless critic of what he saw was inappropriate behaviour in relation to Christian values, including artistry, though he rarely censured artistry in letters to Englishmen.[12] His letter to ‘Speratus’, now understood to be the Mercian bishop Unuuona, dated to 797, is thus a useful but rather brief and exceptional source for an insight into Alcuin’s perspective on certain Anglo-Saxon artistry, reminiscent of the ecclesiastical perspective seen in the canons of the council of *Clofesho*. The letter contains the oft-quoted question commonly interpreted as an encapsulation of Alcuin’s belief that pagan legendary matter should not be preferred to Christian material: *quid enim Hinieldus cum Christo?* ‘what has Ingeld to do with Christ?’ Yet Alcuin also censures artistry more generally:

> Verba Dei legantur in sacerdotali convivio. Ibi decet lectorum audiri, non citharistam; sermones patrum, non carmina gentilium. Quid Hinieldus cum Christo? Angusta est domus: utrosque tenere non poterit. Nun vult rex cęlestis cum paganis et perditis nominetenus regibus communionem habere; quia rex ille aeternus regnat in caelis, ille paganus perditus plangit in inferno. Voces legentium audire in domibus tuis, non ridentium turbam in plateis.[13]

Let the word of God be read at the clergy’s feasts. There it is proper to hear the reader, not the harpist; the sermons of the fathers, not the songs of the heathens. What has Ingeld to do with Christ? The house is narrow, it cannot hold them both. The King of heaven will have no fellowship with so-called kings who are pagan and damned, for the Eternal King reigns in Heaven, while the pagan is damned and laments in Hell. The voices of readers should be heard in your houses, not the crowd of revellers in the streets.[14]

Alcuin refers to harping and heathen song, two kinds of artistry that manifestly appear in *Beowulf*, and his letter cautions against both. Although the extent to which this sort of artistry was prevalent in Anglo-Saxon society and encroaching into the clergy’s feasts is unclear, it was patently widespread enough to have stirred Alcuin into his admonition to

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[12] W.F. Bolton, *Alcuin and Beowulf: an Eighth-Century View* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979); Opland, 1980, pp. 144-45.

[13] Letter 124, in *Epistolarum IV, Karolinum Aevum II*, ed. by Ernst Dummler, Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), p. 183.

[14] Translation from Roy M. Liuzza, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2000), p. 160. For a discussion of Alcuin’s purpose in writing this passage, see Mary Garrison, ‘“Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?”’, in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, 2 vols, ed. by Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), I, pp. 237-59.

a fellow countryman. Moreover, it is possible that Alcuin believed such artistry to be a recent or increased threat to the everyday practices of the clergy at meal times, but this is not stated, and the situation could have been common and against his liking for some time before he wrote the letter. He is referring to harping and heathen song at *sacerdotali convivio*, 'religious feasts'. Given Cuthbert's request for a harper, in a letter discussed below, it does not seem that harping was always inappropriate. Thus Alcuin's hostility to the harp may have been confined to those sorts of feast. He might not have been so disapproving of the populace, or the clergy for that matter, listening to legendary songs or harps in other contexts. Indeed, he appears to associate the artistry he holds in disdain with the general population, the crowd of revellers in the streets. Alcuin singles out the harp in particular for unequivocal dismissal in favour of Christian, unaccompanied readings, though it is not clear whether for Alcuin the instrument had intrinsic associations - with heathen song, for example - that would have precluded it from being acceptable as part of Christian entertainment at feasts. The clause construction of Alcuin's Latin suggests an association between the harp and the performance of heathen song, although he could alternatively have envisioned them as distinct practices. He may have envisaged the harp as relating to the *gleoman* rather than the *scop*, in Opland's distinction, and the unsavoury associations that the former figure has may have influenced his attitude. Regardless, his attitude to the harp differs markedly from the representation in the poetry.

Alcuin's letter provides an intriguing insight into the evident preferences among many for harp music and heathen song, and the concern within the religious establishment about their performance, yet, as an admonition of such practices, it is a source intrinsically unlikely to reveal anything of note concerning the performance of artistry in the period. It can be seen as an example of wider attempts to suppress the kinds of artistry described in *Beowulf*, and suggests that in the view of senior church

figures, the popularity of this artistry was a threat to the routine life of the clergy. It is appealing to consider that the influence of the fruits of the poetic imagination are at work in Anglo-Saxon society, even among its bishops who are accepting the artistic practices ordinarily associated with kings, leading to a popularity that, according to Alcuin, needs to be suppressed.[15] Indeed, he includes Ingeld, a symbolic figure and the subject of artistry, as a rhetorical device in his letter in order to influence opinion.

This leaves one other piece of evidence proposed by Opland concerning the context of harping and associated artistry, the best known description of artistic performance in Anglo-Saxon prose writing: Bede's narrative concerning the Anglo-Saxon poet Cædmon. Bede's description is found within Book 4, Chapter 24 of his Latin *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, a work which survives in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in Latin and also in a late ninth- or early tenth-century Old English translation.[16] There are two passages in the chapter of immediate interest in relation to artistry: the description of communal singing and harping from which Cædmon retires (the *convivium*), and Cædmon's own abilities as composer and reciter of poems. In the first passage, Bede describes the harp being played during social gatherings. His Latin reads:

> Unde nonnumquam in convivio, cum esset laetitae causa decretum ut omnes per ordinem cantare deberent, ille ubi appropinquare sibi citharam cernebat surgebat a media cena et egressus ad suam domum repedabat.

And therefore sometimes at a feast, when for the sake of providing entertainment, it had been decided that they should all sing in turn to the harp, when he saw the harp approaching him, then he would rise up in the middle of the feasting, go out, and return to his house.[17]

The vernacular scribe translated the passage as follows:

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[15] See Garrison, pp. 251-52.
[16] Concerning the manuscripts that contain the Old English version of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, see Sharon M. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's* Historia Ecclesiastica (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), pp. 15-25.
[17] Translation from Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 215.

> Ond he forþon oft in gebeorscipe, þonne þær wæs blisse intinga gedemed, þæt heo ealle scalde þurh endebyrdnesse be hearpan singan, þonne he geseah þa hearpan him nealecan, þonne aras he for forscome from þæm symble and ham eode to his huse.[18]

Both versions are pertinent to some extent when considering the representation of artistry in the Anglo-Saxon period.

Bede's reference to the *convivium* is too brief to provide much information about its events, and the passage does not offer any specifics concerning artistry. His Latin and the Old English translation both infer an association between singing and harping, although the connection is more explicit in the translation. It is generally interpreted that those present at *convivia* are expected to sing in turn, and that harping is expected of everyone. If so then there is no distinction between designated harper and non-harper expected among the social group, unusual in Anglo-Saxon writing. As a result, the depiction would be a brief, idealised representation of communal performance activity, and none of the performers would have been considered as professionals. Bede could have envisioned that the harp moved around in the hands of a mobile, professional harper, although it is stated that the harp rather than the harper approaches Cædmon. Regarding its attendees, Cædmon at least is of relatively low status in society, being a cowherd, although it is unclear whether Bede intended the *convivium* to be populated solely by people of comparable status, or whether he gave the matter any thought.

Harping, entertainment and feasting are associated in the Cædmon account, as we have similarly seen in passages of Old English poetry. However, as a result of the potential lack of distinction between designated performers and their audience, and the fact that they should all sing, it would be a stretch to perceive Bede's *convivium* as an example akin to such illustrations as those featuring a *scop* in Hrothgar's hall in *Beowulf*. Bede's account is not entirely without similarities to the poem; as we have

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[18] Concerning the Old English translator, see Rowley, p. 2.

seen, non-designated characters do give performances in *Beowulf*, for example. Rather than relating to the circumstances of the occasion, however, the similarities between Bede's prose and *Beowulf* relate to stylistic characteristics. Despite the interest that the passage featuring the *convivium* has generated among those searching for depictions of historical Anglo-Saxon artistry,[19] it has literary and symbolic qualities meaning that it would be precarious to read unquestioningly into the account any evidence of historical practices. For example, it could be read that the harp must be circulating and all the participants must take their turn at singing for the story to make any sense, as Cædmon would not be required to sing if there were designated, professional performers. Moreover, as characteristic in *Beowulf*, Bede does not introduce a specific instance of a particular feast, and therefore the *convivium* is not a description of a specific 'scene' of performance. It is a generality, an idealised imagining of routine behaviour, and this problematises any attempts to discern specifics in relation to artistic practices. Bede is not attempting to offer a specific account of a particular *convivium* or to describe one in detail, but to stress Cædmon's aversion to the harp whenever there was such an event. Through use of the term *nonnumquam*, 'sometimes', he crucially refers not to one particular feast but to multiple occasions, echoing the use of *hwilum*, 'at times', when describing the regular performance of artistry in *Beowulf*, as discussed in Chapter 4. Moreover, Bede's account is not anecdotal or descriptive; he writes instead with characteristically detached authority of Cædmon's reluctance to sing and possibly take up the harp at a *convivium*. Reporting naturalistic detail concerning such events is not his focus or purpose.

Bede's sentiments, such as his position towards potentially non-religious feasting, can be discerned, even when reading the account as an allegory. He does not

[19] Magoun, 1955, is perhaps the definitive example, but see also Fry, 1975; Opland, 1980, pp. 106-20; Thornbury, 2014, pp. 5-8; Sharma, pp. 308-14.

specifically criticise the practice of harping and singing in the Cædmon chapter; after all, neither are solely pagan practices, or at least singing is not, and indeed the terms *leoðsong* and *singan* are used of Cædmon's own pious productions in the Old English translation. Neither does Bede overtly criticise the practice of attending *convivium*, translated into Old English in the ninth century rather pointedly as *gebeorscipe*, 'beership', 'feast', although he does believe such events to be in opposition to Christian practices. In the same chapter we are also told: *cuius carminibus multorum saepe animi ad contemtum saeculi et appetitum sunt uitae caelestis accensi*, 'by [Cædmon's] songs the mind of many were often inspired to despise the world and to long for the heavenly life'. The feast and the accompanying communal singing and harp performance can be seen as exemplifying the world Cædmon inspires people to reject. It can be inferred that they represent pre-Conversion behaviours for Bede, and as such can be compared with the behaviours represented in *Beowulf*. Bede presents artistry as an example of social practice in opposition to the heavenly life; he creates an image, possibly of non-religious behaviour, for Cædmon to spurn, and the *convivium* functions as a symbolic event. Accordingly, he is critical of such decadent behaviour in his letter to Egbert, bishop of York, which is discussed below.

Bede's message is more complex than a straightforward opposition of Christian virtue and heathen transgression, however. He states that Cædmon regularly departs from *convivia* not because of a lack of ability but because he had *nil carminum aliquando didicerat*, 'never learned anything of songs'. His reasoning modifies later: when challenged by the dream visitant, he says he is unable to sing, and presumably it is because of a lack of ability: *At ille respondens, 'Nescio', inquit, 'cantare; nam et ideo de convivio egressus huc secessi, quia cantare non poteram'*, 'He answered, "I cannot sing; for that was the reason why I left the banquet and retired to this place, because I could not sing."' The Old English translator is noncommittal about Cædmon's reason; he

writes that he *con noht singan*, which could either mean ‘I can’t sing at all’ or ‘I can’t sing anything (i.e. any songs)’. Bede suggests in turn that the reason he does not know any songs is because *siquidem in habitu saeculari usque ad tempora prouectioris aetatis constitutus* ‘he had lived in the secular life until he was well advanced in age’. Bede could have envisioned that the feast contained Christian songs that Cædmon was not aware of, undermining any suggestion that the *convivia* were solely pagan feasts. This would accord with other descriptions of religious occasions about which there are complaints, such as that by Alcuin discussed above, also described as *convivia*, and indeed that of Bede himself in his letter to Egbert. In the letter, dated 734, late in Bede’s life, musical performance is not specifically mentioned, though *fabulis*, ‘myths’ or ‘storytelling’, are. He writes:

> …quia de quibusdam episcopis fama vulgatum est, quod ipsi ita Christo serviant, ut nullos secum alicuius religionis aut continentiae viros habeant: sed potius illos qui risui, iocis, fabulis, commessationibus et ebrietatibus, ceterisque vitae remissions illecebris subigantur, et qui magis quotidie ventrem dapibus, quam mentem sacrificiis coelestibus pascant.

…it is reported of some bishops that they have no men of true religion or self-control around them, but instead are surrounded by those who give themselves up to laughter, jokes, storytelling, eating, drinking, and other seductions of the soft life, and who would prefer each day to fill their stomachs with feasting rather than their minds with heavenly offerings.[20]

Overall, feasting and associated activities regarded as important in the poetry, characteristic of successful society, are denounced by Bede in this letter, as they are in the Canons of *Clofesho* and in Alcuin’s letter to Unuuona. Bede’s story of Cædmon’s departure from feasts can similarly be read as a rejection of the kinds of artistic practices that are accepted and indeed idealised, rather than admonished, in the poetry. Like Alcuin’s letter, it suggests the influence of poetic concerns on the minds and actions of some in religious orders, and indeed even bishops.

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[20] Bede, 2008, pp. 344-5.

If the provenance and historical accuracy of Bede's depiction of *convivia* is open to doubt, his description of Cædmon's abilities as a poet suggests that the events concerning his creative enlightenment were miraculous. After all, Cædmon does not know the verses he recites at first; they come to his mind spontaneously:

> …adstitit ei quidam per somnium, eumque salutans, ac suo appellans nomine: 'Cædmon,' inquit, 'canta mihi aliquid.' At ille respondens: 'Nescio,' inquit, 'cantare; nam et ideo de conuiuio egressus huc secessi, quia cantare non poteram.' Rursum ille, qui cum eo loquebatur, 'Attamen,' ait, 'mihi cantare habes.' 'Quid,' inquit, 'debeo cantare?' Et ille, 'Canta,' inquit, 'principium creaturarum.' Quo accepto responso, statim ipse coepit cantare in laudem Dei conditoris uersus, quos numquam audierat…

…he dreamt that someone stood by him, saluted him, and called him by name: ` Cædmon,' he said, `sing me something.' Cædmon answered, `I cannot sing; that is why I left the feast and came here because I could not sing.' Once again the speaker said, `nevertheless you must sing to me!' 'What must I sing?' said Cædmon. `Sing,' he said, `about the beginning of created things.' Thereupon Cædmon began to sing verses which he had never heard before in praise of God the Creator…[21]

It is stated later that the words came to his mind inspired by God, according to those who first heard his recitals the next morning. Daniel P. O'Donnell argues that 'Bede's interest in Cædmon lies in the poet's ability to compose rather than in the miracle of his gift',[22] and a concern with compositional skills occupies a greater part of the account than the miraculous genesis of his ability. However, it is in part because of the divine inspiration received by Cædmon that questions have been raised about the value the chapter has for our understanding of Anglo-Saxon poetic practices. James W. Earl points out the fallacy of seeing the Cædmon story as being related to, or useful for an understanding of, Anglo-Saxon oral poetic technique.[23] Niles, meanwhile, states that 'while modern interest in Cædmon as an oral poet may be huge, Bede's seems to have

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[21] Bede, 2008, p. 215.

[22] Daniel P. O'Donnell, 'Material Differences: The Place of Cædmon's Hymn in the History of Anglo-Saxon Vernacular Poetry', in *Cædmon's Hymn and Material Culture in the World of Bede*, ed. by Allen J. Frantzen and John Hines (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2007), p. 26.

[23] James W. Earl, *Thinking About* Beowulf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 81-86 (particularly p. 83).

been negligible'.[24] Indeed, although the introduction to the account emphasises Cædmon's skill at *verbis poeticis*, 'poetic wording', the account itself mentions *cantare*, 'to sing', eight times before the specific, quoted *hymn*, suggesting that song is of greater concern for Bede than poetry in particular. After the inspirational aspects of his artistic awakening, Bede's interest is in the process by which Cædmon's artistry is formulated and articulated, and particularly the acknowledgement of his ability by the abbess and other learned members of the monastery. We can gather limited information from the account concerning Cædmon's oral production of poems and his performance technique. Moreover, fundamental biographical concerns are of little importance; Bede only mentions Cædmon's name once, in the mouth of the mysterious figure who compels him to sing. When considering Bede's account as prose purporting to be a reflection of a historical event, the question of whether Cædmon and his biography was real needs to be posed, at least, even if it is unlikely to be resolved. O'Donnell believes there are issues with the account's reliability, and notes that many critics are either doubtful or non-committal concerning his existence.[25] Accordingly, the chapter could be understood as historical account, allegory or hagiography. Unfortunately, it is the only source we have that suggests Cædmon existed at all, and it was written sixty years after Cædmon's purported death. Yet Book 4, Chapter 24 sits within a section of Bede's *Historia* in which each chapter features biographical details of apparently historical figures. There is little doubt therefore that Bede intended Cædmon to be regarded as a historical person, as real as better attested individuals such as Hild, the abbess of the Whitby monastery where he apparently became a brother, who is described in Chapter 23, or Adamnan the Irishman, who performed penance in the monastery of virgins at Coldingham, described in Chapter 25.

[24] Niles, 2003, p. 15.
[25] Daniel Paul O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn: a multimedia study, archive and edition* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), pp. 3-4, p. 30.

Although the Old English translation of the *Historia* tells us nothing more about Bede and his purpose in relation to the account of Cædmon, it provides some clues concerning the stance of the Anglo-Saxon translator who rendered it into Old English. Little is known about him, and he does not offer his own preface or biography.[26] He does however make particular decisions in his translation that enable us to consider him to be a creative vernacular writer with a particular view of Anglo-Saxon artistry, despite the fact that his focus is evidently historical.[27] Greenfield and Calder note that the Old English translator had 'something of a poetic turn of mind, exhibited in a rich poetic vocabulary and in metaphoric creativity'.[28] In particular, the decision to use *gebeorscipe* for *convivium* can express a link between drinking and enjoyment, including performing, in his imagination. However, while sybaritic revelry may well have been envisioned by Bede's translator, *beorscipe* is often used neutrally in Old English homiletic writing without any overtones of disdain or admonition, referring to types of event that would not have been criticised in post-Conversion Anglo-Saxon England, even spoken by Christ, referring to the symbolic 'banquet' of the faith: *'Iohannes: cum to me tima is þæt ðu mid þinum gebroðrum wistfullige on minum gebeorscipe'*, 'John: come to me; it is time that you with your brethren should feast at my banquet' (4: 214.216).[29]

Whereas in Old English poetry performance events are unequivocally positive and beneficial for the societies being depicted. None of the examples listed by Opland that have been considered in this chapter see artistry so uniformly. Such ambivalence

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[26] For discussion on the authorship of the Old English version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, see Dorothy Whitelock, *The Old English Bede* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). See also Rowley, pp. 2-5; also Christine Wallis, 'The Old English *Bede*: Transmission and Textual History in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2013). Wallis focuses on scribal performance, but see pp. 8-13.
[27] Concerning the Old English translator's creativity, see Greenfield and Calder, pp. 58-59.
[28] Greenfield and Calder, p. 58.
[29] *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series: Text*, EETS, s.s. 17, ed. by Peter Clemoes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Ælfric is particularly prone to using the term *beorscipe*.

towards artistry is also seen in other communication from the period. P.H. Blair notes that

> [w]e have no information about the musical instruments used to accompany the monastic singing of Bede's day. There was a harp of the kind called *rottæ* in the monastery shortly after Bede's death, but nobody knew how to play it.[30]

We know this because Cuthbert, abbot of the Monkwearmouth-Jarrow monastery in which Bede had lived, wrote a letter in 764 to Archbishop Lul of Mainz in the Rhineland making a request:

> It would delight me also to have a harpist who could play on the harp which we call "rottæ"; for I have a harp and am without a player. If it be not a trouble, send one also to my disposal. I beg that you will not scorn my request nor think it laughable.[31]

This is a brief passage in a relatively long letter, and the request is virtually an aside. Opland considers it 'curious that Cuthbert should send to the Continent for a harper: from Bede's account of the *convivium* that Cædmon left, we would conclude that harpers could be found in Northumbria.'[32] This assumes however that Bede's *convivium* was not fictional, and indeed Cuthbert's letter can be seen as evidence against Bede's account being historically accurate. Moreover, whilst it is clear from another request made by Cuthbert in this letter that nobody could make glass vessels - he states 'we are ignorant and destitute of that art'[33] - it is not certain that no one in the vicinity of the Jarrow monastery could play the harp at all. Cuthbert may have been requesting an individual who would specifically fulfil the role of harp player in the monastery, a responsibility designated by the community; the harper would then presumably have been expected to play to a high standard. Indeed, it is likely that some in the area would have been able to play the harp, to a basic level at least, if the musicological conjecture

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[30] P.H. Blair, *The World of Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 257.
[31] Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents 1,* c. *500-1042* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955), pp. 765-66. Concerning the use of *rottæ* in this letter, see Osborn, pp. 442-43.
[32] Opland, 1980, p. 143.
[33] Whitelock, 1955, p. 765.

that it was relatively easy to play and tuned to an open chord is accepted. This would be supported by Bede's depiction of many members of the community potentially playing the instrument at *convivia*; if this were the case then it would tell us something about the way in which Bede imagined harps in performance, even if he was not describing historical events.

We know as a result of Cuthbert's letter that there was at least one senior member of the church who took delight in hearing the playing of string instruments, or he at least saw a harper as having a useful function in some way. This sits uncomfortably with the warnings in the letters of Alcuin and Bede, although Cuthbert does show some embarrassment about his request, seemingly indicating a low general opinion of *rottæ* performances. However, if having a harper in the monastery were particularly frowned upon, it is unlikely that Cuthbert would have made the request at all. Moreover, the letter itself could indicate the importance Cuthbert attaches to harping, in that he takes the trouble to make the request, albeit towards the end of a letter largely concerned with other matters. Perhaps the request is accounted for by the fact that it took time and a certain skill to become an effective enough player to inhabit the role, or else someone could presumably have worked out how to play it and practised, quickly becoming a specialist without the need for an external harper to be drafted in. Cuthbert conceived of harping as being a particular role. He did not want to learn it himself, and did not seem to wish other members of his community to do so, preferring instead to hear its music in the hands of an expert, one skilled as a player. A degree of professionalism might thus be expected when playing the *rottæ* in a monastic setting, expertise which could not be found in the region. This is all conjectural, however. Kevin Crossley-Holland argues speculatively that:

> [t]he 'rottæ' is not known from any other source; since it called for an expertise unavailable in Wearmouth, it must have been much more elaborate than the

> Anglo-Saxon six-stringed harp. Perhaps it was a present from an earlier missionary on the continent.[34]

However, as previously stated, Cuthbert may have been requesting expertise, or a player who had that specific role on the Continent and who could fulfil that role in Northumbria. Also speculating, concerning the material that the harper would have been required to play, Opland proposes that

> [i]t is likely that Cuthbert intended the harp to be used nonliturgically, for secular music, since if it were to be used for religious purposes he would surely have said so and would not then have considered the possibility of Lul's scorning his request.[35]

This is also conjectural. As Cuthbert did not specify the type of material he expected the harper to play, he need not have included the comments insinuating that Lul might scorn his request, unless the *rottæ* was an instrument associated only with non-liturgical performance, or was looked down upon even for the accompaniment of liturgical material within a monastic setting. If it was not only used in non-liturgical environments, then Cuthbert implicitly made an unnecessary admission by acknowledging that his request was rather shameful. Despite Opland's suggestion that Cuthbert wished the harper to perform secular material, we learn nothing concerning the harper's expected repertoire. Nor do we learn anything concerning performance technique. As Opland admits, '[w]e have no way of knowing how Cuthbert intended his harper to operate, whether he intended him (Saxon or Anglo-Saxon) just to play the instrument or to play and sing to its accompaniment.'[36]

Such references to artistry from the wider literature of the Anglo-Saxon period offer only brief and diverse – and sometimes inconsistent - insights into the way it was

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[34] Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 180.
[35] Opland, 1980, p. 143.
[36] Opland, 1980, p. 143.

perceived in Anglo-Saxon society. While the significance of artistry as perceived in the poetic imagination is shown to be reflected in the interests and behaviour of some Anglo-Saxons, that behaviour is admonished by other prominent religious scholars such as Bede and Alcuin, as well as in the Canons of *Clofesho*. Overall, though, the moral position towards certain types of artistry in non-poetic material is significantly distinct from the attitudes represented in the poetry. This position is maintained among prominent religious writers until late in the Anglo-Saxon period. Around the turn of the first millennium, Wulfstan, Bishop of London and later Bishop of Worcester and Archbishop of York, wrote in his *Canons of Edgar* and the *Law of the Northumbrian Priests* admonishing inappropriate kinds of entertainment and those who performed it, particularly in the context of social drinking. Canon 59 of the former work reads: [*a*]*nd riht is þæt ænig preost ne beo ealusceop, ne on ænige wisan gliwige mid him sylfum oðrum mannum, ac beo swa his hade gebyrað, wis and weorðfull*, 'and it is right that any priest should not be an ale-poet, nor in any way entertain with himself or another man, but be as suits his office, wise and worthy.'[37] Law 41 of the latter work reads: *Gif preost oferdruncen lufige oððe gliman oððe ealascop wurðe, gebete þæt*, 'If a priest loves to drink too much or becomes an entertainer or an ale-poet, make him pay for it.'[38] The warnings and criticism of earlier writers has not prevented circumstances in which senior figures such as Wulfstan feel the need to make overt admonitions of these sort.[39] For him, both *scop* in the context of drinking and *gleoman* are terms that signify a character of disrepute, suggesting a situation, proposed by Opland, that the figures may

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[37] See *Wulfstan's Canons of Edgar*, EETS, o.s. 266, ed. by Roger Fowler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 14-15.
[38] *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, ed. by Benjamin Thorpe (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1840), p. 418.
[39] See also Opland, 1980, pp. 186-88.

have been merging in the later Anglo-Saxon period, possibly because of the loss of the *scop*'s traditional role.[40]

The evidence considered in this chapter suggests a distinction between the representation of artistry in the poetic imagination and the attitudes towards seemingly comparable artistic forms in Anglo-Saxon society. The views of Anglo-Saxon commentators reflect a position that certain types of performance were not to be encouraged, and should, if not be outlawed, then be excluded from Christian contexts and environments. Being a performer of secular material was therefore not perceived as the idealised, positive pastime or profession that is represented in gnomic and heroic poetic material. A distinct, poetic conception of artistry in Anglo-Saxon England thus emerges. This distinction is confirmed further when a related tradition, that of Old Norse Eddic poetry, is considered in the following chapter.

[40] See Opland, 1980, pp. 265-66.

Chapter 7 - Functional Artistry in Old Icelandic Eddic Poetry

More is known about the performance cultures operating in early medieval Scandinavian societies than those of Anglo-Saxon England, especially at royal courts. In particular, there is a far greater corpus of extant literature depicting and relating to the skald, court poets who produced complex and allusive eulogistic poems for their rulers, than there is concerning any Anglo-Saxon figures of the early medieval period. Indeed, we know more about Scandinavian court poets who travelled to and operated in England during the age of Viking settlement, in the ninth to eleventh centuries, than about native performers, and *skald*, which can mean 'poet' in general in Old Norse, also refers to a Scandinavian figure with a role more clearly defined in relation to the court than Anglo-Saxon *scop* or *gleoman*.[1] The names of hundreds of skalds are known, listed for example in the *Skáldatal* catalogue of poets, and they appear often in later saga material.[2] Significant poets, such as saga-poet Egill Skallagrímsson, the protagonist of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*,[3] and Bragi Boddason, the earliest known skald, who appears in *Landnámabók* and is named by Snorri Sturluson in his *Edda*, are believed to

[1] For discussion of skalds operating in Anglo-Saxon England, see Matthew Townend, 'Cnut's poets: an Old Norse literary community in Eleventh-Century England', in *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in Medieval England, 800-1250*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Tyler (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 197-215. Also Matthew Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: skaldic praise-poetry at the court of Cnut', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 30 (2001), 145-79. and Judith Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse in Scandinavian England', in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress*, ed. by James Graham-Campbell (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), pp. 313-25. Concerning the relationship between Skaldic practice and Anglo-Saxon England, see Alistair Campbell, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History', The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies (London: HK Lewis, 1971). Thornbury provides a list of skalds known to have worked in Anglo-Saxon England: 2014, pp. 248-49.

[2] The earliest extant version of *Skáldatal* is in the early fourteenth century Codex Upsaliensis, Uppsala, University of Uppsala, MS DG 11 4to. See Snorri Sturluson, *The Uppsala Edda: DG 11 4to*, ed. by Heimir Pálsson, trans. by Anthony Faulkes (London: VSNR, 2012), particularly pp. xxx-xxxiv.

[3] It is generally supposed that *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* was written by Snorri Sturluson, and dates from the early thirteenth century. See Carol J. Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 245.

have been historical, and have detailed, partially accepted biographies, even if the sagas or accounts in which they appear are not to be relied upon for historical accuracy.[4] Nevertheless, for evidence concerning them and their performance practices it is to the sagas and other poetic material that critics have turned, and thus necessarily to the body of skaldic poetry purportedly by these poets, practically all of which sits within saga prose narrative. Many preserved verses are believed to date as early as the ninth century, and some include first-hand reference to poetic practice. However, the sagas that furnish most of the references to performance and provide biographical information about skalds date from the thirteenth century and later. Moreover, even with such a body of literary evidence, certain fundamental information concerning skalds is unclear. For example, like those Anglo-Saxons defined as *scopas*, it is not known whether they played, or were accompanied by, musical instruments, though skaldic poetry's complexity, together with the lack of any explicit reference to accompaniment, makes it unlikely.

This chapter, however, is concerned with Eddic poetry, the Old Norse form more closely related to the Old English poetic tradition. Skalds composed poetry with eulogistic subject matter in exceptional, discrete metrical and stylistic forms. They are not commonly associated with the production of Eddic poetic material, although it is possible that a few skalds may have consciously mimicked Eddic style.[5] Also, professional skalds do not appear in Eddic poetry, although Bragi is named in

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[4] Egill Skallagrímsson lived in the tenth century. See Heather O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 47. Bragi Boddason probably lived in the early ninth century (O'Donoghue, p. 73). For Snorri Sturluson's Edda, see Sturluson, 1987.

[5] For example, in the account of the battle of Stiklastaðir in *Heimskringla II*, King Olaf calls on one of his skalds to recite the ´Bjarkarímur´, a poem in Eddic metre, and some early skaldic poems such as *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, quoted in the early parts of *Heimskringla*, use a metre similar to *fornyrðislag*. Moreover, in *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* skalds are called on to use imagery from Eddic stories to describe everyday events, such as a quarrel between a smith and a carpenter (source: Alison Finlay, Birkbeck, University of London, email correspondence, September 2017).

Grímnismál and *Sigrdrífumál*, and appears as a character in *Lokasenna*.[6] Eddic poetry's authorship and date of composition is unknown, and it is generally believed to have had oral origins.[7] We are thus dealing with a poetry that originated with the antecedents of many named professional skalds whose material was produced between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, likely their ancestors. Owing to the lack of information we have concerning this prehistory, however, detail concerning the role, status, and associated performance contexts of Eddic poets are lost to us.[8]

The principal similarity between Eddic and Old English poetry lies in its metrics. The late thirteenth-century Codex Regius manuscript, the principal store of Eddic poetry along with the material known collectively as the Eddic Appendix and the Eddica Minora,[9] features the Germanic alliterative long line throughout, commonly presented as a half-line per line in modern editions. Despite being designated collectively as 'Eddic', there are multiple, distinct metres in the various poems of the

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[6] Bragi has commonly been seen as a god of poetry, but for a discussion of the relationship between the Poet Bragi Boddason and the God Bragi, see John Lindow, 'Narrative Worlds, Human Environments, and Poets: The Case of Bragi', in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, ed. by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press 2004), pp. 21-25 (p. 21, p. 24).

[7] Concerning the provenance of Eddic poetry, see Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, trans. by Peter Foote (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1988), pp. 26-30. The first study to focus on the oral-formulaic nature of Eddic material was Robert Kellogg's 1958 PhD thesis, 'A Concordance of Eddic Poetry', later published as Robert Kellogg, *A Concordance to Eddic Poetry* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1988). See also Lars Lönnroth, 'Hjálmar's Death-Song and the Delivery of Eddic Poetry,' *Speculum*, 46:1 (1971), 1-20 (p. 1). Terry Gunnell, 'Eddic Poetry', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 82-100 (p. 83). Scott Mellor applies oral-formulaic theory to part of *The Poetic Edda* in Scott A. Mellor, *Analyzing Ten Poems from* The Poetic Edda*: Oral Formula and Mythic Patterns* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon, 2008).

[8] For a discussion of the oral performance of Eddic poetry, see Terry Gunnell, 'Eddic performance and eddic audiences', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 92-113.

[9] For an overview of manuscripts containing poems that typically constitute the wider Eddic corpus, and a debate over whether the Codex Regius manuscript should be seen as the sole focus for Eddic research, see Joseph Harris, 'Eddic Poetry', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 68-156 (pp. 68-69). A recent summary can also be found in Clunies Ross, 2016, pp. 21-31.

Codex Regius and the wider Eddic corpus. The predominant poetic metres are as follows: *fornyrðislag*, 'old story metre', the most common form and the Eddic metre most similar to that of Old English poetry, though principally stanzaic; *málaháttr*, 'speeches form', which features additional unstressed syllables and has a less formal style in comparison with *fornyrðislag*; and *ljóðaháttr*, 'song form', a stanzaic metre comprising six lines, or two units of three lines.[10] As well as the intra-traditional diversity that distinguishes the Eddic poetic line from the Old English one, there are also differences in content and style between the two traditions, and their literary qualities differ. Lönnroth argues that '[i]n comparison to West-Germanic narrative poetry, the Edda is much less lax, repetitious and conventional in style; its didacticism much more epigrammatic; its rhetoric much more succinct and precise.'[11] For Lönnroth, Eddic poetry is a 'carefully polished product of poetic craftsmanship' rather than 'recordings of an illiterate singer's improvisations.'[12] Although a poem such as *Beowulf* does not exclusively display signs of the latter – it too is crafted to a significant degree, as its storytelling speeches in particular evince – one possible outcome of such polish concerning the representation of artistry is that the succinct, symbolic representation of unnamed performers with generic identifiers found in *Beowulf* were apparently not appropriate for inclusion in Eddic poems. Also, instruments, particularly the harp, do not function in the same manner, appearing as the device of an individual performer in the Eddic corpus rather than as an isolated symbol, as will be shown.

[10] See R.D. Fulk, 'Eddic metres', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 252-70. For an alternative overview, including a discussion the relationship between Eddic verse form and metre and skaldic verse, see Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Eddica minora: A Lesser Poetic Edda?', in *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend*, ed. by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), pp. 183-201 (pp. 188-89).
[11] Lönnroth, 1971, p. 10.
[12] Lönnroth, 1971, p. 10.

There is also a distinction between the uses of formulaic patterning in Eddic and Old English poetry. Whereas in *Beowulf* analogous half-lines encapsulating concise concepts are employed for emphasis, and variation and parallelism develop symbolic associations, formulaic properties in Eddic poetry are generally in the form of repeated phrases, often by way of a refrain, a characteristic which does not appear in Old English poetry except in *Deor* and loosely in *Wulf and Eadwacer*.[13] This method of repetition can be seen as a component and possibly a consequence of Eddic poetry's stanzaic form, another feature rarely found in Old English poetry (*Deor*, *The Rune Poem*, and the late *Instructions for Christians* being notable exceptions). Lönnroth states that in Eddic poetry,

> [formulas] serve as ornaments and as poetic padding rather than as the basic building blocks of composition … they function very much like refrains in the ballad, i.e. to set a mood, emphasize an idea and give a certain unity to a group of stanzas.[14]

However, although the positioning of formulaic language in the narrative differs between the traditions, it is arguable that, save for giving unity to stanzas - though it does this in the two Old English poems that feature stanzas - its functions in Eddic poems as conceived by Lönnroth are much the same in Old English poetry.

Amodio considers the 'leakage', to use Foley's expression, of literary features across traditions. He claims that

> whereas formulas are always linguistically and culturally specific and thus are necessarily aligned only with each tradition's unique prosody, traditional themes are able to cross linguistic (and cultural) boundaries because they are not solely elements of the local expressive economy of any given tradition but are rooted in a far more global one.[15]

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[13] See Brittany Schorn, 'Eddic style', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 270-87 (p. 281-82).
[14] Lönnroth, 1971, p. 2. See also Paul Acker, *Revising Oral Theory: Formulaic Composition in Old English and Old Icelandic Verse* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 96.
[15] Amodio, 2004, pp. 156-57. Ward Parks compares the flyting mode across literary traditions, in Ward Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Also Foley, 1990, especially Chapters 2 and 3.

However, there is no certain passage between such boundaries, no guarantee that proximity between cultures or languages necessitates a transfer, through influence or transmission, of literary attributes. Instances relating to artistry are represented in Old Norse Eddic poetry in a markedly different manner than in Old English poetry, despite the formal similarities, linguistic relationship, and any congruences in their subject matter. In particular, the unnamed performers present in the Old English tradition do not feature in Eddic poetry, although description is similarly limited, and artistry does not feature in the context of hall-entertainment or the feast. Despite this distinction, certain deep associations of symbolic application can still be determined. One method of identifying these analogous deep associations is to consider the gnomic statement in Eddic poetry, comparable in style and content with Old English wisdom poems. For example, the introductory stanzas of the poem *Hyndluljóð*, found in its entirety in the Flateyjarbók manuscript, contain the following gnomic stanzas spoken by the goddess Freyja. Her speech exemplifies the comparable deep associations concerning cultural knowledge, in the form of aphoristic statement, which evidently existed between the Old English and Old Norse poetic traditions:[16]

> 'Vaki, mær meyja!
> Vaki, mín vina,
> Hyndla systir
> er i helli byr!
> Nú er røkkr røkkra,
> ríða við skulum
> til Valhallar
> ok til vés heilags.
>
> Biðjum Herjafǫðr
> í hugum sitja,
> hann geldr og gefr
> gull verðungu;

[16] Based on internal evidence, Flateyjarbók, the name given to Reykjavík, Árni Magnússon Institute, MS GKS 1005 fol., was constructed between 1387 and 1394. See Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, 'Manuscripts and Palaeography', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 245-64 (p. 250).

gaf hann Hermóði
hjálm ok brynju
en Sigmundi
sverð að þiggja.

Gefr hann sigr sumum
en sumum aura,
mælsku mǫrgum
ok mannvit firum;
byri gefr hann brǫgnum
en brag skáldum,
gefr hann mannsemi
mǫrgum rekki. (stanzas 1-3)

'Wake up, girl of girls, wake up, my friend, | Hyndla, sister, who lives in the rock cave! | Now it's the darkness of darknesses, we two shall ride | to Valhall, to the sacred sanctuary.

'Let's ask Odin, lord of hosts, to be kindly, | he gives and pays out gold to the deserving; | he gave Hermod a helmet and corslet, | and to Sigmund a sword to keep.

'He gives victory to some, to some riches, | eloquence to many, and common sense to the living; | he gives following winds to sailors, turns of phrase to poets, | he gives manliness to many a fighter.[17]

Although Barend Sijmons believed the third stanza of this poem to be an interpolation,[18] and the focus in this stanza shifts from individual, named characters - a feature absent from Old English wisdom poems - in the first and second stanzas to the distribution of skills more generally, the gnomic inferences witnessed in Old English wisdom poems are recognisable. Divinely given gifts are assigned, by Odin in this instance, while the skald is perceived as someone with a particular skill, possessing *bragr*, 'art' or 'inspiration'. Similarities in the construction of these gnomic statements, and the association between them, are also perceptible. For example, Freyja also alludes to those possessing eloquence, reminiscent of the way in which the abilities of harper and wordsmith are listed adjacently in poems such as *Christ II* and *Maxims I*. Analogous classification in gnomic statement relating to fundamental conceptions of the

[17] Passage is from *Eddukvæði*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, 2 vols (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2014), vol. I, p. 461. Translation is from *The Poetic Edda*, trans. by Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 245.
[18] Barend Sijmons, *Die Lieder Der Edda*, 2 vols (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1888-1906), I, p. 179; Henry Adams Bellows, *The Poetic Edda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1936), p. 219.

performer's skill are thus perceptible in the gnomic imagination of Old English and Eddic poets. Despite such underlying conceptions, however, there is little depiction of artistry in the Eddic corpus; what does occur will now be discussed.

The seeress in *Vǫluspá*, 'Prophecy of the Seeress', the opening poem of the Codex Regius manuscript, can be seen as an archetypal, ur-storyteller, who has knowledge spanning the extremes of past and future time, so that even Odin desires her wisdom, and it is at his command that her recollections of the past and prophecies for the future are delivered. However, although the possession and acquisition of knowledge is shown to be of primary importance, storytelling is not a major mode of artistry in Eddic poetry. Much Eddic material is conversational and dialogic, and does not routinely lend itself to contexts for formal or professional performances. Artistry's symbolic associations, and the narrative settings in which it appears, are also dissimilar from those found in Old English poetry. For example, artistry does not feature as an aspect of social court activity in Eddic material, either independently or as a component of 'joy in the hall', representing communal pleasure, even though drinking consistently does. There is significant referentiality in Eddic verse, but the method of its generation differs in comparison with the Old English tradition. For example, in *Vǫluspá* the shepherd-giant Eggþér performs with his harp:

> Sat þar á haugi
> ok sló hǫrpo
> gýgiar hirðir,
> glaðr Eggþér.
> Gól um hánom
> í Galgviði
> fagrrauðr hani,
> sá er Fialarr heitir. (stanza 41)

There sat on the grave-mound | and struck his harp | the ogress's herdsman | happy Eggþér. | Above him crew | in Gallows Wood | the gleaming red cock | that is named Fialarr.[19]

[19] Dronke, 1997, p. 18.

As in the Old English tradition, the *harpa*, ‘harp’, is the most significant instrument in Eddic poetry, though here too we cannot be certain of the kind of instrument that was envisaged. The instrument appears four times in the Eddic corpus, though in the context of strife or impending battle rather than as a symbol of pleasure in the social hall. That Eggþér is named distinguishes him from the harpers in *Beowulf* and other old English poems, who are never named or indeed given any characterisation at all, unless it is understood that King Hrothgar is the player described by Beowulf during his speech to Hygelac, and that *Scilling* is the name of Widsith’s companion. Such identification continues throughout the Eddic corpus, in which all reference to harping is associated with named characters. Eggþér is *glaðr*, which could mean ‘happy’, ‘glad’, or ‘joyous’ - but see Ursula Dronke’s remark quoted below - and a musician-herdsman. Whether he is *glaðr* because of his musicianship is not spelt out, but it is unlikely. Some connection can be implied between joy and music, yet Eggþér is *glaðr* for reasons other than because of the act of his performance. In all likelihood, it is because of the impending end for the gods in Ragnarǫk, his awareness of which is made clear as the poem progresses, and his happiness thus derives from wider plot events rather than from the act of playing the harp. Concerning Eggþér as prescient performer, Dronke observes that

> [a]ny minstrel striking his harp to inspire warriors before a battle must appear *glaðr* – confident, elated at the strenuous prospect of destroying an enemy. But this minstrel exulted with good reason: he knew that this time the giants would be the destroyers. The happy echo of his harp from the grave-mound was rousing them to victory.[20]

Although it is not made explicit in the poem, Dronke suggests that Eggþér has particular knowledge concerning future events, and that his playing was influencing those events.

[20] Dronke, 1997, p. 56.

Musical performance's potential to influence, and indeed magical power, not expressed in Old English poetry outside of the metrical *Charms*, would thus be evident here.[21]

The depiction of Eggþér operates in a complex realm of symbolic images. The associations between the act of the performer and the seeress's prophecies concerning Ragnarǫk are clear, although the mythological referentiality in *Vǫluspá* is overall simultaneously intricate and largely allusive. Dronke explains the symbolism thus:

> oppressive portents in the *vǫlva*'s vision are suddenly replaced by a bright scene: a merry herdsman was sitting, playing a harp; in a tree above him a vivid red cock was crowing. Yet this pastoral peacefulness had an undertow of warning. The harpist's seat was a grave-mound; he himself belonged to the giant world – *gýgiar hirðir* – and the wood in which the cock was crowing was hung with corpses. When we hear in the next stanza that two more cocks began to crow, one to wake Oðinn's champions in Valhǫll, and one in the halls of Hel to wake the valorous dead, we can be sure that this minstrel's lay is an *aubade* to war.[22]

The use of artistry in the depiction of this 'bright scene' exemplifies powerfully the way in which referentiality can generate contrast between the description of a benign, seated, passive performance and the wider narrative and cultural circumstances. Significant associative implications relate the circumstances of this stanza to the mythological events with which the poem is concerned: the mound-seat is a burial mound; Eggþér is not guarding sheep but wolves who will fight at the impending final battle at Ragnarǫk; the cockerel crowing in the gallows-tree is one of the portents of that battle.

Eggþér's musical performance is one instance of sound functioning as a symbol alluding to forthcoming war in this section of the poem. The purposeful crowing of the cocks, noted by Dronke, is echoed four stanzas later by the blowing of *Giallarhorn*, the 'shrieking horn', by the god Heimdallr, which acts to signify the initial phase of Ragnarǫk:

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[21] The principal work on the *Charms* and Anglo-Saxon magic more generally, including edition and commentary, remains G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1948). See also Lori Ann Garner, 'Anglo-Saxon Charms in Performance', *Oral Tradition*, 19:1 (2004), 20-42.

[22] Dronke, 1997, p. 56.

Leika Míms synir,
en miǫtuðr kyndiz
at en[o] galla
Giallarhorni.
Hátt blæss Heimdallr
-horn er á lopti-
mælir Óðinn
við Míms hǫfuð. (stanza 45)

Mímr's sons sport, | but fate's measure is lit | at the sound of the clear-ringing | Clarion Horn. | Loud blows Heimdallr | -the horn points to the sky- | Óðinn talks | with Mímr's head.

Sound in diverse forms is depicted in these stanzas as an expression of impending battle, a call to arms, much like the horn's function in Old English poetry. Elsewhere in *The Poetic Edda*, horns are drinking utensils rather than musical or martial instruments, although one exception appears later in the cycle: in stanza 18 of *Hamðismál*, the blowing of a horn is associated with a 'joy in the hall' scene. The instrument is not played as part of the revelry, however. Used instead as a signal in the hands of a warrior, it alerts the revellers to impending danger, and represents another call to arms:[23]

Glaumr var í hǫllo,
halir ǫlreifir,
ok til gota ekki
gerðot heyra,
áðr halr hugfullr
í horn um þaut. (stanza 18)

There was revelry in the hall, | warriors were happy with ale, | and they did not hear | the sound of horses, | until a keen soldier | blew his horn.[24]

Despite such vivid scenes as the one depicting Eggþér, artistry features very little in Eddic poetry overall, and there are few references to it. We are presented with 'joy in the hall' passages, such as the one just quoted, as we are in *Beowulf*. However, although mead is often mentioned being passed around, performance does not feature. Its presence in Greek epic suggest it was common in early European poetry, yet because

[23] An alternative interpretation is that the horn is winded by one of the warriors who are approaching to attack the hall.
[24] Dronke, 1969, p. 165.

the corpus of early Germanic poetry is so limited, it is not clear whether artistry was lost from 'joy in the hall' passages in the Eddic poetic tradition or introduced in the Old English tradition, or indeed were created independently by a poet such as the *Beowulf* one, whose depictions are the primary instances that remain to us in Old English. Resultantly, any processes that might have led to a distinction between the two are also lost. Artistry in Eddic poems has symbolic associations, well attested in the Eggþér stanza, but the method of association differs from that seen in *Beowulf* and other Old English poems. Eddic poets are concerned with action and character agency rather than inherent symbolism. Artistry functions as part of the plot, rather than as a component in an image, or, as in *Beowulf*, as an associative tool or structural device used to introduce historical or legendary context.

Eggþér is one named performer, but a more celebrated harp player, the heroic Gunnarr Gjúkason, brother-in-law of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, uses the harp too. In doing so, rather than merely being the conduit for historical and legendary material, Gunnarr embodies such material by performing heroic-tragic deeds, just as Widsith embodies the transient, knowledgeable and capable entertainer in the Old English tradition. In *Beowulf*, the harp and its song are abstracted from the plot; they are merely indicated rather than used as functional tools that affect events. Additionally, there is little relationship to, and no discussion of, its human performance context: the actual activities carried out through harp use. In the hands (or feet) of Gunnarr, however, the harp performs a function integral to the poem's events. The story of Gunnarr playing the harp is told in three Eddic poems: *Atlakviða*, *Atlamál in Grœnlenzku*, and *Oddrúnargrátr*.[25] These episodes constitute the remaining references to harp playing in Eddic poetry. Although the details of the story change in each occurrence, Gunnarr is

[25] Outside of Eddic poetry, the story of Gunnarr in the snake pit is also told in the *Völsungasaga* and in the *Prose Edda.* See Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir.

never depicted as a performer of artistic material, and his harp playing is consistently a functional device rather than a symbolic or recreational act.

The initial instance in the Codex Regius featuring Gunnarr's harping is in *Atlakviða*, a version of the tale of Atli's killing of Gunnarr and his brother Hogni, and the revenge taken by their sister Guðrún. Banished to a snake-pit by Atli, he plays his harp:

> Lifanda gram
> lagði í garð,
> þann er skriðinn var,
> skatna mengi,
> innan ormum.
> En einn Gunnarr
> heiptmóðr hǫrpo
> hendi kníði–
> glumðo strengir.
> Svá skal gulli
> frœkn hringdrifi
> við fira halda. (stanza 32)

The living prince | they placed in a pit | that was crawling | - a crowd of men did it - | with snakes inside. | But Gunnar, alone, | with hate in his soul, | struck his harp with his hand. | The chords [strings] resounded. | So must a brave, munificent lord | guard his gold | against men.[26]

In this version of the snake-pit story there is little descriptive detail concerning harp playing in this passage save for the reference to use of the hand and the resonance of the chords, though the gnomic style of the final two lines emphasises the heroic nature of Gunnarr's performance. The purpose of the harping is also not made clear. How harping enables him to guard his gold and why he should do so at the moment of his impending death is not immediately apparent either, but it is seemingly behaviour appropriate for such a man, a hero. One inference is that 'the harp helps to lighten anguish', as Dronke suggests, but it is also suggested elsewhere, in the thirteenth-century sources *Dráp*

[26] Dronke, 1969, pp. 9-10.

Niflunga, *Völsunga saga*, and *Skáldskaparmál* in Snorri's *Edda*, that the playing lulls the snakes.[27]

In *Atlamál in grœnlenzku*, an extended version of the same tale of Atli and Guðrún's revenge over him, Gunnarr's hands are bound and he resorts to playing the instrument with his toes. Despite this unorthodox technique, the effectiveness of his playing is more apparent here than in *Atlakviða*, as the reaction of those who hear it reveals:

> Harpu tók Gunnarr,
> hrærði ilkvistum.
> Slá hann svá kunni,
> at snótir gréto,
> klukko þeir karlar,
> er kunno gørst heyra.
> Ríkri ráð sagði–
> raptar sundr brusto. (stanza 63)

Gunnarr took a harp, | touched it with his foot's twigs. | He played with such skill | that women wept | and men sobbed | as they heard it plainly. | He told his fate to the mighty queen- | the roof-beams burst asunder.[28]

Despite the fact that *Atlamál in grœnlenzku* is less 'subtle and allusive' and more 'colloquial and idiomatic, closer to the prose sagas in tone' than *Atlakviða*, detail relating to artistry is again minimal.[29] Gunnarr's skill as a harper is stressed in this instance, together with the effect of his playing upon others and upon the rafters. Those who hear weep at his skilful playing but also at what it represents – his demise. Yet the use of the feet as playing technique undermines any potential relationship between the account and everyday practices.

In *Oddrúnargrátr*, the final poem in the Codex to make reference to Gunnarr and the harp, his playing is offered from a different perspective. Atli's sister Oddrún, who is in love with Gunnarr, describes it within a speech. Whilst she is visiting another court to

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[27] Dronke, 1969, pp. 66-67; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, p. 1043. *Dráp Niflunga* possibly dates from earlier than the thirteenth century.
[28] Dronke, 1969, pp. 89-90.
[29] Larrington, 2014, p. 211.

help with the brewing of beer for a feast, Oddrún hears the sound of a harp and realises it is a plea for help.

> Nam ek at heyra
> ór Hléseyju
> hvé þar af stríðum
> strengir mæltu;
> bað ek ambáttir
> búnar verða,
> vilda ek fylkis
> fjǫrvi bjarga. (stanza 30)

I heard it there in Hlésey, | how the strings were singing of strife; | I told my serving-maids to get ready, | I wanted to save the prince's life![30]

However, she arrives too late to save Gunnarr; Atli's mother, disguised as a snake, kills him. In this instance, we obtain some detail concerning the *stríð*, 'grief' or 'strife' of the sound of the strings as the harp is said to *mæla* 'speak' (or *gjalla*, 'shriek' or 'ring', since *mæltu* is a correction of *gullu* in the manuscript), but there is no further detail. Akin to a signal, an alerting call such as commonly executed by a horn, this could barely be interpreted as a performance, but does bear comparison with the skilful, affecting playing described in *Atlamál in grœnlenzku*. The harping is a communicative act; meaning is generated via the harp's strings.

Despite the relationship between their poetic line, form and language, Eddic poetry is of a different kind from a long narrative of the Old English tradition such as *Beowulf*, or the catalogue style of the wisdom poems. This, together with the differing concerns of Eddic poems, can account somewhat for the lack of similarity in their representations of artistry. Some of the content is comparable, however: there are Eddic poems heroic in tone and focus, and episodes of revelry at court which could have featured artistry do exist. Moreover, the provenance of the two traditions is similarly obscure. The question

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[30] Passage from Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, II, p. 370; Translation from Larrington, 2014, p. 209.

of the possible oral origins of *The Poetic Edda* is as challenging as it is concerning the Old English tradition, and this issue has become as much of a point of contention as it has for *Beowulf* and other Old English poems. For example, Gísli Sigurðsson argues from an oral-formulaic perspective that attempting to date the Eddic poems by relying on the texts is problematic.[31] Lars Lönnroth offers a similar argument specifically in relation to *Guðrúnarkviða I*, highlighting the complexities of its oral prehistory.[32] Additionally, despite the many apparent differences in representation and narrative style between the two traditions, other deep associations of similarity in relation to artistry are perceptible. In both, the harp is the primary instrument, with symbolic aspects to its representation and significant cultural importance, whilst the horn appears within martial contexts and as a signal. Additionally, the gnomic wisdom of both traditions highlights the skill required to be an artistic performer, a skill that is purportedly given divinely. The overall impression is that the representation of artistry differs markedly between Eddic and Old English poetry stylistically, whilst certain similarities in their underlying associations point to certain correspondences concerning the two traditions in the poetic imagination.

As well as underlying similarities between the Old English and Old Norse poetic traditions, an association has long been made by critics between those who performed them. They assert that these performers were related in the past through a common and recognised role in society that was inherent to their respective cultures but also comparable with each other.[33] Percy is one early commentator who conjectures that

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[31] Gísli Sigurðsson, 'On the Classification of Eddic Heroic Poetry in View of the Oral Theory', *The Seventh International Saga Conference: Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages, Spoleto, 4-10 September 1988* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1990), 245-55.
[32] Lars Lönnroth, 'Heroine in Grief: The Old Norse Development of a Germanic Theme', in *Inclinate Aurem. Oral Perspectives on Early European Verbal Culture. A Symposium*, ed. by Jan Helldén et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 2001) pp. 111-27. See also Mellor, particularly pp. 61-68.
[33] But see Roberta Frank, 'Anglo-Scandinavian Poetic Relations', *ANQ*, 3 (1990), 74-79.

there was a relationship between those who performed Old English and Old Norse poems. In his introductory essay on English minstrels, discussed in Chapter 2, he conjectures that

> the profession of oral itinerant Poet was held in the utmost reverence among all the Danish tribes; and therefore we might have concluded that it was not unknown or unrespected among their Saxon brethren in Britain, even if history had been altogether silent on this subject.[34]

Additionally, there have been attempts to see the Old English poetic tradition as being influenced by Old Norse.[35] The distinctions between the two traditions have been highlighted in comparative analyses, although the Eddic form is inherently more comparable to the Old English tradition than the skaldic or saga forms.[36] This chapter has also underlined the differences between these related poetic traditions when it comes to the treatment of artistry. The way in which elements which fall under the artistry concept function as plot devices, and the fact that named individuals perform, align the Old Norse representation of artistry with Classical works such as *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*, and with later English poems such as *King Horn* and *Sir Orfeo*, among others. Perhaps the distinction results from differing cultural contexts relating to contemporary performance practices. One hypothetical reason for the differences highlighted in this chapter between Old Norse Eddic and Old English representations of artistry, particularly for artistry's lack of inherent symbolic associations through allusive reference to unnamed entertainers and their instruments in *The Poetic Edda*, is that in England the tradition of patronising court poets had died out, leading over time to an idealised, archaised perception of them, at least until the tenth century when Athelstan

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[34] Percy, 1839, p. xiv.
[35] For example, Roger Humphris, *Scop and Skald: Norse Influence on Old English Poetry* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wales, 1977).
[36] See, for example, Hazel Carter, 'Poetry and Society: Aspects of Shona, Old English and Old Norse Literature', *Zambezia*, 3:2 (1974) 11-25 (pp. 20-21).

may have received skalds at his court.[37] Whenever the Old English poems were originally composed, they were written down in monastic settings culturally distinct from a mead hall presided over by a heathen, heroic lord. In Scandinavia, however, the skald maintained the tradition of creating and performing eulogistic court poetry after its conversion to Christianity, which took place at various times, but in all places later than Conversion in England.[38] Therefore, the performer is less likely to appear in generic, idealised form, performed by an unnamed character in the literature, because the tradition had been preserved and was ongoing, and there were named antecedents to contemporary skalds.

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[37] According to *Egils Saga*, Athelstan apparently patronised Egill Skallagrímsson who, the saga claims, is said to have composed the *Aðalsteinsdrápa*, of which one stanza is cited in the saga. See Matthew Townend, 'Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England', *RES*, 51 (2000), 349-70.

[38] For detail concerning the conversion of Scandinavians to Christianity, see Alexandra Sanmark, *Power and Conversion: A Comparative Study of Christianization in Scandinavia* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2004), pp. 75-117. Concerning the Conversion and its relationship with the skalds and the sagas, see John Lindow, 'St. Olaf and the Skalds,' in *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. by Thomas Andrew DuBois (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 103-27.

Chapter 8 - Uniform Artistry in Laȝamon's *Brut*

Critics have increasingly been concerned to interrogate the relationship between the Old English poetic tradition and the literature that followed the Norman Conquest, particularly that of the early Middle English period, during which time the changes in the vernacular as a result of Norman French influence were less pronounced than in later Middle English poetry, especially that of Chaucer and his London contemporaries. In addition to the linguistic similarities between Anglo-Saxon prose texts and early Middle English prose material, such as the Katherine Group texts,[1] substantive, stylistic, and associative characteristics of the Old English poetic tradition persisted into the post-Conquest period. As Amodio observes, 'the traditional themes and story patterns that continue to appear in post-Conquest vernacular verse remain linked to their Old English predecessors through other than verbal means.'[2] One of these traditional Old English themes, the idealised representation of artistic performance involving associations with joy, revelry, and successful society, persisted post-Conquest, most notably in the work of Laȝamon, a Worcester priest and poet writing in the period between the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries. This chapter considers the way in which Laȝamon imagined artistry in the sole work ascribed to him, the early Middle English *Brut*, usually dated to between 1190 and 1225, to discover if some influence from the Old English poetic tradition, conscious or unconscious, can be perceived. In the *Brut*, the representation of the artistry theme, whilst possessing features comparable with the Old English tradition, shows evidence of increasing crystallisation and isolation from the

[1] The Katherine Group texts are a collection of five prose works dating from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 34. Concerning Old English linguistic characteristics in these texts, see Dorothy Bethurum, 'The Connection of the Katherine Group with Old English Prose,' *JEGP*, 34:4 (1935), 553-64.
[2] Amodio, 2004, p. 158.

poem's architectonics and adjacent plot events. As Amodio also points out, 'one of the *Brut*'s most striking features is that it contains many narrative patterns, among which are scenes of feasts, voyages, arrivals, and combat, whose thematics are remarkably similar from one occurrence to the next.'[3] This chapter argues that the homogeneity of the *Brut*'s representation of artistry can be seen as a result of its distance from the pre-literate culture of oral transmission, notwithstanding any oral-derived literary characteristics operating within the poem. Genre should be borne in mind when considering the *Brut* in relation to *Beowulf* in particular. The *Brut* is not a heroic epic so much as a historical account, and so artistry's allusions and the complex relationships between artistry and the reflection on cultural circumstances, and with the poem's overall structure, seen in *Beowulf* should not perhaps be expected. However, the poems feature substantial comparable subject matter, both being a mixture of history and legend, and the *Brut*, like *Beowulf*, foregrounds heroic events. The typical context for the appearance of artistry, joy in the hall, is a significant element of both poems.

The *Brut* survives in two manuscripts: London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A IX and London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho C XIII. There are significant differences between the content of the two versions, to the extent that Caligula is approximately 3,000 lines longer than Otho. There is also a notable difference in diction between the two versions. Caligula contains an archaic lexis, often relying heavily on Anglo-Saxon terms, and it features considerable use of compounds reminiscent of Old English poetic vocabulary. Moreover, as will be discussed, the archaisms relating to artistry in Caligula often echo the language of performance in Old English poetry, particularly its vocabulary concerning performers. Otho meanwhile routinely favours Norman-derived words over the archaisms of Caligula, and also omits many archaic words and lines. Previously this was thought to suggest a later date for

[3] Amodio, 2004, p. 113.

Otho. However, palaeographic evidence dates both manuscripts to the second half of the thirteenth century.[4] Both manuscripts rely on an earlier source now lost, though E. G. Stanley suggests that Caligula's diction is linguistically closer to the authorial text than Otho.[5] Françoise Le Saux also considers Caligula to be 'most faithful to the authorial copy'.[6] However, Harford questions the premise that the *Brut*'s two manuscripts should be contrasted with each other, and indeed that consciously-archaic language is present in Laȝamon's writing.[7] Moreover, according to Harford, Stanley's notion of the 'Otho reviser',[8] which has been taken up by subsequent critics such as Donoghue, is an assumption based on a simplistic understanding of the relationship between the two texts. Harford notes that Donoghue's assumption of the Otho reviser is 'a clear indication that [he] perceives that an almost author-like persona with a clear and recognizable agenda is documented in Otho'.[9] The Otho scribe was a reviser, but he didn't revise Caligula. Although comparison is made in this analysis between the two manuscripts, this thesis supposes that both scribes revised an original version, with the Otho scribe being more liberal with his amendments and thus creating a text more divergent than Caligula from the original. No process of revision involving the Otho scribe using Caligula as a source is envisioned.[10]

The *Brut* is a product of manuscript sources, in particular Wace's *Roman de Brut*, an Anglo-Norman poem dated to 1155, which is in turn based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin *Historia Regum Britannie*, 'The History of the Kings of Britain',

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[4] Thomas J. Harford, *A Comprehensive Study of Laȝamon's* Brut (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon, 2002), p. 2.
[5] E. G. Stanley, 'Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentiments', *Medium Ævum*, 38 (1969), 23-37.
[6] Françoise Le Saux, *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), p. 13.
[7] Harford, pp. 57-75, particularly p. 62.
[8] Stanley, 1969, p. 29
[9] Harford, p. 62.
[10] On the relationship between the two MSS and their possible progentor, see Le Saux, 1989, pp. 10-13.

dated to c.1136.[11] Significantly, the development of the treatment of artistry in the process of translation and expansion from Laȝamon's source texts reveals the influence of Old English poetry's overall style and representation of artistry on his work. In particular, Laȝamon inserts or greatly expands upon the depictions of artistry in his sources, showing influence from the Old English narrative tradition and adopting elements also found in *Beowulf*.[12] The fact that the *Brut* is a consciously literary text clearly influenced its reception by early audiences as well as the circumstances of its creation. Amodio argues that

> in the entire canon of early Middle English poetry there is probably no poem less well suited for oral delivery than the *Brut*, a poem whose subject matter and extraordinary length alone militate strongly against the possibility of its ever having been presented to a listening audience.[13]

Length should not be considered as a barrier to oral delivery, however. More convincingly, Brewer points out that Laȝamon himself 'appears to envisage a solitary reader' rather than a public audience, as the narrator consistently addresses his reader in the singular.[14] Despite this, traces of oral poetics linger in the poem, though the *Brut*'s oral characteristics have been influenced by inevitable changes in the process of poem creation over time, as Amodio points out.[15] Glowka believes that it was 'meant to be read aloud or at least read so that its cadences and sounds can be felt'.[16] Moreover, oral-formulaic analysis has been applied to the poem. For example, Dennis P. Donahue considers its formulaic features, arguing that Laȝamon applied the characteristics of an

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[11] Laȝamon's sources are discussed below, from p. 287.
[12] For detail concerning Laȝamon's amplifications of Wace, see Ringbom, pp. 105-23. For comparison between Laȝamon and Wace in relation to artistry in particular, see pp. 81-84.
[13] Mark C. Amodio, 'Tradition, Performance, and Poetics in the Early Middle English Period', *Oral Tradition*, 15:2 (2000), 191-214 (p. 200).
[14] Derek Brewer, 'The Paradox of the Archaic and the Modern in Laȝamon's Brut', in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley*, ed. by Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray and Terry Hoad (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 188-205 (p. 205).
[15] Amodio, 2000, p. 201; Amodio, 2004, pp. 98-128.
[16] Arthur W. Glowka, 'The Poetics of Laȝamon's *Brut*', in *The Text and Tradition of Laȝamon's* Brut, ed. by Françoise Le Saux (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 57-63 (p. 62).

orally-circulated poem in the adaptation of his sources,[17] and Håkan Ringbom adopts the oral-formulaic concept of the theme in his discussion of the narrative correlations between *Beowulf* and the *Brut*.[18] Nevertheless, the *Brut* is principally a textually-informed work, even if it shows signs of influence from an oral-derived tradition and some intention to acknowledge that tradition, or make use of its characteristics in his own creation. Following a consideration of the artistry depicted in Wace, Laȝamon's main textual source, this chapter explores the creativity that Laȝamon employs in the process of amplifying significantly the references to artistry in his work. This creativity is shown to be influenced by a familiarity with Old English poetry and a desire to develop aesthetic and thematic associations with that earlier tradition, with distinctive results.

Wace's *Roman de Brut* features two significant episodes involving performing artistry. In the first episode (9101-10), the Saxon nobleman Badulph disguises himself as a harper to gain access to his brother Colgrin who is being besieged by Arthur at York. Taken directly from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, it is effectively a translation. As expected from an Anglo-Norman work based on a Latin prose source, the passage bears little relationship to references to artistry in the Old English poetic tradition; artistry is used as a plot device, in the manner of the 'harper in disguise' theme.[19] This episode appears relatively faithfully in the *Brut*. In the second episode, there is detailed description of the festivities that follow the coronation of Arthur, including a long list of instruments and reference to various performing artists:

Mult out a la curt jugleürs,
Chanteürs, estrumenteürs;
Mult peüssiez oïr chançuns,
Rotruenges e novels suns,

[17] Dennis P. Donahue, *Lawman's Brut, an early Arthurian poem: a study of Middle English formulaic composition* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1991).
[18] See Ringbom.
[19] See further below, p. 303.

Vieleüres, lais de notes,
Lais de vïeles, lais de rotes,
Lais de harpes, lais de frestels,
Lires, tympes e chalemels,
Symphonies, psalteriuns,
Monacordes, timbes, coruns.
Assez i out tresgeteürs;
Joeresses e jugleürs;
Li un dient contes e fables,
Alquant demandent dez e tables. (10543-56)

There were many minstrels at court, singers and instrumentalists: many songs could be heard, melodies sung to the rote and new tunes, fiddle music, lays and melodies, lays on fiddles, lays on rotes, lays on harps, lays on flutes, lyres, drums and shawms, bagpipes, psalteries, string instruments, tambourines and choruns. There were plenty of conjurors, dancers and jugglers. Some told stories and tales, others asked for dice and backgammon.[20]

In this section, Wace significantly expands upon Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, which briefly mentions a music concert together with a general reference to musical instruments. Perhaps because it was perceived of as an unnecessary expansion on Wace's sources, the passage does not appear in nine of the thirty-two extant manuscripts and fragments of the *Roman de Brut*. This passage is also largely distinct from the Old English poetic tradition. In particular, the use of lists of different instruments and performers in the *Roman de Brut* is markedly dissimilar to the Old English style; rote, lyre, harp, and other string instruments are distinguished, for example. Perhaps Laȝamon's source manuscript was one of those in which the passage was omitted, because his work does not feature this episode of artistry, and in fact is unusually terse in comparison with Wace at this key point in the chronicle. The *Brut* has the following:

Muchel wes þa blisse þa Arður com to burhȝe;
þer wes bemene blæst and swiðe glade beornes.
Þer heo houen to kinge Arður þene ȝunge. (9942-44)

Great was the joy when Arthur came to the town; there was blowing of trumpets and great rejoicing among the men. There they raised the youthful Arthur to the kingship.[21]

[20] Passage and translation from Judith Weiss, *Wace's* Roman de Brut, A History of the British*:* *Text and Translation* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), p. 265.
[21] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 512-13.

Exemplifying Laȝamon’s creativity in interpretation, despite dispensing with Wace’s instruments, this brief passage does introduce reference to trumpets, not present in Wace’s long list. As will be shown, trumpets are principally envisaged as instruments of ceremony rather than of court-pleasure in the *Brut*. They are commonly listed separately, referring to distinct aspects of a passage.

Episodes of Artistry in the *Brut*

Laȝamon develops the *Roman de Brut*’s 7433 octosyllabic couplets significantly, to 16095 long lines in Caligula. He adds more detail to the Arthurian elements of Wace’s poem in particular, but expands the references to performing artistry throughout his work, and in doing so includes many stylistic elements and diction recognisable from the Old English poetic tradition. As in *Beowulf*, references to artistry feature extensively in ‘joy in the hall’ episodes, and there are numerous references to unnamed vocal, harping and other musical performances. The poem does feature named artistic performers, most notably the master musician King Blæðgabreat:

> Seoððe sone æfter þet   com a king Blæðgabreat.
> Seoððen þeos worle wes astolled   ne cuðe na mon swa muchel of song
> of harpe and of salteriun,   of fiðele and of coriun,
> of timpe and of lire   –gleomen him weoren deore.
> He cuðen al þeos songes,   and þat gleo of ilche londe.
> Of him wes muchel speche   ȝeond þas woruld-riche
> swa þat al þis moncun   þat of him iherden tellen
> seiden þat he wes god   of alle gleo-cræften.
> Æuer wes þe king glad   and æuere he gomen luueden,
> and þus he lædde his lif   þe while þe hit ilæste.   (3488-97)

Then shortly after [Sillius] came a king called Blathgabreat. No man since this world was created knew so much about music of harp and of psaltery, of fiddle and of tambour, of tambourine and of lyre – musicians were valued by him. He knew all the songs, and the music of every land. There was much talk of him throughout the world so that all the people who had heard tell of him said that he was supreme master of all musical arts. The king was always cheerful and always loved revelry, and he lived his life in this way while it lasted.[22]

[22] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 180-81.

However, this description of Blæðgabreat is taken closely from Wace, who expanded on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s brief description; Laȝamon’s amplification is negligible. When Laȝamon does expand on his sources, he does so through the introduction of unnamed performers who are often given labels relating to artistry, reminiscent of those in *Beowulf*. They appear at times when society is in order, particularly when a king returns home victorious following adventure and conflict, especially in the section of the poem that focuses on King Arthur’s adventures, which, as noted, is where Laȝamon expands on his sources the most. As a result of the similarities in its use of language and application of theme, the representation of artistry in the *Brut* can be seen as a continuation of the style found in *Beowulf*. However, their representations also differ significantly, in ways that reveal the *Brut* to be a poem further removed than *Beowulf* from the practice of oral composition and transmission. In the *Brut*, artistry functions in a far more homogeneous way overall in comparison with *Beowulf*. It also has less significance in relation to the poem’s structure, and little symbolic relationship with wider plot events. There is no interperformativity. Ringbom observes that artistry features as a component of feasting, and that ‘the feasts, which do not vary much in length, are of a very conventional character’ and, moreover, they ‘are described in the same terms regardless of the historical period described.’[23] Laȝamon applies his imaginings of what artistry ought to be uniformly, for the duration of his chronicle.

Early in the *Brut*, a religious festival in the court of King Brutus, the legendary first king of Britain, is described:

> Hit ilomp on ane daȝe þat Brutus and his duȝeðe
> makeden halinesse mid wrscipen heȝen,
> mid mete and mid drinchen and mid murie gleo-dreme,
> mid seoluer and mid golde þe elche bar an honde,
> mid horsen and mid scruden –bliss wes on hirede;
> wes al þat folc swa bliðe swa heo neoren nauer er on liue. (911-16)

[23] Ringbom, p. 90.

It happened one day that Brutus and his followers were performing holy rites with solemn ceremony, with food and drink and with merry music-making, with silver and gold which each bore in hand, with horses and raiment – joy was among the people; that whole company was happier than they had ever been.[24]

This passage is similar to Wace, in which dancing, feasting and playing games is mentioned, although Laȝamon includes specific reference to *gleo-dreme*, 'music', or 'pleasurable sound' more generally. In this instance, as in *Beowulf*, anonymous, idealised artistry is associated with feasting and signs of wealth, and also with the general pleasure experienced by a ruler and his company. The use of archaic language in this passage is also reminiscent of the poetic language of *Beowulf*, particularly the compound *gleo-dreme*, unique to the *Brut* in Middle English, which exemplifies the stylistic similarities between Laȝamon's depiction of successful society in action and that found in *Beowulf*. This is a rarely-used compound; *gleodream* in *Beowulf* (3021), referring to that which will be lost following Beowulf's death, is the only extant instance in Old English literature. Moreover, images of joyous prosperity in the royal court are contrasted with oppressive external dangers which require a heroic response, also comparable with events in *Beowulf*: immediately following this image of peace and prosperity, twenty giants attack Brutus' company of Trojans and five hundred of his men are killed. Significantly, Otho retains this description of merriment together with the compound, with the variant plural form *gle-dremes*. Otho's only omission in this passage is of Caligula 915, which refers to the horses and raiment.

Later in the *Brut*, an episode similar in content occurs when King Leir visits his daughter Cordoille at the court of her husband, Aganippus, king of the Franks:

Heo comen togadere   and ofte heo custen;
heo uenden to burȝe;   bliss wes an hirede.
Þer wes bemene song   þere ȝeden pipen among;
al weren þe hællen   bihongen mid pellen,
alle þa mete-burdes   ibrusted mid golde.
Ringes of golde   ælc mon hafte on honed;

[24] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 48-51.

mid fiþelen and mid harpen   hæleðes þer sungen. (1813-19)

They met and kissed repeatedly; they went to the city; there was rejoicing in the court. There was the song of trumpets mingled with that of pipes; the halls were all hung with tapestry, all the dining tables laid with gold. Everyone had rings of gold upon their hands; there was singing to the fiddle and harp.[25]

Laʒamon's concern in this passage is again to represent the display of wealth and feasting in the hall during a period of celebration. The concise depiction of artistry is immediately reminiscent of *Beowulf*, as is the 'there was' statement, a formulaic introduction to artistic activity considered in Chapter 4, p. 180. The *Brut* departs significantly from Wace at this point, adding the rejoicing in court, the sound of trumpets and pipes and other musical performance, and the images of prosperity. Although Otho has suffered damage affecting the legibility of this part of the poem, it can be determined that much of this passage is retained, except for 1815 that contains the reference to pipes and trumpets, the inclusion of which in Caligula is a formulaic application conforming to a structure in which Laʒamon follows narrative events with mention of trumpets and sometimes pipes, before alluding to the wealth of the court and then pleasure and artistry (cf. other passages discussed in this thesis: 2545-50, 7455-61, 11415-21). Laʒamon thus commonly distinguishes the function of trumpets from other instruments and singing through the chronology of his passages.

As in *Beowulf*, Laʒamon does not restrict artistry to within the court. A battle-plain is the setting for another episode of similar style, which occurs when Brenne, a British king, and his brother Belin, duke of Burgundy, are reconciled through the efforts of their mother following a long rivalry. As in the scene featuring Leir, Cordoille and Aganippus, the passage begins with an affectionate reunion:

Þer heo hom custen   þe weren kings bearn,
bifeoren þa twam ferden   freondscipe makeden.
Bemen þer bleowen   bliss wes on folke.
Þer weore segge [gleomenne in Otho] songe,   þer were pipen imagge,

[25] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 94-95.

> þer wes swa muchel murehðe þat ne mihte heo beon namare.
> Þus iwerað Brennes sæht whit his broðer. (2545-50)

There they who were king's sons kissed each other, became reconciled before the two armies. The trumpets sounded; there was joy among the people. There were minstrel songs mingled with the sound of pipes, there was so much merriment that it could not have been greater. So Brenne became reconciled with his brother.[26]

In this instance, trumpets are again isolated as formal symbols of ceremony and wider celebration, though pipes are here incorporated into the allusion to public merriment. This is not a depiction of court performance in the manner of *Beowulf*, however. Minstrelsy in particular (*gleomenne*) is only a feature of Otho, as noted below, and instead it is an instance relating merriment among the armies. Although a field containing the two armies is the setting for the reconciliation, Laȝamon's description leaves open the possibility that the music and joy might not be confined to them; he could have meant that there was jubilation among the wider population. Laȝamon again adds artistry to Wace's account at this point - no trumpets, pipes, joy or minstrelsy feature in Wace - and he is shown to be creating his own images of peace, with this episode and the episode featuring Leir both containing similar elements: trumpets, pipes, and minstrelsy, although a reference specifically to harping only appears in the Leir episode.

In this passage, one significant distinction between the two manuscripts occurs at 2548. There, Otho replaces Caligula's line: *þer weore segge songe*, 'there was the song of men',[27] with the more specific *þar was gleomenne songe*, 'there was the song of the minstrel', exemplifying the continued relevance of the term *gleoman* into the Middle English period. Unlike the term *scop*, *gleoman* and its variant forms continued to be used to refer to entertainers even into the later medieval period, where it features in the *Lay of Havelock the Dane* and *Piers Plowman*, among other poems. William Dunbar

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[26] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 132-33.
[27] Barron and Weinberg translate *segge* as 'minstrel', 1995, p. 133, perhaps because of their awareness that *gleomen* was used in Otho. The more literal 'men' is preferred here, however.

uses the term as late as the 1510s. Except for when it omits 9586-87, reference to *gleomen* in Caligula is retained in Otho, and indeed the term is preferred at 2548 in place of Caligula's *segge*, as stated. Otho routinely substitutes *segge*, which despite deriving from Old English *secg*, 'man', is not strictly an archaism, being used in later poetry; it might have become a dialect word, as it is used by the *Gawain* poet and by the poet of the *Alliterative Morte Arthur*.[28]

When the treacherous Rouwenne feigns to king Vortimer that she has adopted Christianity, Laȝamon describes the following:

> Þa wæs Uortimer þe king   bliþe þurh alle þing;
> he wende þat hit weore soð   þat þeo scaðe sæide.
> Bemen þer bleowen,   blisse wes on hirede.
> Forð mon brohte þat water   biforen þan kinge;
> heo seten to borde   mid muchelure blisse.
> Þa þe king hafde iæten,   þa eoden þeinesmen to mete;
> in halle heo drunken,   harpen þer dremden.   (7455-61)

King Vortimer was then the happiest of men; he thought that what the evil creature [Rouwenne] said was true. Then trumpets were sounded, there was rejoicing at court. Water for washing was brought to the king; amid great rejoicing they all sat down to table. When the king had eaten, the noble servitors began their meal; there was drinking in the hall, there was the sound of harps.[29]

This passage is also a Laȝamon expansion. The sounding of the trumpets and the harps, indeed the entire description of the court, is not to be found in Wace. Otho retains this passage except for one line, 7457, and thus the ceremonial trumpets are again omitted, along with the general reference to rejoicing at court. The focus on harp sound, described using the Middle English verb *dremen*, which developed from Old English *dream* and also Old English *dryman* 'to sing aloud, rejoice, be joyful', recalls the reference to harp sound or music at 89 of *Beowulf*: *þær wæs hearpan sweg*, as well as other reminiscences of *hearpan sweg* in later passages of *Beowulf*.[30]

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[28] See *MED* [online], 'segge, (n. (2))', < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=171196101&egdisplay=open&egs=171201478> [accessed 11 July 2018].
[29] Barron and Weinberg, p. 385.
[30] See *OED* [online], 'dream, *v.*[1]', <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57601> [accessed 15 June 2017].

The formulaic character of the *Brut* belies its literary influences. All four of the passages above contain the *bliss ewes*, ‘there was joy’, ‘b’ half-line, associating joy with either *hirede*, ‘court’ or *folke*, ‘people’:

bliss wes on hirede (915)
bliss wes an hirede (1814)
bliss wes on folke (2547)
bliss wes on hirede (7457)

For Laȝamon, *bliss*, ‘joy’, is clearly a routine concept associating a positive emotional state, partly the result of artistry, with the communal court space and its populace, as it was for the *Beowulf* poet. Though it is not uniform in all passages, another formulaic characteristic of Laȝamon’s passages of artistry is their overall construction, which can be broken down as follows: protagonists in action, trumpets, feasting and wealth display, artistry.

Gleomen appear again in the *Brut* when king Uther Pendragon reappears to his people, instigating another period of rejoicing among the Britons; *bliss* is again emphasised:

Þa com he to þan ærde þer læi his ferde,
Merlin hafde a þene king his wlite iset þurh alle þing;
þa icneowen cnihtes heore kinelauerd;
þer was moni oht Brut mid blissen afeolled.
Þa weoren inne Bruttene blissen inoȝe:
hornes þer bleowen, gleomen gunnen gleowen;
glad æuerælch cniht, al mid pælle biþæht. (9582-88)

Then the king came to the place where his army lay. Merlin had restored his appearance to him in all respects, and so the knights recognised their lord and king; many a valiant Briton there was filled with joy. In Britain then was much rejoicing: horns were sounded there, minstrels made music; glad was each and every knight, clad all in fine clothes.[31]

Laȝamon clearly favours the inclusion of a description of celebration involving artistry in order to mark a king’s return, and it forms a recurrent theme in the *Brut*. However, this passage shows a compression of his typical structure, with horns, minstrelsy and wealth display - the fine clothes - occurring over two lines.

[31] Barron and Weinberg, p. 493.

Perhaps the most overt archaism applied by Laȝamon in relation to artistry is the use of the term *scop*, in the plural form *scopes*, which otherwise died out very early in the post-Conquest period. This continued use in the hands of Laȝamon can be seen as representative of a consciously archaic choice of descriptive language as witnessed in Caligula. As with *gleomen*, the singular form of the word is never used, such is the general nature of the description; they consistently appear as an anonymous and homogeneous group. Laȝamon uses two forms: *scopes* 'poets', and *leod-scopes*, 'poets of the people' or 'poets of the king/prince/ruler'. E.G. Stanley argues that 'many of the compounds not found in ME outside the *Brut*, e.g. those with "leod" as first element, clearly belong to the tradition of OE poetic compounds',[32] though it should be acknowledged that, as Le Saux suggests, compounding does not necessarily denote conscious archaism.[33] The compound *leod-scop* does not appear in pre-Conquest literature, although *leod* does derive from Old English, and so Laȝamon could have adopted the practice of inventing nonce compounds from his perception of the diversity of compounding in Old English poems and created *leod-scopes*, among other *leod*-compounds unique to him. It shows that he believed such practice to be 'permissible and desirable within the traditional poetic diction', as Stanley suggests.[34]

Scopes often appear separately from *gleomen* in the *Brut*, lending support to Opland's distinction even at this late date and distance from the Old English tradition, or possibly indicating that Laȝamon had an understanding that there was a distinction earlier in the Anglo-Saxon period. They are mentioned together, however, in two references to a prophecy by Merlin concerning Arthur. The first passage reads:

Af him scullen gleomen   godliche singen;

[32] Stanley, 1969, p. 30.
[33] Le Saux, 1989, pp. 189-92. See also W.R.J. Barron, 'The Idiom and the Audience of Laȝamon's *Brut*', in *Laȝamon: Contexts, Language, and Interpretation*, ed. by Rosamund Allen, Lucy Perry, and Jane Roberts (London: CLAMS, 2002), pp. 157-84 (pp. 178-79).
[34] Stanley, 1969, p. 30.

of his breosten scullen æten aðele scopes;
scullen of his blode beornes beon drunke. (9410-12)

Of him shall minstrels splendidly sing; of his breast noble bards shall eat, heroes shall be drunk upon his blood.[35]

Otho replaces *aðele scopes* 'noble bards' with *staleworþe kempes*, 'brave warriors', so that warriors perform the actions of the final two lines, and instead of the first two lines being variation on the roles of artist figures, as they are in Caligula, the last line becomes a combination of variation and parallelism. Otho does however retain the reference to *gleomen* that features in this section. Later in the poem, at 11495, a slightly expanded passage recounting the same prophecy by Merlin again features both *scopes* and *gleomen*:

Al þat iherde of Arðure telle
heom þuhte muchel seollic of selen þan kinge.
And swa hit wes iuuren iboded, ær he iboren weoren.
Swa him sæide Merlin, þe witeʒe wes mære,
þat a king sculde cume of Vðere Pendragune,
þat gleomen sculden wurchen burd of þas kinges breosten,
and þerto sitten scopes swiðe sele
and eten heore wullen ær heo þenne fusden,
and winscenches ut teon of þeos kinges tungen,
and drinken and dreomen daies and nihtes;
þis gomen heom sculde ilasten to þere weorlde longe. (11489-99)

All who heard tell of Arthur marvelled greatly at the noble king. And so it had been foretold long ago, before he was born. Merlin himself, the famous prophet, said so, said that a king should descend from Uther Pendragon, that minstrels should make a table of that king's breast, and most excellent poets sit down thereat and eat all they wished before they went away, and draw draughts of wine from that king's tongue, and drink and make merry both day and night; this entertainment should suffice them to the end of the world.[36]

Otho differs again at this point, this time omitting Caligula's 11496 featuring *scopes* entirely, whilst retaining the *gleomen* of the previous line. Although Donahue suggests that these references to Merlin's prophecy of artists feasting on Arthur were independently devised or at least inventively employed by Laʒamon, Le Saux notes that they appear to have been taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini*

[35] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 484-85.
[36] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 590-91.

rather than Wace, in which they do not appear.[37] Both passages are stylistically distinct from the Old English tradition.

There is an instance in which *scopes* are mentioned in a similar manner as in *Beowulf*, when Arthur returns safely home to Britain, landing at Grimsby:

> Þat iherden sone þa hæhste of þissen londe
> and to þære quene com tidende of Arðure þan kinge,
> þat he wes isund icumen and his folc on selen.
> Þa weoren inne Bruttene blissen inoȝe:
> her wes fiþelinge and song, her wes harpinge imong,
> pipen and bemen murie þer sungen;
> scopes þer sungen of Arðure þan kingen
> and of þan muchele wurðscipe þe he iwunnen hafeden. (11324-31)

> The greatest men in this land soon learnt of that and news of King Arthur was brought to the queen, that he had returned safe and sound and with his army in good heart. Then there was in Britain great rejoicing: here sounds of viol and of voice, mingling with music of the harp, there pipes and trumpets ringing out merrily; there minstrels sang of Arthur the king and of the great honour which he had won.[38]

In this passage, the pipes and trumpets and the harping and singing are inverted, and the trumpets and harps are grouped with the other references to artistry. Also unique in this passage, another expansion on Wace, the subject matter of the *scopes*, their praise of the king and his deeds, is specified, added to the end of the usual celebratory elements. They are shown to be performing the archetypal role of eulogist, possibly in the professional service of their lord, although this is not specified. Again, *scopes* are omitted from Otho; this time, the *scopes þer sungen* half-line at 11330a is not included. It appears that references to such archaic characters were deemed irrelevant by the Otho scribe, whilst his treatment of *gleomen* is far more favourable, even choosing to include them when Caligula does not.

Shortly after, the subsequent episode of artistry follows disorder in Arthur's London court; there is animosity between *hæxte þeines*, 'high ranking thanes', and their knights, who arrive from different parts of Arthur's kingdom. After scuffles break out,

[37] Donahue, p. 78, pp. 181-82; Le Saux, 1989, p. 209.
[38] Barron and Weinberg, p. 583.

Arthur orders the men to break up the fight. Following this display of authority, his court returns to order and there is reconciliation:

> Seoððen me bleou bemen mid swiðe murie dremen;
> weoren him leof weoren him læð, elc þer feng water and clæð
> and seoððen adun seten sæhte to borden,
> al for Arðure æiȝe, aðelest kingen.
> Birles þer þurngen, gleomen þer sungen,
> harpen gunnen dremen; duȝeðe wes on selen.
> Þus fulle seoueniht wes þan hirede idiht. (11415-21)

Then trumpets were sounded with a cheerful noise; whether reconciled or not, everyone there made use of water and towel and afterwards sat down to table in amity, solely out of respect for Arthur, the noblest of kings. Cup-bearers thronged there, there minstrels sang, harps resounded; the company was in high spirits. For fully a week the court was maintained in this manner.[39]

The usual construction: trumpets, court activity and wealth, and minstrelsy, is returned to in this passage. Otho again retains the line featuring the *gleomen* (11419) at this point, although it does omit the following line that features the *harpen* (11420). Harps are mentioned in these scenes more often in Caligula than in Otho, indicating in Otho a move away from the dominance of the instrument in the Old English period which is reflected in Caligula and suits Caligula's archaic style. The dominance of the harp as component of the description of artistry is ending by the early Middle English period in general, as other instruments are routinely used. Ringbom notes this, but also argues that in the *Brut* other instruments such as trumpets and horns 'are, however, mentioned not in accounts of feasts proper, but in such passages where the people give vent to feelings of joy and happiness'.[40] This gives the impression that the instruments appear in different passages; the instruments do however appear in the same passages, though the harp is still a distinctive component of the feast element, singled out from the overall joy accompanied and represented by other references to artistry and pleasure, at 1819, 7461, 11420, and 12073. The passage describing the disorder and return to normality at Arthur's court is characteristic of the *Brut*'s latter stages, where artistry

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[39] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 586-87.
[40] Ringbom, p. 88.

appears only tersely. Laȝamon, having presented episodes of feasting and other joyous occasions featuring artistry earlier in the poem, appears to feel less need to offer detailed description in later passages. For example:

> Þus Arður þe king delde his drihtliche londes
> after heore iwurhte for he heom þuhte wurðe.
> Þa weoren bliðe spelles in Arðures hallen;
> þer wes harepinge and song, þer weoren blissen imong. (12070-73)

So King Arthur distributed his royal lands according to the merits of those men whom he thought worthy. Then there was joyful entertainment in Arthur's halls; there was harping and singing, and other pleasures as well.[41]

This instance reprises the compression seen at 9586-88. Reference to artistry is also very brief on another occasion, when Arthur and his army set sail:

> Wunden into widen sæ þeines wunder bliðe.
> Scipen þer forð þrungen, gleomen þer sungen,
> seiles þer tuhten, rapes þer rehtten;
> wederen alre selest and þa sæ sweuede. (12747-50)

In high spirits the warriors set out upon the open sea. Then ships pressed onwards, minstrels sang, sails were hoisted, ropes adjusted; the weather was very calm and the sea lay quiet.[42]

At this point, artistry achieves ultimate brevity and redundancy, free from function in the text. Outside of the traditional performance space, its intended associations have become ambiguous. Performance is isolated from its usual contexts, being listed among references to seafaring and its associated tasks. It could be that the minstrels are contributing to the high spirits, or reflecting and supporting heroic endeavour, but no clear purpose for artistry's inclusion is perceptible at this point, save for the function of contributing to the rhyme of 12748.

Laȝamon's Notion of Tradition

Amodio argues that

> [s]ome isolated elements of Laȝamon's feasting scenes, such as the joyous noise and the music and song that attend the occasion, clearly descend from Anglo-Saxon tradition, but their overall contours deviate so greatly from those found in

[41] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 622-23.
[42] Barron and Weinberg, p. 657.

> Old English poetry that a structuralist reading of them yields only general insights.[43]

Unfortunately, Amodio does not see artistry to be an appropriate subject for the comparative analysis that he undertakes with Wace, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, and Old English poetry, to highlight how Laȝamon is informed by oral poetics. Instead, he compares one scene in which a hero battles a monstrous foe, and another in which a woman greets a man and offers a cup to him.[44] This is justifiable; those episodes contain more specific plot details, including named characters, and they have typically heroic and ceremonial characteristics respectively. Yet if comparison is made between episodes of artistry in the *Brut* and *Beowulf*, we can observe similarity in their generalised representation, and there are certainly linguistic correlations. Additionally, episodes in the *Brut* are reminiscent of the point in *Beowulf* at which the Geats have arrived at Hrothgar's hall (494b-98). In *Beowulf*, a reference to artistry is placed among a description of joy in the hall during a period of relative peace for the Danish people as they welcome Beowulf and his entourage, bearing no structural relationship with events before or after its description. Unlike other instances of artistry in *Beowulf*, the performer does not introduce a specific tale and the passage does not have any symbolic function other than to represent pleasure and effectiveness at court. This passage is comparable with Laȝamon's representations throughout the *Brut*. Indeed, the most significant difference between the treatment of artistry in *Beowulf* and the *Brut* is that at no point does Laȝamon use artistry to initiate elements of the narrative. Like the performers who appear in his poem, the *Beowulf* poet places significance on and shows close identification with his fictional representations of artistry, by using them as intrinsic components that unite and connect narrative elements, whilst also developing symbolic associations. Laȝamon's artistry, by contrast, whilst being a routine aspect of

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[43] Amodio, 2004, p. 114.
[44] Amodio, 2004, pp. 114-128.

hall entertainment and feasting showing obvious relationships with pleasure and success, is superfluous to the architectonics and wider symbolic and cultural contexts of his work. Artistry is not so much a literary device in the *Brut* as a component of a generalised description of pleasure, though it is usually an aspect of court life reminiscent of Old English representation, particularly as one of the characteristics of the feast, as Magennis discusses in relation to *Beowulf*.[45]

It is arguable, given the lack of such representation in other Old English narrative poems, that Laȝamon could have been influenced by *Beowulf* specifically, or by a poem in *Beowulf*'s mould, now lost. Like the *Beowulf* poet, Laȝamon engages with subject matter that looks back to an earlier time, which thus takes him outside his contemporary cultural milieu. Moreover, he has an overtly anti-Norman stance that is revealed in his treatment of his material, his language, and his verse-form. Derek Pearsall believes that 'Laȝamon is a massive erratic in the history of English poetry. He proves nothing about the continuity of the alliterative tradition but his own obstinacy: his sources and models lay outside the tradition…'[46] Pearsall also rejects any idea that Laȝamon's heroic style, particularly his description of battle, is influenced by Old English.[47] Similarly, Thorlac Turville-Petre claims that 'the suggestion which is sometimes made that Laȝamon was drawing on a tradition of heroic verse orally handed down has little to support it.'[48] However, he does accept that Old English poetry may have played some part: '[i]t is, however, probable that the poet knew at least the odd piece of Old English verse.'[49] Oral transmission may not have influenced the *Brut* directly, and artistry in the poem does not have the structural function that might have

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[45] Magennis, 1996, pp. 60-81, particularly p. 62.
[46] Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 112.
[47] Pearsall, p. 112.
[48] Turville-Petre, p. 13.
[49] Turville-Petre, p. 13.

been an indicator of oral narrative technique, but the symbolic aspects of written Old English poetry and its oral origins were a significant influence in relation to artistry. Laȝamon's images of periods of peace and joy at court between battles bear striking similarities to those in *Beowulf*, even though they possess less dynamism in relation to the construction of the narrative and more isolation from plot events. Laȝamon copied the events in Wace without reflecting Wace's use of Anglo-Norman, whilst at the same time adding his own images of success that appear to have been influenced by the Old English poetic tradition.[50] Brewer notes the additions Laȝamon makes to 'joy in the hall' episodes, and its evocation of passages in *Beowulf.* He determines that 'this may be part of Laȝamon's re-creation of archaic modes'.[51] Concerning such images, Ringbom claims that '[a]s Lawman elaborates on exactly those set themes that were most common in Old English poetry it is tempting to suspect that he was influenced by Old English traditions.'[52] Considering artistry in particular, Ringbom notes that '[m]usic and singing are described in the same terms in *Beowulf* and the *Brut*'.[53] Moreover, in contrast with Pearsall and Turville-Petre, some critics have seen more general evidence of links between the *Brut* and Old English literature. For example, in the introduction to their edition and translation of the poem, W.R.J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg note that

> [it is likely] given the growing evidence of Laȝamon's conscious artistry, that he felt free to embellish his version of Wace with whatever his imagination found relevant among the source materials, literary and oral, available to him. The archaising element in his poem – his use of a basically accentual verse-line, his heavy reliance on alliteration, his fondness for a poetic diction reminiscent of Old English literature – and the very choice of English at a time when French was more widely used as a literary language, link him with the Old English literary tradition.[54]

[50] Le Saux, 1989, pp. 24-27. See also Barron and Weinberg, p. xvi; Brewer, pp. 194-96.
[51] Brewer, p. 196.
[52] Ringbom, p. 78.
[53] Ringbom, p. 90.
[54] Barron and Weinberg, p. xvi.

Elsewhere, Thomas A. Bredehoft claims that 'Ælfric's works – along with other late Old English poems – were in fact a powerful influence on the works of Laȝamon and his contemporaries, either as direct sources or ancestors in a shared tradition.'[55] He also goes on to argue that Laȝamon was familiar with certain poems of the late Anglo-Saxon period, particularly some from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[56] Given the nature of the *Brut* as a historical text, that Laȝamon wished to be familiar with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is entirely plausible. This evidence concerning possible sources and the notion of a shared tradition is pursued in the rest of this chapter and in the conclusion to this thesis.

Even if Bredehoft's point is accepted, it is not clear how much Old English material Laȝamon would have had access to. In both manuscripts of the *Brut*, Laȝamon claims to be a priest who lived at Areley Kings, in the West Midlands of England. He is thus likely to have had an association with nearby Worcester, only ten miles away, and, as Barron and Weinberg suggest, might well have had relatively easy access to and familiarity with the Old English manuscripts in the cathedral library there.[57] Moreover, Laȝamon himself claims that he used an Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* as a source,[58] and he may have had access to one of the manuscripts of Bede in circulation that contained a small amount of Old English verse. However, the *Brut* itself does not show evidence of direct access to Bede's work.[59] The other source he names, which he claims was 'composed by St Albin and the blessed

[55] Bredehoft, p. 99. See also the chapter 'Laȝamon's Old English Poetics' (pp. 110-20) in the same volume.
[56] Bredehoft, p. 111.
[57] Barron and Weinberg, p. xvi.
[58] Laȝamon makes the claim in the proem to his work. See Barron and Weinberg, pp. 2-3.
[59] See Le Saux, 1989, pp. 16-17; also E. G. Stanley, 'Laȝamon (*fl.* 13th cent.)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [Online] <http://www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/16217> [accessed 26 October 2015].

Austin who introduced baptism here',[60] was written in Latin, even if he used that more elusive source at all.[61]

As to the matter of Laȝamon's versification and what it can reveal concerning his likely influences, Laȝamon's *Brut* is an alliterative poem, though its metre is much looser than that of classical Old English poetry.[62] Although there are routinely two stresses in each half-line, the syllable count of the *Brut*'s poetic line is more variable than that of classical Old English poetry, with a minimum of five syllables per half-line but no defined maximum. Indeed, Arthur Wayne Glowka suggests that it is more appropriately described as 'rhythmic, ornamental prose',[63] and its metrical characteristics could have been influenced in part by the prose nature of some of his source material. Turville-Petre proposes that Laȝamon 'learnt his metrical technique not from Old English poetry but from works such as *The Worcester Fragments*', which were short transcriptions of vocal music from the later thirteenth century, geographically convenient for him but hardly comparable to the *Brut* in terms of subject matter or genre.[64] Aligning with Bredehoft's point, some critics see the greatest influence on this loose alliterative style as being Ælfric's tenth-century prose, which has rhythmic characteristics.[65] Laȝamon could also have been influenced by the writing of a community of fellow priests, such as the glossator known as the 'Tremulous Hand' of Worcester, his likely contemporary, who was from the same region. However, Thomas Cable points out two alternative possibilities, both of which assume contact with Old English poetry: the differences between the Old English metrical line and Laȝamon's

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[60] Barron and Weinberg, p. 3.

[61] For discussion of this source see Le Saux, 1989, pp. 17-22. Harford suggests that this source may in fact be Bede's Latin *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Harford, p. 3.

[62] Concerning Laȝamon's metrics, see Bredehoft, pp. 110-20; Cable, pp. 2-3 and pp. 68-63.

[63] Glowka, p. 57.

[64] Turville-Petre, p. 13.

[65] N.F. Blake defines Laȝamon's style as 'rhythmical alliteration', in order to preserve the relationship between the *Brut* and earlier verse: N.F. Blake, 'Rhythmical Alliteration', *Modern Philology*, 67 (1969), 118-24.

line may have come about because Laȝamon devised his own interpretation of Old English poetry, focusing on the stress rather than the syllable count, or alternatively that he modified his metre from the syllable count in the Old English line.[66] Whereas his language is archaic, Laȝamon's loose alliteration blends elements of Old English alliterative metre, rhythmical prose, and Continental rhyme into a unique formulation.[67] However, whether it follows that this determines a significant amount of contact with and understanding of much Old English poetry is not certain. Even if he did not encounter an oral tradition of heroic verse, and it seems unlikely that he did, Laȝamon appears to have represented artistry using a literary style typical of written epic verse, reminiscent at least of the *scop*'s appearances in *Beowulf*. There are such similarities in the representation and the language of artistry between Laȝamon's *Brut* and Old English poems - particularly *Beowulf* - not present in his sources, that some direct influence between the two could be argued for. Generally speaking, Bredehoft's perception of a process of evolution and development through influence from the rules of classical Old English verse to the early Middle English period seems entirely plausible when considering Laȝamon's poetry.[68]

There has been significant discussion of Laȝamon's relationship with Anglo-Saxon culture and history as well as with Old English language and literature, particularly concerning his intentions concerning the *Brut*'s archaic lexis. It has been argued, for example, that Laȝamon was consciously refuting the 'Norman yoke' and advocating support for his Anglo-Saxon forebears.[69] His use of archaic language has thus been seen as reflecting an English nationalism, or as an attempt to associate with

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[66] Cable, pp. 60-62.
[67] Concerning the lack of stylistic resemblance between the *Brut* and *Beowulf*, see Dorothy Everett, *Essays on Middle English Literature*, ed. by Patricia Kean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 37-38.
[68] Bredehoft, p. 100.
[69] See Le Saux, 1989, pp. 184-89.

the English 'race', particularly by earlier scholars.[70] Brewer however believes that Laȝamon was '*inventing* an archaizing style'.[71] Moreover, the narrative suggests an ambivalent attitude: early Anglo-Saxon rulers are negatively depicted in the *Brut*, which favours the Britons, and he has alternatively been seen as a multiculturalist, albeit a rather limited one, because of the linguistic diversity of his sources, and also because of his focus upon Britain, as opposed merely to England.[72]

As to the purpose for undertaking the writing of the *Brut*, and what that purpose might suggest concerning its relationship with Old English poetry, Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne consider the uninformative nature of Laȝamon's prologue to his work, together with the possible circumstances surrounding the way he, as they see it, 'was inspired by the desire to recount the history of the nobles of England, and embarked on a textual adventure to gather up the past of the land and to produce a new written synthesis.'[73] They contemplate the possible audience of the poem in particular, and argue that 'it is not easy … to re-create the receptive context (desired or actual) for Laȝamon's work'.[74] If it is not possible to locate the intended or actual receptive context, it is however possible to suggest, based on the evidence of the way in which he builds on or invents instances of artistry, that Laȝamon's impulse for undertaking the work was the creative and scholarly enterprise, rather than the assemblage of material

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[70] See Henry Cecil Wyld, 'Laȝamon as an English Poet', *RES*, 6 (1930), 1-30. Concerning the perceived invention of Laȝamon's nationalism by critics, see Daniel Donoghue, 'Laȝamon's Ambivalence', *Speculum*, 65:3 (1990), 537-63 (p. 557).
[71] Brewer, p. 194 (Brewer's emphasis).
[72] Concerning the complex relationship Laȝamon had with English history, and Laȝamon's allegiance to the Anglo-Saxons and their literature, see Harford, pp. 41-75. For Laȝamon as multiculturalist, see Elizabeth J. Bryan, 'Laȝamon's Brut and the Vernacular Text', in *Reading Laȝamon's Brut: Approaches and Explorations*, ed. by Rosamund Allen, Jane Roberts, and Carole Weinberg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), p. 683; Elizabeth Salter, *English and the International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England*, ed. by Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 48-70.
[73] Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'National, World and Women's History: Writers and Readers of English in Post-Conquest England', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 94.
[74] Johnson and Wogan-Browne, p. 97.

for consumption by a particular audience. Brewer argues that Laȝamon was 'transposing Wace's anachronistically "modern" presentation of the primitive early history of Britain into something more suitable. He adopts a modified form of ancient versification, avoids modern French words and concepts, creates his own archaizing diction as he goes along.'[75] His additions to his source material forms one aspect of his retrospective approach to the conception of chronicle, one that incorporates poetic allusion, an approach that might well have alienated a contemporary audience.

Despite the fact that the *Brut* is purportedly a historical chronicle, Laȝamon himself, possibly unwittingly, cautions against our treating his work as being accurate, and he does this through reference to *leod-scopes*. Laȝamon expresses the nature of truth in relation to the opinions about kings, and also of 'poets of the people':

> Ne al soh ne al les þat leod-scopes singeð;
> ah þis is þat soððe bi Arðure þan kinge,
> Nes næuer ar swulc king, swa duhti þurh alle þing;
> for þat soðe stod a þan writen hu hit is iwurðen,
> ord from þan ænden, of Arðure þan kinge,
> no mare, no lasse, buten alse his laȝen weoren.
> Ah Bruttes hine luueden swiðe and ofte on him liȝeð,
> and suggeð feole þinges bi Arður þan kinge
> þat næuere nes iwurðen a þissere weorlde-richen.
> Inoh he mai suggen þe soð wule uremmen
> seolcuðe þinges bi Arðure kinge. (11454-75)

What minstrels sing is not all truth nor all lies; but this is the truth about King Arthur. Never before was there such a king, so valiant through thick and thin; for the truth of what befell King Arthur from beginning to end has been recorded in the writings, his acts just as they were, no more, no less. But the Britons loved him greatly and often tell lies about him, and say many things of King Arthur which never happened in this mortal world. He who is willing to speak the truth can tell many marvellous things about King Arthur.[76]

As noted by Kenneth Tiller, Laȝamon is more ambiguous about the nature of *leod-scopes*' material than Wace is about that of the *fableürs*:[77]

> Que pur amur de sa largesce,
> Que pur poür de sa prüesce,

[75] Brewer, p. 194.
[76] Barron and Weinberg, pp. 588-91.
[77] Kenneth J. Tiller, *Laȝamon's* Brut *and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History* (Cardiff, University of Cardiff Press, 2007), p. 187.

En cele grant pais ke jo di,
Ne sai si vus l'avez oï,
Furent les merveilles pruvees
E les aventures truvees
Ki d'Artur sunt tant recuntees
Ke a fable sunt aturnees:
Ne tut mençunge, ne tut veir,
Ne tut folie ne tut saveir.
Tant unt li cunteür cunté
E li fableür tant fablé
Pur lur cuntes enbeleter,
Que tut unt fait fable sembler

In this time of great peace I speak of—I do not know if you have heard of it—the wondrous events appeared and the adventures were sought out which, whether for love of his generosity, or for fear of his bravery, are so often told about Arthur that they have become the stuff of fiction: not all lies, not all truth, neither total folly nor total wisdom. The raconteurs have told so many yarns, the story-tellers so many stories, to embellish their tales that they have made it all appear fiction.[78]

Whereas Wace is clear, and critical, about the role that storytellers have played in making all of Arthur's adventures incredible, Laȝamon stresses that the *leod-scopes* communicate both facts and fiction: *Ne al soh ne al les þat leod-scopes singeð*, 'What minstrels sing is not all truth nor all lies'. Tiller states that 'Laȝamon explains, sympathetically, the process of dissimulating fiction and history about Arthur, and invites reader scrutiny of all accounts.'[79] Yet Laȝamon is assuming that the written material is truthful, whereas the *leod-scopes* are less so. The intention of the *Brut* should be seen in relation to this passage. Does Laȝamon align himself with the *leod-scopes*? Or is he perceiving them to be the oral storytellers of a former time? Although Tiller suggests that Laȝamon is participating in a culture of history transmission that necessarily involves unreliability,[80] the *Brut* claims that it has the truth*: ah þis is þat soððe bi Arðure þan kinge*, 'this is the truth about Arthur the King'. Laȝamon appears to profess to be a historian distanced from the part-truths of the oral-poet. In doing so, he expresses that the author or narrator of an extant medieval poem should not be conflated

[78] Passage and translation from Weiss, pp. 246-47.
[79] Tiller, p. 187.
[80] Tiller, pp. 187-88.

with the poet figures that their works contain. Here, as in *Beowulf*, the poets are presented as being historical, though that is by no means a certainty, and both poems can be seen to present *scop* performers of the same kind: poet communicators, storytellers of the people, of former times, not of the narrator's time. Of course, in presenting a work that is itself an adaptation of diverse sources, he simultaneously undermines any notion that the *Brut* is wholly accurate, by highlighting the unreliability of transmission.

Certainly, because of the timespan between the *Brut*'s events, whether historical or legendary, and Laȝamon's writing, and also because he was embellishing his sources, which were generally erroneous in any case, the reader of Laȝamon's *Brut* should not expect to discover any description of significance concerning historical performance technique from the poem; as stated, the representations are uniform throughout the chronology of its events. It is temporally distant from those events, as *Beowulf* likewise does, though it is unclear how great the distance was because of the debate surrounding the dating of the Old English poem. Whereas both works can be seen as the product of a single, literate author, *Beowulf* shows stylistic evidence of being closely related to the process of transmission among oral poets that may even have been part of its pre-textual composition, whereas the *Brut*, though it contains traces of oral style, consciously acknowledges its textual sources. The *Brut*, therefore, along with *Beowulf* and together with many other Old English poems, should be read without expectation of historical accuracy. Because we cannot be certain of Laȝamon's influences on his representation of artistry, we are not in a position to say specifically how he may have amended or adapted his sources. If such representations were found in Wace then we would have something to compare. However, we can be confident that the influence on Laȝamon concerning artistry did not come from Wace or the other sources that he stated in his work. As discussed above, the sole significant appearance of artistry in Wace features a

long list of instruments, which Laȝamon does not appropriate. Instead, the textual comparison in this chapter has revealed that there is reason to believe that he turned to the Old English poetic tradition, or the remnants of its poetic imagination, possibly the imagination of a poet such as the *Beowulf* one in particular, for his inspiration. This is evidenced by the linguistic parallels, and the formulaic constructions of the instances of artistry discussed in this chapter, which cohere as a theme.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion: Artistry as Tradition

Anglo-Saxon poets had a particular understanding of performance artistry, which alluded to but was also inherited from a past that they often imagined and mythologised in their poems. A development of what Clemoes refers to as 'active being', artistry represented pleasure, belonging within a community, and the success of society. These concepts were also reflected in Old English, which included compounds and phrases relating to performers and their instruments which associated them inherently with joy and entertainment. Old English words relating to artistry carried symbolic as well as literal meaning, enabling a poem's traditional referentiality to suggest and stimulate elaborate cultural knowledge in an audience through concise and indefinite phrasing. The conception of artistry in the poetic imagination was developed in didactic and gnomic poems, and narrative poets also made particular use of inherited linguistic and symbolic characteristics, applying them for functional purposes such as the creation of poetic images of successful society, as well as for creative and stylistic referential effect. Mary LeCron Foster argues that

> culture is not itself formed of symbols, but of the meaning that lies behind and unites symbols. This meaning only exists in the minds of participants in culture, but it is acted out through the manipulation of symbols, which objectify meaning.[1]

The cultural meaning lying behind linguistic symbols relating to artistry is shown to be of considerable importance for Anglo-Saxon poets, as Old English poetry regularly presents an imagined, often idealised, yet complex domain of cultural understanding through the manipulation of such symbols. Moreover, artistry in Old English poetry

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[1] Mary LeCron Foster, 'Symbolism: The Foundation of Culture', in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life*, ed. by Tim Ingold (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 366-96 (p. 366).

serves to transmit connotative meaning through the language; the poets manipulate symbols to objectify and also reinforce meaning, regardless of whether or not that meaning was reflective of contemporary historical realities.

In Old English poems, artistry has overwhelmingly positive associations. It is valuable, generally suggestive of belonging, and its performers are explicitly and routinely moral in narrative and wisdom poems, and in the 'artist' poems too. Moreover, the belonging that binds performers such as those described as *scopas* and *gleomen* with the people is often stressed. Artistry and its performers are seen as intrinsic to a harmonious and prosperous society. As well as being a positive phenomenon, the representation of performance in narrative poetry, particularly by characters defined using specific identifiers associated with artistry, is often archetypal, and effectively performed. The effectiveness of a performer is shown to be the result of the particular knowledge and ability that they possess, sometimes attributed to God, particularly in the wisdom poems, and at other times the product of worldly experience, as in *Beowulf* and *Widsith*. Attribution appears to depend on the religious milieu surrounding a poem's origin as well as its subject matter. Performers in the corpus are also imbued with an authority to perform. Such ability and authority is reflective of the gnomic sayings found in catalogue wisdom poems of the period. Narrative poems thus reflect the concerns of those wisdom poems, and are embellishments of the concise statements within them. The representation of artistry is generalised, non-nuanced, and based on linguistic relationships between joy and entertainment, which accentuates the conventionality. In short, artistry is routinely idealised. At times, however, artistry also performs an important structural role in *Beowulf*, through creative application by the poet. As well as being effective in performance, performers have knowledge of stories from the past, which they are able to reproduce; this enables the poet to introduce contextual material and develop a poetic world of interperformativity.

The types of poems in which performers and their performances appear leads to the conclusion that they are often imagined as an aspect of a heroic 'Germanic' past for Anglo-Saxon poets, or in any case for the scribes of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries whose manuscripts have survived. This is particularly the case in relation to the *Widsith*, *Deor* and *Beowulf* poets, and such a historical focus further explains the generality, idealisation and lack of specifics in these poems. The poets' concern with the past means that artistry becomes an element in that orientation. Additionally, artistry is shown to be one aspect of the 'unequivocal wisdom' that, according to Niles, was longed for by the Anglo-Saxons.[2] Correspondingly, Old English poetic representations of artistic performance in wisdom and narrative poems reveal a longing for artistry to be seen as positive, effective, and important for society.

Despite often being concerned with an idealised past, such representation is not a feature of the related Scandinavian poetic tradition of Eddic poetry. It is seemingly unique in relation to the literature of its close cultural neighbours, though aspects of deep association do appear in Eddic poetry, as noted in Chapter 7, as well as in more distant traditions such as Homeric epic. The small amount of poetic material in related early Germanic literatures becomes a hindrance when attempting to determine the distinctiveness of the Old English tradition. Even concerning the Old English imagination specifically, the principal problem when attempting to make conclusive statements concerning artistry is the scarcity and brevity of the references. The treatment of the harp as a reference to memory and the past, for example, is similar in *Beowulf* and *The Seafarer*, and thus the cultural association is shown to span poetic genres, but it would be difficult to conclude that those links are thus routinely apparent in narrative or lyric poetry. Subtle differences in representation mean it would be possible to conclude that each poet treats harps differently, and that for example the

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[2] Niles, 2003, p. 39.

specific formulaic compounding and phrasing that links joy or song with the harp in *Beowulf* was a functional invention of one poet. The case for an association between a general conception in the imagination and its reflection in the language is overwhelming, however. For example, in numerous instances the harp is associated with people and is represented as a public, social instrument capable of delivering joy, a status supported in the poetic language as well as in the prose of the period, in material such as Bede's account of Cædmon.

Indeed, some of the stylistic, aesthetic characteristics, together with the underlying deep associations of the poetic imagination, do also feature in prose from the period, such as Bede's *Historia*, in which the suggestive image of communal secular artistry in performance as component of the feast initiates the events that lead to Cædmon's creative and spiritual conversion. However, it is these images and associated behaviours that cause concern for the religious hierarchy, including Bede himself. Such concern is summed up well in a speech by the *snottor ar*, 'wise messenger', in *Vainglory*, which, unusually in the poetic corpus, is critical of artistry as a component of feasting and revelry:

> 'Þæt mæg æghwylc mon eaþe geþencan,
> se þe hine ne læteð on þas lænan tid
> amyrran his gemyndum modes gælsan
> ond on his dægrime druncen to rice,
> þonne monige beoð mæþelhegendra,
> wlonce wigsmiþas winburgum in,
> sittaþ æt symble, soðgied wrecað,
> wordum wrixlað, witan fundiaþ
> hwylc æscstede inne in ræcede
> mid werum wunige, þonne win hweteð
> beornes breostsefan. Breahtem stigeð,
> cirm on corþre, cwide scralletaþ
> missenlice. Swa beoþ modsefan
> dalum gedæled, sindon dryhtguman
> ungelice. Sum on oferhygdo
> þrymme þringeð, þrinteð him in innan
> ungemedemad mod; sindan to monige þæt!' (7-25)

> 'Every man can quite easily consider on this, he who in this transitory time does not allow himself to have his thoughts hindered, a glutton of the mind and in the count of his days drunken with power, when many holding meeting are proud war-smiths in their festive settlements— they sit at the feast, reciting true lyrics, mixing words, wishing for the wise men in every place of spears within their halls abiding with men, then wine whets the warrior's breast-sense. Voices mount high, an uproar in the company, diverse noise shall rise up. So the minds become separated into parts, lordly men are all unalike. Some into over-mind closing in forcefully, swelling within him, a mind knowing no bounds—too many are like that!'

The *Vainglory* poet is not looking back to a pre-Christian period, or dealing with legendary matter. Instead, he is considering a contemporary situation, and the attitude of the *snottor ar* chimes with opinions prevalent in the material discussed in Chapter 6. A key issue thus arises as to whether the idealised representation of artistry found in other Old English poems was a form of cultural relativism and acceptance, a result of deliberate archaising, or the product of a relatively early date of origin and subsequent preservation. Whatever the answer to this question, such a critical moral position as found in *Vainglory* is not routinely adopted in poetic material in either the Anglo-Saxon or the post-Anglo-Saxon period.

Vainglory excepted, artistry is represented in a distinctive manner in Old English poetry, particularly in *Beowulf*, in which it combines symbolism with narrative function by expressing the concepts also generated in gnomic statement and referring to concepts such as individual and societal fate, as well as to specific, detailed narrative digressions, such as the stories of Sigemund and the Frisian slaughter. Performers are symbolic in Old English poems, yet they also function at times to support the narrative through their performances. It is apparent, however, that the *Beowulf* poet uses them in more complex ways than do other poets whose work survives. Symbolism and maxims become narrative themes in *Beowulf*, but these are not merely static elements slotted into the narrative, they relate dynamically to the narrative and vary according to the poet's particular intentions at each point. The representation of the *hearpe* as an aspect of cultural memory later in the poem is one example of the way in which referential linguistic symbolism can be used in relation to significant cultural concerns in the plot.

Artistry in *Beowulf* is at once an expression of traditional wisdom in a narrative context and is also used creatively to develop structure. This dynamism and use as a plot device, to initiate digressive stories for example, suggest that performers and artistry are inserted into the world of *Beowulf* in ways that closely associate them with oral composition and delivery, whether poetic in form or not, and integrate them with the poem's architectonics. This thesis has argued that storytelling is the mode given most considered attention in *Beowulf*. Because it occurs in speeches, it is the one mode certainly delivered in the Germanic alliterative line at times, notwithstanding the fact that all speech in the poem is necessarily 'poetry'. Not only are named principal characters - including the hero - storytellers, but the symbolic hall-performers are often shown to be so too, if they are not singers. Key unnamed characters such as the Geatish messenger and the *þegn* on horseback are also storytellers. Compared with most of the comparable instances in *Beowulf*, the artistry is less dynamic in Laȝamon's *Brut*, and is unrelated to the events surrounding it other than as a component of an image of society's success or pleasure.

Artistry is a paradoxical phenomenon in Old English poetry. The overall lack of references throughout the extant corpus, particularly in relation to singing and the making of music, indicates that they are not an ongoing concern for Old English poets. The succinct depiction and limited description that does exist, in heroic poems especially, provides further evidence in support of the view that it does not appear to have significance for them in relation to plot events. Yet its referentiality has importance. In *Beowulf*, such performance episodes form part of the overall psychological rather than narrative emphasis that the poem has, and artistry is shown to be a distinctive mode of idealised cultural being. As in the wider corpus, it is always positive, and ubiquitous as an element of the culture in comparison with other, more material symbolic aspects of the poem. Yet with this idealisation, the Old English poet

uses artistry in diverse and creative ways, and it is regularly used as a referent for significant cultural elements, and a tool for incorporating disparate narrative elements in the construction of their imagined cultural world. Beechy argues that

> part of the individual poet's work is to vary phrasal formulas, to balance multiple tensions among the exigencies of rapid composition, the needs of the plot and characters, and personal color, style and innovation. Also, in a traditional poetry there is a diachronic, collective creative force, and it is this force which is responsible for the formation of the formulas themselves.[3]

Artistry as represented in Old English poetry exemplifies well the balance between tradition and innovation required by the early medieval poet. If one were to judge poetic quality by the way these formulaic elements coexist dynamically, *Beowulf* achieves this most clearly. In comparison, Laȝamon's *Brut* shows evidence of engagement with the earlier tradition, and his representations of artistry, although one-dimensional in comparison, can be seen as part of a collective creative force, involving conscious archaising, that occurs and persists in diverse literatures. Artistry in the Old English period was regularly presented as a component of a theme, particularly as a part of 'joy in the hall', with associative functions and idealistic representation. It is likely that Laȝamon observed this phenomenon, whether in *Beowulf* or elsewhere, or understood the conception as part of his poetic imagination. He applied it in the late twelfth century to his representation of British history, revealing a continuation of this mode of imagining into the early Middle English period, though in a manner that largely removes artistry from the wider plot and the architectonics of the work. The artistry meme crystallised as it became distanced from the oral tradition, becoming an imaginative poetic concept.

The idealised representation of artistry could broadly be grouped as being a generic characteristic of early medieval heroic poetry, particularly a poetry that takes the past as its subject. Sharma argues that

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[3] Beechy, pp. 18-19.

> [i]n Bergsonian and Deleuzoguattarian thought, the past is alive: it is never the lost object of fantasy but a vital ontological principle, informing the present and constituting a non-human reservoir for novel productions and creative evolutions.[4]

The *Beowulf* poet and Laȝamon are two poets who, together with their characters, can be seen as conduits of the past in the Bergsonian and Deleuzoguattarian sense, even though their aims may have differed. Whereas *Beowulf* is an amalgam of history, fiction and myth, Laȝamon was consciously creating a poetic narrative purporting to be history. It has often been argued that such representations in *Beowulf* and the *Brut* are nostalgic, anachronistic, remote inventions far removed from the period in which the poem was created.[5] Yet there is a purpose to this nostalgia, to the extent that nostalgic heroic epic can be seen as a conscious genre of literary fiction through the ages, with analogous themes and associations, and similar approaches to representing particular ways of being, including that of the performing artist.[6]

There is little doubt that Old English poetry can be seen as a tradition. Yet can the Old English method of poetic production in relation to the depiction of artistry be seen as a tradition which crossed typically-defined historical, cultural and linguistic boundaries, into the Middle English period? Could traditional thought have been applied in passages of narrative poetry, which then became a poetic tradition adopted even after its classical form had declined? The *Brut* is after all a single text by one author from the post-Conquest period. By the time of the alliterative revival of the fourteenth century, the period in which most of the canonical Middle English poems were written, the treatment of artistry had wholly fragmented. Influence of the romances

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[4] Sharma, p. 323.
[5] See, for example, concerning *Beowulf*: Trilling; Liuzza, 2005, pp. 91-108. Concerning the *Brut* as an exercise in archaising, see Stanley, 1969.
[6] For example, the innovation and contemporary relevance of the *Brut*'s representation of history has been noted, for example by Joseph D. Parry, 'Losing the Past: Cezar's Moment of Time in Lawman's *Brut*', in *Reading Laȝamon's* Brut*: Approaches and Explorations*, ed. by Rosamund Allen, Jane Roberts, and Carole Weinberg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 194-95. Le Saux describes the *Brut* as 'an attempt to create a new foundation myth', 1989, p. 230.

introduced from the Continent and the linguistic classifications deriving from Old French was prevalent. Perhaps influenced by passages in such Continental romances, diversity in the representation of artistry is apparent as early as 1250 in *King Horn*, in which artistry is a plot device. One passage shows Horn being initiated, partly as a harper, at the court of Aylmar, King of Westernesse (227-44). Elsewhere, Horn and his companions disguise themselves as harpers and jugglers (1473-96), a motif, defined by Jerrianne D. Shultz as 'the minstrel disguise entrance trick', no doubt influenced by passages in works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, and Wace's interpretation, discussed in Chapter 8.[7] This plot device also appears in Laȝamon, also noted in Chapter 8, as well as in the late-thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century *Sir Orfeo*. As a character, such performer-kings may be reminiscent of Hrothgar storytelling and possibly harping in Heorot, but the minstrel-ruler, who features in the *Brut* in the form of Blæðgabreat, is a figure otherwise alien to extant Anglo-Saxon poetry, in which the subservient, dependent, unnamed retainer-performer dominates.

Traces of the depiction of artistry in the Old English period do persist, however, particularly in alliterative poetry; traditional form and traditional theme thus appear to be associated. In *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, for example, dating from the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, 'minstralsy noble' is associated with 'mirth' and drinking in a royal hall (231-42, 3173-75), showing evidence of influence from instances in earlier Arthurian material, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Laȝamon. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, varied treatment of artistry appears, some of which is reminiscent of the Old English tradition, particularly in the final stanza of the first fitt, in which Arthur ruminates on the pleasures of feasting and artistry, unnamed performers accompany good food, and the court is joyous (467-86). Festive

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[7] Jerrianne D. Shultz, 'Creativity, the Trickster, and the Cunning Harper King: A Study of the Minstrel Disguise Entrance Trick in *King Horn* and *Sir Orfeo*', Unpublished PhD thesis, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 2007.

music-making also features as a central component in the joyous life of the mysterious castle wherein lives the Green Knight, disguised as Bertilak (1648-56). In non-alliterative poems, however, a discontinuity from earlier English poetry is perceptible. While artistry does feature as part of joyous celebration on occasion, such passages are isolated, as in the one example in the late thirteenth-century *Lay of Havelock the Dane* upon the coronation of Havelock (2320-35)[8] and in the early fourteenth-century *Ywain and Gawain* (1393-400). However, with diverse influences, particularly from the Continent, Chaucer's depictions of artistry differ radically from those in the English alliterative poetic tradition, and its representation as idealised symbol is lost. Chaucer's performers also contrast with the consistently positive impressions found in *Beowulf* and the *Brut*. For instance, in the 'General Prologue' to the *Canterbury Tales* it is noted that the wayward friar Hubert took enjoyment from playing the harp and singing (I, 266), while the repulsive, drunkard Miller plays the bagpipes (I, 565). Similarly associating artistry with moral corruption, the beginning of the 'Pardoner's Tale' shows an entirely divergent representation from the earlier English tradition in relation to the context in which harping is created (VI, 463-71). Chaucer's listing only of string instruments (VI, 466) might reflect Chaucer's particular distaste for them, or a negative perception of them in wider society. As Osborn observes, Chaucer uses the verb 'to harp' to reference the playing of any string instrument, perceiving them to be a linguistically-classifiable group.[9] The opening to 'The Pardoner's Tale' shows this group to represent deviance. Later in the tale, artistry is associated with gluttony (VI, 477-82), subverting the artistry-feasting association characteristic of earlier poetry. By portraying performers as instigators of lechery, Chaucer satirises the gnomic association

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[8] *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, ed. by Graham Drake, Eve Salisbury, and Ronald B. Herzman (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), pp. 141-42.

[9] Osborn, p. 442.

between artistry and feasting stated so overtly in Homeric epic. He also aligns himself with the views of the Anglo-Saxon religious community highlighted in Chapter 6. In 'Sir Thopas', meanwhile, the harp, pipe and hurdy-gurdy are associated with the perils of Faery, and his hero's clichéd plea for minstrelsy reflects the tale's satirical tone (VII, 845-50). Elsewhere, we are told at the start of 'The Manciple's Tale' that Phoebus was a multi-instrumentalist (IX, 113) and an unrivalled singer (IX, 114-18). However, he 'brak his mynstralcie', again all string instruments, in sorrow after hearing of his wife's adultery and killing her (IX, 267-68). Meanwhile, the Wife of Bath danced to the harp and sang in her younger days after drinking wine (III, 457-59). In such instances, Chaucer precludes artistry from offering any morally acceptable enjoyment.

Chaucer's representation is thus distinct from the references to artistry as component of the theme in the Old English literary tradition. Yet artistry as isolated occurrence, representing joy, community and belonging, did not die out with the end of the alliterative tradition, challenging the notion that such literature is distinct from subsequent poetry. In Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* from 1590, 'Minstrales' and 'Bardes' operate in the 'commune hall' (Book 1, Canto V, Stanza iii). Like Laȝamon, Spenser invents his own archaising style, in which artistry is envisaged as being present in traditional circumstances, and such representation persists as a component in the archaic or retrospective poetic imagination.

Drout describes a tradition as 'an unbroken train of identical, non-instinctual behaviours that have been invariably repeated after the same recurring antecedent conditions.'[10] Old English poetic verse form can be seen as traditional according to this definition; it remained largely unchanged during the Anglo-Saxon period, and a poet would have had to engage with its form and understand its rules before generating something new within the tradition. There are variations that show the effect of time

[10] Drout, 2006, p. 9.

upon a poet's understanding of a tradition, for example in the early twelfth-century *Instructions for Christians*. However, another late poem, *Durham*, written between 1104 and 1109, is remarkably faithful to traditional form.[11] The appearance of a poetic component such as a 'joy in the hall' passage, with such routine features as artistry and the display of wealth, is also likely to result from a process of repetition and influence, even though the exact circumstances of that process is uncertain. Foley argues that '[e]ven in the case of the ancient Greek and Anglo-Saxon epics, where prudence demands that we speak of oral-derived rather than ascertainably oral works, the role of tradition is still manifestly prominent.'[12] However, Drout's definition may not apply readily when it comes to creative thematic, symbolic or associative aspects of English poetry beyond the Old English period. Finding 'unbroken', 'identical', 'invariably repeated' examples within a creative medium is problematic; the definition needs loosening somewhat if a relationship in the form of a conscious tradition between Old English poetry and the *Brut* and beyond is to be proposed. While the representation of artistry in relevant passages is a thematic component of the Old English poetic tradition, later poetry such as Laȝamon's *Brut* shows some influence from that representation, even while it does not include other themes, such as the 'beasts of battle'. It also shows familiarity with and influence from Old English poetry's form and also its vocabulary. Whether specific antecedent conditions were widely known after the Anglo-Saxon period - whether Laȝamon knew *Beowulf* specifically, for example - cannot be determined for certain, although his familiarity with the Old English poetic tradition, or at least some remnant of it, possibly through imaginative conception rather than literal access to relevant manuscripts, is difficult to refute.

Niles argues that

[11] See Rosier; Dobbie, 1942, pp. xliii-xlv.
[12] Foley, 1991, p. xv.

> [t]radition … can easily be reified and used as a synonym for inertia. When one looks closely at an oral tradition, what one sees are not the abstractions of literary history but rather a set of flesh-and-blood individuals. Unreflective use of the term "tradition" can obscure the effort that is expended by individual persons in the course of producing a work of literature, not just reproducing one.[13]

Beowulf's diverse representation and implementation of artistry is an example of the results of such creative effort, and Laȝamon can be seen as a more explicit example of this notion of individual production. Working outside the Anglo-Saxon period, with literary sources removed from the Old English poetic tradition, Laȝamon nonetheless assimilates that tradition into his work. Despite his declared sources not being part of the Old English tradition, he develops it through engagement with its sentiments, reflecting his understanding of artistry's place in the poetic domain. The notion that the *Brut* is related to the earlier tradition is strengthened by the fact that Laȝamon also contributes to the maintenance of English more generally, during a perilous period for the language. Swan and Treharne note that

> [b]oth Laȝamon and his possible contemporary, the Tremulous Hand, in a land ruled by descendants of the Norman conquerors, chose to look back to the days when English saints and scholars taught the people in English, and to play their own part in that language's survival by contributing so effectively to the continued use of the vernacular.[14]

His choice of language, as well as his creative choices within that language, align him intrinsically with earlier English writing. He also contributes to the continuation of idealised illustrations of artistry in poems into the later medieval period.

Future Directions

The research undertaken in the writing of this thesis raises questions relating to medieval performance practices in various directions. First, concerning the poetry itself, attempts have been made to move beyond the oral-formulaic approach to the material

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[13] Niles, 1998, p. 146.
[14] M. Swan and E.M. Treharne, *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 208.

analysed in this thesis, as has been pointed out in the introduction. For the most part, however, the areas in need of further consideration largely lie outside the poetic manuscripts and relate to early medieval society more widely, focusing for example on cultural behaviours, an approach which has been resisted in this thesis. This would include attention to the experiential aspects of what being a performer and giving a performance might have been like in early medieval society. It would be valuable for example to further understanding of the ways in which Anglo-Saxon people conceived of the self and the human body in performance, as well as the spaces of performance, culturally delineated or otherwise.[15] This in turn suggests the need for a study of contemporary philosophical notions of what it was to perform, to be a performer, artistry in the poetic imagination being one example of numerous possible philosophies of performance conceived of in the medieval period. The relationship between performer and non-performer, at least at those times when there was such a relationship - festivals and other occasions requiring ritual performance, for example - could be seen as an aspect of this focus.[16] Furthermore, analysis of the status of performers, adopting ethnomusicological theories and methods as a starting point, could additionally illuminate our understanding of what it was to perform, to be an artist, and whether indeed there was a conception comparable to those in modern societies, Western or otherwise, in early medieval England.[17]

Inevitably, the lack of available source material leads to conjecture, yet analysis of wider resources, such as images, prose writing, letters and other cultural artefacts including archaeological finds, especially of musical instruments, may help in the effort.

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[15] I have tentatively initiated some work on Anglo-Saxon performance spaces in a talk entitled ‘The Symbolic Performance Space in Old English Poetry’ given at the Place and Space in the Medieval World conference at York University in May 2015.
[16] Thornbury notes that everyone was a performer in monasteries during the period (2014, p. 74).
[17] A paper entitled ‘The Anglo-Saxon *Gleoman* and an Ethnomusicological Status Paradigm’ was delivered at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, in July 2017.

New modes of analysis, applying fresh theory from areas such as anthropology, ethnomusicology, cultural studies and performance studies, can offer the means to understand the lives of those who played the instruments, or sang, or told stories, those who entertained their companions and superiors, whatever their position in a society which idealised artistry in its poetic writing, and whether or not they were represented faithfully in the poems of the period.

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