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‘As if it never were’: The Construct and Poetics of Time in Anglo-Saxon Literature

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Abstract

This thesis examines the construction and poetics of time in Anglo-Saxon literature through a holistic approach to works of history, science, exegesis, and poetry. St Augustine conceived of time as *distentio animi*, the distention of the mind, and the thesis argues that the texts under discussion form responses to the problems of being in time, by looking to the stillness of eternity.

Chapter one demonstrates how the scientific, historical, and exegetical works of the Venerable Bede form a sustained project to construct time. In the conversion of King Edwin in the *Historia ecclesiastica*, the famous flight of the sparrow in the hall emphasises the meaning that Christian time gives to both individuals and communities. Bede's works both lay the foundation for the poetry of the later chapters and are texts worth studying in their own right.

The second chapter investigates two Old English saints' lives. *Elene* affects historicity by beginning with a precise date, though incorrect. The duration of the narrative of *Andreas* comes to a biblically significant forty days. Through study of the likely sources of these poems, it can be seen that the poets made deliberate choices to construct time in their narratives. The poetics of time in these two works suggests that the two are alike both as saints' lives and in their approaches to time.

Temporal markers within *Beowulf* provide clues to when certain events take place, as the third chapter discusses. The diurnal cycle that structures *Beowulf* on the micro level continues to the macro, and the poem as a whole depicts the day and the night of Beowulf's life. The poem also engages in the elegiac mode, defined in chapter four as one in which time is largely unmarked, causing instability. The speakers of the Old English elegies are trapped in the present

while their minds experience the distension described by Augustine; they recall memories of the past but to do so is painful. For some, time can come to seem 'as if it never were'.

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Preface

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Dr Daniel Anlezark, and to my associate supervisors, Dr Margaret Rogerson and Dr Jan Shaw, for their supervision of this thesis.

While the majority of this thesis is formed from new research, a small part of chapter four emerged from research conducted for my MA thesis at the University of Leeds, titled 'Elegy, Exile, and Extinction: The Lay of the Last Survivor in *Beowulf*', supervised by Dr Alfred Hiatt and submitted in 2008.

I wish to thank my parents and siblings, Patrick, and the Marlands for their loving support, and Roberta Kwan, Sabina Rahman, and Tahlia Birnbaum for their proofreading assistance.

Abbreviations and Conventions

AD	<i>anno Domini</i>
AM	<i>annus mundi</i>
ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
DNR	Bede, <i>De natura rerum</i>
DT	Bede, <i>De temporibus</i>
DTR	Bede, <i>De temporum ratione</i>
EETS	Early English Text Society
EA	Bede, <i>Expositio Apocalypseos</i>
HE	Bede, <i>Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum</i>
IG	Bede, <i>In Genesim</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>

The abbreviated titles for Bede's works are used when referring to the work in general; quotations and translations are to specific editions cited in the text. All quotations from the Bible are the Douay-Rheims translation.

Introduction

There are many ways of studying and attempting to understand time. It can be discussed from a number of viewpoints, in various disciplines and subcategories, for example science, cosmology, philosophy, metaphysics, astronomy, phenomenology, ontology, eternalism, presentism, philosophy of space and time, temporality, narratology, and historicity. The aim of this thesis is to explore the construct of time and the use of the poetics of time in Anglo-Saxon literature, beyond previously studied areas of temporality. Rather than separating temporality into distinct categories, e.g. narratology, nostalgia, typology, etc., and assessing these in isolation, the thesis examines how approaches to time function in concert in each text. The varied aspects of temporality make division a laboured task. Is memory, for example, a part of a construct or poetic of time? Can an anticipation of Apocalypse be separated from a culturally agreed-upon vision of the past?

The definition of ‘time’ famously eluded Augustine of Hippo and I would be lying if I professed to understand time any better than he. For the purposes of this thesis, time is the passage of the celestial bodies and the turning of the earth, experienced by humans as what we call days, nights, months, and years, and divided into what we call hours, minutes, and seconds. This is how the Venerable Bede conceived of time, as discussed in chapter one. Time stretches forward and back, so that we speak of the present but also the past and the future. The independent existence of time outside of memory, attention, and expectation (these are, of course, Augustine’s terms) is still a modern puzzle. Temporality, then, is the experience of *being* in time, or having a relationship with time. The latter is unavoidable, really: humans are temporal beings, and the Anglo-Saxons were no different to modern humans in this respect.

The thesis covers some familiar critical territory, such as the use of typology in Old English saints' lives, but does so from a fresh perspective, examining the relationship between typology and liturgical time and other forms of temporality in the rhetoric of time in some Anglo-Saxon texts. The question this thesis asks is whether the construct and poetics of time vary significantly among the genres (as they are generally understood) of Anglo-Saxon literature, and which strategies are employed by authors when representing time in their works. The question of genre is addressed in each chapter, but it is worth noting that aside from chapter one, each chapter addresses a single manuscript as well as a genre (saints' lives in the Vercelli Book, elegies in the Exeter Book, and *Beowulf*). The question of literary categories is also one of manuscript compilation: were certain texts placed in the same manuscript because they have similar attitudes towards time? Of necessity, the thesis is not exhaustive, in order to examine time across several categories of literature rather than limiting its approach to one group.

The only timekeeping devices in use in early medieval Europe were sundials, candle-clocks, and water-clocks, and water-clocks were probably not used in Anglo-Saxon England.¹ However, the natural passage of time could be observed in the movements of the sun, moon, and stars across the sky. While many medieval people must have had little need on a day-to-day basis

¹ Alfred, of course, had a candle-clock, as described by Asser in his *Life of King Alfred*. On timekeeping generally see David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*, rev. edn (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000). For information on sundials through the ages see René R. J. Rohr, *Sundials: History, Theory and Practice*, trans. by Gabriel Godin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), and for a study of sundials focusing on medieval England, see Arthur Robert Green, *Sundials: Incised Dials or Mass-Clocks: A Study of the Time-Markers of Medieval Churches, Containing Descriptions, Photographs, Diagrams and Analysis of Dials, Chiefly in Hampshire, but Also in Various Other Counties* (Historic Monuments of England series, 1926; repr. London: SPCK, 1978).

for the precise timekeeping that a clock provides, the passage of time had to be marked within communities, especially for ecclesiastical and governmental purposes. This was done using calendars.² There were ways of dividing time even though they might not be measured with a timepiece, most notably the canonical hours necessary for monastic communities — the approximate time provided by sundials must have served this need. As J. D. North explains, ‘when we come to the smaller intervals of time, time as experienced depends largely on what there is to fill it, and it is here that we differ most from those in the monastery. Measuring the hour, rather than the millisecond, was nevertheless something they wanted to do.’³ The hour was the base unit of monastic time because the Benedictine rule, the basis for many of the communities in Anglo-Saxon England,⁴ structured daily life and the activities of the medieval monastery by the hour.

Even if time is imagined to have any independent existence, it is only through movement that we can observe, let alone measure, time. Time is not easily apparent to us except in its passing, the fleeting nature of which exasperated Augustine of Hippo:

² See Bill Griffiths, *Anglo-Saxon Times: A Study of the Early Calendar* (London: Amra, 1991), and more broadly, Duncan Steel, *Marking Time: The Epic Quest to Invent the Perfect Calendar* (New York: Wiley, 2000).

³ J. D. North, ‘Monastic Time’, in *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism*, ed. by James G. Clark, *Studies in the History of Medieval Religion*, 30 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 203–11 (p. 203).

⁴ The oldest European Rule of St Benedict in an English manuscript dates to c. 700 (Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970), p. 200); however there was considerable divergence and a lack of uniformity among Anglo-Saxon religious communities. See also John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) for background information, and *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation*, trans. and ed. by Thomas Symons (London: Nelson, 1953) for a translation of the tenth-century agreement.

Even a single hour runs its course through fleeing minutes: whatever portion of it has flown is now past, and what remains is future. If we can conceive of a moment in time which cannot be further divided into even the tiniest of minute particles, that alone can be rightly termed the present; yet even this flies by from the future into the past with such haste that it seems to last no time at all. Even if it has some duration, that too is divisible into past and future; hence the present is reduced to vanishing-point.⁵

We imprecisely observe the passage of time in our minds, as Augustine describes, but with something closer to objectivity in nature, as day turns to night, as the moon goes through its phases, and as the seasons change. This is ‘natural’ time, acknowledged in all societies and cultures, without the requirement of philosophical speculation. Natural time requires nothing more than observation and memory: the memory of this morning’s sunrise leads to anticipation of the next day’s sunrise. Natural time is constructed with cyclical metaphors, making it predictable; once its patterns are remembered and understood, the future of time can be anticipated.

However, while an understanding of natural time might meet the needs of hunter-gatherers, it is not practical for the needs of societies with more complex structures. To use time in any other way, to refer to events in the past, to keep social records, to engage in history beyond the local community, requires a construct of time. Taken as a whole, Bede’s body of works incorporate a construct of time which draws on the historical and scientific, and these ultimately serve to locate the Anglo-Saxons in time in various ways. The construct of time is the way time is conceived of, described, or built by an author or text. Such construction is a necessity because in narratives temporal constructs are not natural and do not occur by accident; even in the imitation of ‘real time’ an author is constantly making choices about how to order the

⁵ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by Maria Boulding (New York: New City, 1997), XII, 20. All references to and translations from the *Confessions* are from this translation.

events of his narrative. Narrative time is the product of structured thought, and in Bede's case highly literate thought. The way time is constructed varies according to the aims of the author and/or his text, and it implies a rhetoric or poetics of time. The poetics of time is the ways in which time and temporality are represented within texts to produce a range of effects, which varies across and within different genres of Anglo-Saxon literature. Temporal poetics may imitate the passage of time, use time markers to structure a narrative, or invite meditations on time itself. As will be shown in various examples, specific times of day can invoke particular associations, by their connections with canonical hours, or biblical typology, the liturgy, or scientific and historiographical traditions and conventions. Some of the texts explored in this thesis also make use of a phenomenology of time which finds its most powerful expression in the phrase 'swa hit no wære', 'as if it never were', found in both *The Wanderer* and *The Wife's Lament*. This thesis will discuss these, but focus on the role of objective systems of time in some elegies.

Contexts: Time and Writing in Anglo-Saxon England

Very little is known about the calendar or dating systems in use by the pagan Anglo-Saxons,⁶ and evidence for the way time was marked in the pre-conversion period is minimal. The modern English names for the months of the year are Latin in origin, but they replaced Old English names which were remembered mainly because they were recorded by Bede, until at least the

⁶ Although Peter Blair suggests 'there are some indications that even the pagan Saxons had acquired a considerable understanding of lunar cycles', Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede* (London: Gollancz, 1976), p. 79.

eleventh century when Byrhtferth of Ramsey listed them in his *Enchiridion*, alongside Hebrew, Egyptian, and Greek names.⁷ For Byrhtferth such words were of antiquarian interest, as they were for Bede, except that in Bede's time it is possible the old names for the months may still have been in common use, and indeed some survive in English as names for seasons of the year. Bede lists ten Anglo-Saxon months rather than the Julian calendar's twelve, leading Kenneth Harrison to argue that while the Anglo-Saxon calendar was not fully synchronised with the Julian, 'the farmer had a workable guide to the seasons, and in any case would sow and reap according to the state of the weather and the crops as he does today.'⁸ Earl Anderson has also suggested a dichotomy between learned and popular systems for classifying the seasons, finding linguistic and cultural evidence for a Germanic idea of just two seasons: *winter*, the wet season, and *sumer*, the rest of the year.⁹

The conversion to Christianity replaced the Anglo-Saxon calendar with the Roman, though it would already have been in use in parts of Britain still influenced by the Roman occupation. The Julian calendar had been in use in Rome since the calendar reform of 45 BC. Both the Julian calendar and the primitive Anglo-Saxon one are solar: one year approximates the tropical or solar year, i.e. according to Bede 'the Sun's year is [complete] when it returns to the

⁷ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, EETS, s.s. 15 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for EETS, 1995), figs 5–8.

⁸ Kenneth Harrison, 'The Primitive Anglo-Saxon Calendar', *Antiquity*, 47 (1973), 284–87 (p. 285).

⁹ Earl R. Anderson, 'The Seasons of the Year in Old English', *ASE*, 26 (1997), 231–63 (p. 232). See also Peter Baker, 'Textual Boundaries in Anglo-Saxon Works on Time (and in Some Old English Poems)', in *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely'*, ed. by M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 445–56.

same place with respect to the fixed stars after 365 days and 6 hours'.¹⁰ The Julian calendar contains twelve months and added an extra day every four years to account for the partial day accumulated each solar year. Individual dates in a month were given by counting back from three fixed points: the *kalends*, *nones*, and *ides*. Isidore of Seville informed his readers 'the Romans established the Kalends, Nones, and Ides with reference to festival days, or with reference to the offices of their magistrates, for on those days there would be an assembly in the cities'.¹¹ In southern Europe this might not have been novel information, but in the newly converted north, such information had to be learned. The kalends is the first day of the month while the ides, Bede says, divide the month, and the nones are nine days before the ides, counting inclusively.¹² These fixed points were probably once aligned to the moon, but as the calendar months fell out of synchronisation with the lunar months this correlation ceased to exist. In effect, the calendar looks forward by counting back, for a date does not have its own number, but a number relative to a fixed point. For example, 11 January becomes 3 ides of January, 3 February is 2 nones of February, and 28 March is the 5 kalends of April. The use of such a way of dating suggests a reliance on the continuity of present and future. Bede notes that the Greeks and Egyptians used a

¹⁰ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Faith Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians, 29 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), ch. 36, p. 103. Latin: 'solis est annus cum ad eadem loca siderum redit, peractis ·cclxv· diebus et sex horis', Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', *Bedae Venerabilis opera: Opera didascalica, Pars VI*, CCSL, 123B, ed. by C. W. Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), p. 396. Of course, we now know that it is the earth that moves, and not the sun.

¹¹ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* trans. and ed. by Stephen A. Barney and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), V.xxxiii, p. 128.

¹² *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 13.

process familiar from our modern system, that of counting the days from the beginning of the month to the end.¹³

There are many ways to reckon the passing of solar years — even today in the West *anno Domini* (AD) dating is regularly used alongside CE (common era) — and many were in use during the Middle Ages.¹⁴ While the assumption is still current that Bede popularised *anno Domini* dating, he also used *annus mundi* years, counting the years from Creation and thus from the beginning of time. Other systems available to the historian included years from the founding of the city of Rome (AUC, *ab urbe condita*, used by Orosius in his world history), consular years, regnal years, and the indiction years inherited from the fifteen-year Roman taxation cycle.¹⁵ Localised systems for dating the past were useful for local events, but a wider scale was eventually needed.¹⁶ The type of dating used depended on the function, and Deliyannis identifies

¹³ ‘Neither the Greeks nor the Egyptians, of whom we spoke above, observed the distinction of kalends, nones and ideas in their months. Instead, they counted forward in the sequence of days from the beginning of the month until its end, simply and without error.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Faith Wallis, ch. 14, pp. 51–52. Latin: ‘Sed et Graeci et Aegyptii, de quibus supra diximus, nullam in suis mensibus kalendarum, nonarum, iduum distinctionem obseruant, uerum ab incipiente cuiusque mensis exordio usque ad terminum eius, crescent simpliciter et inerrabiliter dierum concurrentium ordine computando, peruenieunt.’ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, ed. by C. W. Jones, p. 327.

¹⁴ For an overview see Deborah Mausekopf Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. by Chris Humphrey and W. M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 5–22. For time in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle see Jennifer Neville, ‘Making Their Own Sweet Time: The Scribes of *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A*’, in *The Medieval Chronicle II: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle Driebergen/Utrecht 16–21 July 1999*, ed. by Erik Cooper, Costerus, n.s. 144 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 166–77.

¹⁵ Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, p. 6.

¹⁶ Deliyannis suggests that the Easter controversy partly contributed to AD dating; Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, p. 7. On AD dating see also Daniel P. McCarthy, ‘The Emergence of

AD years plus indiction years, or sometimes regnal years, as most commonly used in Anglo-Saxon documents: ‘It has been traditional to credit Bede with introducing AD dating to England. However, AD by itself, or AD plus indiction, appears on even the very earliest documents, from the seventh century.’¹⁷ The reasons why Bede came to prefer AD dating are discussed in chapter one.

AD dating is sequential, but the liturgical calendar and the solar year are cyclical. The beginning of the year was marked on different days in Anglo-Saxon England, depending on ecclesiastic or popular custom,¹⁸ but the year repeated through its cycle of months, changing only with the addition of the bissextile day each leap year. Similarly, the Christian liturgical calendar returns, year after year, with most of its feasts fixed, i.e., occurring on the same date each year. The exception is Easter and its associated feasts, which are linked to the Hebrew festival of Passover, the meal Jesus celebrated at the Last Supper. The Hebrew calendar is lunar and Passover falls on the first full moon after the spring equinox, regardless of the day of the week. The Christian church, however, emerging from Jewish roots into a Gentile world, also began using the Julian solar calendar; it retained the tradition of celebrating Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon after the spring equinox, according to the lunar rather than the solar calendar.¹⁹ According to J. D. North, timekeeping ‘within the Church, even at the most sacred

Anno Domini’, in *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño, International Medieval Research, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 31–53.

¹⁷ Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, p. 11.

¹⁸ See Malcolm Godden, ‘New Year’s Day in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, *Notes and Queries*, 237, n.s. 39 (1992), 148–50.

¹⁹ For more background information see Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

level – which is to say, the celebration of Easter – was a question of bringing our experience into a relationship with the visible heavens'.²⁰ The science of the computus arose from the need not just to reckon human time against natural time, but the lunar calendar against the solar, for the celebration of an event in which time met eternity.²¹ Without our printed calendars, the individual medieval church or monastery had to work out for itself the date of Easter, and it had to do so sufficiently far in advance as to calculate the date of Septuagesima, then Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday (the beginning of Lent), and prepare for these and the other moveable feasts (Passiontide, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, Ascension).

Simple observation of the lunar cycle did not allow sufficient notice to plan for these feasts. Instead, the phases of the moon could be approximated and anticipated by using a complex set of formulae. However, every so often the lunisolar cycles would repeat, allowing for a degree of predictability once one had calculated where in the cycle the current year fell. Easter tables were drawn and disseminated to facilitate the calculations; such calculation constituted the science of the *computus*.²² In time, manuscripts with computus treatises also attracted related

²⁰ North, 'Monastic Time', p. 205.

²¹ See Wesley M. Stevens, 'Sidereal Time in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by Calvin B. Kendall and Peter S. Wells (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 125–52.

²² See Deliyannis, 'Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages', also Peter Baker, 'Computus', in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 119–20 for a general introduction, and the recent Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Of some use is Arno Borst, *The Ordering of Time: From the Ancient Computus to the Modern Computer*, trans. by Andrew Winnard (Cambridge: Polity, 1993).

knowledge, becoming what Faith Wallis distinguishes as ‘the framework for what might be called a clerical encyclopaedia of spiritualized science’, including mathematics, astronomy, medicine, prognostics, and even grammar and metrics.²³ As she explains, ‘Bede himself in *De temporum ratione*, his magisterial textbook of *computus*, legitimated all these subjects as *doctrina christiana*: learning in the service of Christian moral, spiritual, and ecclesial ends.’²⁴ Elsewhere Wallis identifies *computus* as ‘not an observational science, or a physics of time, but a technique of patterning time into repeating cycles according to certain conventions’.²⁵ *Computus* offered a way to understand the order of the world, and Peter Blair concludes that such computistical manuals ‘stimulated a widespread interest in problems of chronology in general’.²⁶

The interest and need were so general, and the knowledge so fundamentally required, that at least forty-five *computus* manuscripts survive from those which existed in England before 1200.²⁷ *Computus* manuscripts began with the goal of assisting the calculation of Easter, but for many ‘ignorant clerics’ and ‘lazy priests’ (as Byrhtferth addresses them),²⁸ further help was necessary to facilitate the use of the tables. Bede wrote *De temporibus*, and then later *De*

²³ Faith Wallis, ‘*Computus*, Crusade, and Construction: Writing England’s Monastic Past and Future in Oxford, St John’s College, MS 17’, *New Medieval Literatures*, 13 (2011), 221–38 (p. 226).

²⁴ Wallis, ‘*Computus*, Crusade, and Construction’, p. 226. See also Faith Wallis, ‘Bede’, in *Medieval Science, Technology and Medicine: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by S. Livesey, T. Glick and Faith Wallis (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 139–41.

²⁵ Faith Wallis, ‘Introduction’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Faith Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians, 29 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. xv–ci (p. xx).

²⁶ Blair, *The World of Bede*, p. 261.

²⁷ Stephanie Hollis, ‘Scientific and Medieval Writings’, in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Elaine M. Treharne and Phillip Pulsiano (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 188–208 (p. 189).

²⁸ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge: ‘<clerici> imperiti’, I.3.1; ‘sleacan preoste’, II.3.8–9.

temporum ratione, to explain the underlying principles of computus. The demand for such knowledge came from Bede's contemporaries, but his works enjoyed wide transmission. Soon after 1000, Ælfric translated what he found most relevant into the vernacular in his *De temporibus anni*,²⁹ and Byrhtferth composed his *Enchiridion* in both Old English and Latin, drawing on Bede, Ælfric, and other sources. Initially for the Latin literate and learned, over the centuries computistical and related works were translated into the vernacular and disseminated more widely, and what was initially a mathematical exercise for a specific purpose became a collection of information concerned with time. Number symbolism was one of the knowledge systems added to computistical texts, a manifestation of the medieval concern with order, and cemented by 'Augustine's enthusiasm for number symbolism in exegesis'.³⁰ The number symbolism which was embedded in the *computus* is discussed further in chapter two. The popularisation of computistical works meant that information about time and temporality became available to both the Latinate and vernacular reader.

One branch of medieval 'science' related to the *computus* was prognostication, which became popular in Anglo-Saxon England from the later tenth century.³¹ The unpredictable nature

²⁹ Edited as *Ælfric's 'De Temporibus Anni'*, ed. and trans. by Martin Blake, Anglo-Saxon Texts, 6 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), and earlier as *Aelfric's De Temporibus Anni*, ed. by Henrich Henel, EETS, o.s. 213 (London: Milford, Oxford University Press for EETS, 1942). See Aaron J. Kleist, 'The Influence of Bede's *De Temporum Ratione* on Ælfric's Understanding of Time', *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño, International Medieval Research, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 81–97.

³⁰ Charles Jones, 'Some Introductory Remarks on Bede's Commentary on Genesis', *Sacris Erudiri*, 19 (1969), 115–98 (p. 166).

³¹ For a general introduction and texts, see R. M. Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context: A Survey and Handlist of Manuscripts', *ASE*, 30 (2001), 181–230. Liuzza has also edited an edition of prognostics

of future time led to folk traditions of predictions based on dreams, lunar phases, and similar phenomena. Ælfric rejected such practices as akin to magic, though prognostic materials are generally found in manuscripts associated with Benedictine houses, even Winchester itself — Ælfric knew what he was rejecting. Roy Liuzza suggests that ‘this coexistence may suggest something about the psychology of monastic life: to enter a monastery was to enter into a new relationship to time’.³² Certainly the availability of computistical manuscripts, combined with the temporal nature of monastic life, would have prompted many to contemplate on the nature of time and perhaps then to write poems about it.

The contents of a monastic library varied greatly, but there was a strong tradition of textual exchange with continental Europe.³³ Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* was the basis for much of the early medieval understanding of time. This work, ‘a reorganized redaction and compendium of writings mainly of the fourth to six centuries’, ‘preserved, in abbreviated form,

from one manuscript: *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.iii*, ed. and trans. by R. M. Liuzza, Anglo-Saxon Texts, 8 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011). László Chardonnens’ edition of prognostics features both Latin and vernacular texts: *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900–1100: Study and Texts*, ed. by László Sándor Chardonnens, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History, 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2007). See also Carla Morini, ‘Measuring Time in Anglo-Saxon England and Temporal Prognostics’, *Études Médiévales (Amiens)*, 6 (2004), 24–32.

³² Liuzza, ‘Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context’, p. 206.

³³ See Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); more specifically, for Bede’s library, see M. L.W. Laistner, ‘The Library of the Venerable Bede’, in *Bede: His Life, Times, and Writings: Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of His Death*, ed. by A. Hamilton Thompson (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), pp. 237–66.

the accumulated learning of the classical world.’³⁴ This and Isidore’s other works were an important source for Bede’s own science. The encyclopaedic form of the *Etymologies* allows the reader to look up a concept or thing, such as time, and learn the basic classical understanding, a format followed in part in Bede’s *DT* and *DNR*, and echoed by Ælfric’s later *De temporibus anni*. Works of the other Latin Church Fathers were also available, and models of histories like Eusebius’s own *Historia ecclesiastica* were accessible to Bede.³⁵ Narratives and traditions from other cultures were sources for poetry in the vernacular, whether directly or through intermediary translations.³⁶ The possible sources for the two saints’ lives discussed in chapter two are of particular interest, as source study suggests that the Anglo-Saxon poets made deliberate choices to imitate or deviate from sources as they saw fit, especially with regards to time. Bede, too, was original in some of his temporal thought, though it caused him difficulty. *Beowulf* has some possible analogues but the Old English elegies lack any clear extant sources, and thus their

³⁴ ‘Introduction’, in *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. and ed. by Stephen A. Barney and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 3–28 (p. 13).

³⁵ For discussion of Latinate sources available in Anglo-Saxon England and to Bede see the introductions to translations of his works, especially to *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis. On the church and study more generally, see Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*.

³⁶ For a collection of sources for Old English poetry see Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder, trans., *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1976), and Daniel G. Calder and others, ed., *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry II: The Major Germanic and Celtic Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983). For sources for the Old English *Andreas* see *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals: Translations from the Greek, Latin, and Old English*, ed. and trans. by Robert Boenig, The Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 70 (New York: Garland, 1991). For *Beowulf* sources see Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995); G.N. Garmonsway and Jacqueline Simpson, ed. and trans., *Beowulf and its Analogues* (London: Dent, 1980); and Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000).

particular temporalities may be original or otherwise. Also in a medieval library would surely be found works of Augustine by Hippo, the major early medieval influence on both theology and philosophy, especially of time. His *Confessions* contain one of the most important extended reflections on time in the Western intellectual tradition.

Augustine and Beyond: Theoretical Frameworks

Philosophies of time often start with Aristotle and Augustine, but there is no evidence of any direct knowledge of Aristotle's works in Anglo-Saxon England, and very little indirect.³⁷

Augustine takes up problems to do with the concept of time across all his works, but Book XI of his *Confessions* addresses the problem in earnest, if without resolution. Bettetini proposes that 'St Augustine announces and attacks the great theme of time in a specific context and with specific weapons. But he never takes himself to arrived [*sic*] at the final word on the matter simply because it is, in a certain respect, not relevant to the aims of his writings.'³⁸ Augustine takes up a problem which seems self-evident, and perhaps insoluble:

³⁷ For a historical approach to temporal philosophy see J. J. A. Mooij, *Time and Mind: The History of a Philosophical Problem*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 129 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), and for a specifically medieval approach see Pasquale Porro, ed., *The Medieval Concept of Time: Studies on the Scholastic Debate and Its Reception in Early Modern Philosophy*, Studien Und Texte Zur Geistesgeschichte Des Mittelalters, 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Ricoeur goes on to discuss Aristotle after Augustine in his *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), I, discussed below.

³⁸ Marie Bettetini, 'Measuring in Accordance with *dimensiones certae*: Augustine of Hippo and the Question of Time', in *The Medieval Concept of Time: Studies on the Scholastic Debate and Its Reception*

What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who asks me, I do not know. I can state with confidence, however, that this much I do know: if nothing passed away there would be no past time; if there was nothing still on its way there would be no future time; and if nothing existed, there would be no present time.³⁹

Attempts to answer this question have been made over the past millennium and a half, and continue. We all ‘know’ what natural time is, and we all experience it as ‘passing’, however spatial this analogy is; the experience of past, present and future seems in itself an attribute of nature, until the problem is raised.

The meditation in Book XI of the *Confessions* begins with Creation, and a question of how God made heaven and earth.⁴⁰ Was there time before the Creation of time? For Augustine, no:

How could measureless ages have passed by if you had not made them, since you are the author and creator of the ages? Or what epochs of time could have existed, that had not been created by you? And how could they have passed by, if they had never existed? If there was a “time” before you made heaven and earth, how can it be said that you were not at work then, you who are the initiator of all times? For of course you would have made that time too; there could not have been any passing times before you created times. If, therefore, there was no time before heaven and earth came to be, how can anyone ask what you were doing then? There was no such thing as “then” when there was no time.⁴¹

There can be no time outside of God, as Augustine continues: ‘You have made all eras of time and you are before all time, and there was never a “time” when time did not exist.’⁴² For Augustine and for Bede, as chapter one will show, God is both maker and arbiter of time.

in *Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Pasquale Porro, *Studien Und Texte Zur Geistesgeschichte Des Mittelalters*, 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 33–53 (p. 34).

³⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.14, 17.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.5, 7.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.13, 15.

⁴² Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.16.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur takes Book 11 of the *Confessions* as the starting point for the first chapter of his monumental work, *Time and Narrative*.⁴³ Ricoeur argues throughout this book that ‘speculation on time is an inconclusive rumination to which narrative activity alone can respond’;⁴⁴ the narrative activity of the Anglo-Saxons also serves this purpose in its exploration of different temporal constructs. Ricoeur’s thesis is that ‘time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence’.⁴⁵ Ricoeur begins the reflection in *Time and Narrative* with what he terms Augustine’s ‘aporias’.⁴⁶ ‘The major aporia with which Augustine is struggling’, according to Ricoeur, is

that of the measurement of time. This aporia itself, however, is inscribed within the circle of an aporia that is even more fundamental, that of the being or the nonbeing of time. For what can be measured is only what, in some way, exists. We may deplore the fact if we like, but the phenomenology of time emerges out of an ontological question: *quid est enim tempus?* [...] As soon as this question is posed, all the ancient difficulties regarding the being and the nonbeing of time surge forth.⁴⁷

Augustine does not or cannot solve for himself ‘the being and the nonbeing of time’. He writes: ‘I have therefore come to the conclusion that time is nothing other than tension: but tension of what, I do not know, and I would be very surprised if it is not tension of consciousness

⁴³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*.

⁴⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 52.

⁴⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, I, ‘The Aporias of the Experience of Time: Book 11 of Augustine’s *Confessions*’, pp. 5–30.

⁴⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 7.

itself.’⁴⁸ The closest Augustine can come to a definition of time is to combine it with his ontological experience, and particularly the ‘impressions’ time makes upon his mind:

In you, my mind, I measure time. Do not interrupt me by clamoring that time has objective existence, nor hinder yourself with the hurly-burly of your impressions. In you, I say, I do measure time. What I measure is the impression which passing phenomena leave in you, which abides after they have passed by: that is what I measure as a present reality, not the things that passed by so that the impression could be formed. The impression itself is what I measure when I measure intervals of time. Hence either time is this impression, or what I measure is not time.⁴⁹

Ultimately, for Augustine, the *locus* of time is the mind. Time is phenomenological, and can be said to exist insofar as humans can experience it, remember it, and anticipate it. These impressions, or senses, are threefold: ‘There are three tenses or times: the present of past things, the present of present things, and the present of future things. These are three realities in the mind, but nowhere else as far as I can see, for the present of past things is memory, the present of present things is attention, and the present of future things is expectation.’⁵⁰ The past-present-future scheme endures today; it may be how we most naturally, instinctually, relate to time.

However, as Ricoeur notes, this is somewhat novel ground: ‘Augustine alone dares to allow that one might speak of a span of time—a day, an hour—without a cosmological reference. The notion of *distentio animi* will serve, precisely, as a substitute for this cosmological basis for the span of time.’⁵¹ The three tenses or realities of time exist in the mind, but cannot exist all at once. Augustine sets up a ‘dialectic of expectation, memory, and attention, each considered no longer in isolation but in interaction with one another. It is thus no longer a question of either

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.26, 33

⁴⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.36.

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.20, 26.

⁵¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, pp. 14–15.

impression-images or anticipatory images but of an action that shortens expectation and extends memory.⁵² But still:

it is precisely as an enigma that the resolution of the aporia of measurement is valuable. Augustine's inestimable discovery is, by reducing the extension of time to the distention of the soul, to have tied this distention to the slippage that never ceased to find its way into the heart of the threefold present—between the present of the future, the present of the past, and the present of the present. In this way he sees discordance emerge again and again out of the very concordance of the intentions of expectation, attention, and memory.⁵³

The discord identified by Augustine and Ricoeur is an element which Antonina Harbus has identified in the Old English elegies. Her comprehensive study of the mind in Old English poetry encompasses the temporality of mental processes, including the interaction of time and memory in the Old English elegies.⁵⁴ This thesis is interested in all constructs of time, inside and outside of the lived experience of the mind, and the various ways that Anglo-Saxon literature attempts to make sense of time. As Frank Kermode writes, literature has always worked in this way: 'Men, like poets, rush "into the midst," *in media res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems.'⁵⁵

⁵² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 20.

⁵³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry*, Costerus New Series, 143 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), esp. pp. 141–46. Also on memory in the medieval world more generally see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵⁵ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 7.

Bede's lack of engagement with Augustine and the question of time is its own aporia, and will be discussed in chapter one. The absence of a concrete definition of time beyond Augustine's *distentio animi* did not preclude Anglo-Saxons from using time in their literature. As Kermode writes in his *The Sense of an Ending*, 'We measure and order time with our fictions',⁵⁶ and so did the Anglo-Saxons. *The Sense of an Ending* is generally focused on modern literature, beginning with Shakespeare, with few references to medieval literature, and discusses human relationships with time, and how time can be structured through narrative. Kermode writes of Augustine that he 'studies time as the soul's necessary self-extension before and after the critical moment upon which he reflects'.⁵⁷ Despite not directly addressing the medieval, Kermode casts historiography, a particular attribute of *Elene* and *Beowulf*, as a sign of sophistication:

A desire to *use* the past denotes, we are told, an evolutionary phase already quite advanced. To find patterns in historical time—a time free of the repetitions of ritual, and indifferent to the ecstasies of the shāman—is yet another stage. And the assumption or understanding that finding such patterns is a purely anthropocentric activity belongs to a third phase. We are still not quite easy with it. Much of our thinking still belongs to the second phase, when history, historiographical plot-making, did the work of ritual or tradition.⁵⁸

In Kermode's terms, what we will find in Bede, *Beowulf*, and Old English verse saints' lives is an intersection of tradition with history. Anglo-Saxon authors continually found patterns in their past; they drew patterns in time. Overall *The Sense of an Ending* offers some basic truths about the role of time in narrative, and its emphasis on ideas of the end has some use for apocalypse in

⁵⁶ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 63

⁵⁷ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 44.

⁵⁸ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 56.

Old English literature; Martin Green draws on Kermode in his analysis of Old English elegiac poetry, which will be discussed in chapter four.⁵⁹

The structuralist Gérard Genette built on narratology after Ricouer with his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, which offers ‘a systemic theory of narrative’.⁶⁰ He begins with the acknowledgement that a written narrative ‘can only be “consumed”, and therefore actualized, in a *time* that is obviously reading time’.⁶¹ The time in which a narrative is consumed (i.e. read) is different to the time of the story being narrated. Ad Putter makes the same point, in a paraphrase of Mieke Bal’s *Narratology*:

Since time also passes in the fictional worlds of medieval literature, literary critics risk making comparable mistakes when they impose their own sense of time on that implied by the medieval text. I say ‘implied’ because in literature the only time that really passes is the time spent reading or listening (the ‘time of narration’): ‘narrated time’ is an illusion and passes only by suggestion. We arrive at an imaginary chronology by supplementing the temporal markers in the text with our own experience of the world. And the possibility of error arises when this experience that we draw upon to restore the fullness of time conflicts with the experience originally envisaged by the author.⁶²

Time within a text can still be constructed by the author, a point particularly relevant to the saints’ lives discussed in chapter two which consciously create certain forms of narrative time. It is the contention of this thesis that while narrative time is illusory, in that it has no existence

⁵⁹ Martin Green, ‘Man, Time and Apocalypse in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*’, *JEGP*, 74 (1975), 502–18.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Culler, ‘Foreword’, in Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 7–13 (p. 7).

⁶¹ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 34.

⁶² Ad Putter, ‘In Search of Lost Time: Missing Days in *Sir Cleges* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. by Chris Humphrey, and W. M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 119–36 (p. 119).

outside of the narrative, just as a story has no independent existence outside of itself, the Anglo-Saxon texts under discussion craft timeframes within themselves for deliberate effect.

Genette names three narrative concepts that are useful for this thesis: order, duration, and frequency. ‘Order’ is ‘the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged in the narrative discourse’, compared with ‘the order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story’.⁶³ Most medieval narrative does not deviate from an expected arrangement of events, however there are occasional ‘anachronies’, Genette’s useful term for such discordance. Usually such analepses and prolepses (movements back in time and forward in time, respectively) are heterodiegetic, that is, they refer to a different character, event or timeline to the ones described in the surrounding text. ‘Duration’ refers to the amount of text that narrates a particular length of time or narrative event, however, there is no way to measure the duration of a narrative, for ‘reading time varies according to particular circumstances’.⁶⁴ Finally, ‘frequency’ is the repeated telling of a single story event or incident. Genette provides for the possibility that an event may be repeated or not, and a statement (about the event) repeated or not.⁶⁵

Narratology is a structural exercise, and as such usually leaves out the intersection of time and human experience which is expressed through the temporal structure of narrative, or when time appears in narrative (and non-narrative) without apparent or immediate structural purpose. A sense of past, present, and future, is both a narrative structure and a phenomenological sensation. The threefold sense is common to all, and can easily be

⁶³ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 35.

⁶⁴ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 86.

⁶⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 114.

demonstrated in Anglo-Saxon literature. In *Beowulf* the poet has a sense of his own present, from which he looks back to a past both mythical and part-historical, and forward to uncertain futures. Within the world of the poem, within Beowulf's lifetime, the narrative ranges back and forward, the poet particularly given to ominous prolepses.

Aspects of the topic of time in literature have been dealt with before, but this thesis is the first attempt to study Anglo-Saxon ideas of time through examinations of poetry as well as historical and scientific writings.⁶⁶ Some of this material and related concepts have been studied in isolation, for example, in surveys of medieval philosophy or science. Human relationships with time have been addressed in part by such scholarly developments as the growing interest in nostalgia studies. Time in Anglo-Saxon literature, and Old English poetry in particular, has been somewhat neglected aside from scholarly commonplaces such as typology in the saints' lives.

One work on time in medieval literature is Richard Lock's *Aspects of Time in Medieval Literature*. The book is a comparison of oral and written literature rather than an examination of

⁶⁶ Theses such as the following examine various aspects of time in literature, most focusing on Anglo-Saxon texts, but without also addressing scientific and historical texts as this thesis does: Patricia Anne Daily, 'Promised Bodies: Embodiment and the Time of a Literary Text' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, 2002); Jennifer Elise Merriman, 'The Rhetoric of the End Times in Old English Preaching' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2004); Laura Ellen Renick, 'The Aesthetics of Time and the Ideology of Eternity in Old English Christian Poetry' (unpublished dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1995); R. L. Sassone, 'Time and *Beowulf*: The Impact on Anglo-Saxon Poetry of Christian and Non-Christian Germanic Traditions Regarding Time' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2001); James Dyas Thayer, 'Altered Identities: Time and Transformation in *Beowulf*' (unpublished dissertation, University of Oregon, 2002); Mircea Mihai Tomus, 'Chronotopes: The Sense of Time in Old English and Old French Poetry' (unpublished dissertation, University of Iowa, 1995).

time in medieval narrative in itself. His analysis of time in medieval literature is a means to a predetermined end: to prove his thesis that written literature is more sophisticated than that with oral origins. Lock writes in his abstract, ‘Anthropological evidence indicates that concepts of time are closely related to literacy and non-literacy. Cyclic time is thought to be characteristic of a non-literate society, while linear time is characteristic of a literate group.’⁶⁷ In the introduction he discusses time itself, arguing that preliterate societies often operate in an ‘eternal present’,⁶⁸ because ‘the recording and measurement of long periods of time are impossible without writing’.⁶⁹ History of any length must be written, because

without written records accurate evidence of the past is scanty, since even oral records to which great importance may be attached, such as genealogies, rarely extend over more than a few generations. Once written records begin to be kept, a sense of the past, a sense of “history”, may arise and references to past events can be more exact.⁷⁰

Lock’s approach to his chosen medieval texts – which span multiple languages and time periods – includes a consideration of logical chronology within the narrative, and the use of appropriate sequencing patterns. Lock maintains that oral literature cannot be analysed in the same manner as written literature,⁷¹ a somewhat outdated idea. When all we have is the written form then we should treat it as written, without separate terms of analysis. There is no certainty of knowing whether a work is an oral piece being written down for the first time, and many works have some oral basis, however distant from the final written form.

⁶⁷ Richard Lock, *Aspects of Time in Medieval Literature* (New York: Garland, 1985), p. i.

⁶⁸ Lock, *Aspects of Time in Medieval Literature*, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Lock, *Aspects of Time in Medieval Literature*, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Lock, *Aspects of Time in Medieval Literature*, p. 18.

⁷¹ Lock, *Aspects of Time in Medieval Literature*, p. 20.

Several collections of essays have been published on the topic of time, especially around the turn of the millennium because, as Chris Humphrey writes, ‘the impending approach of the third millennium AD served to focus both popular and scholarly curiosity on the nature and history of time. The Middle Ages occupy an ambiguous place in this history: on the one hand recognizably pre-modern, and yet also arguably the birthplace of a modern temporal sensibility.’⁷² The papers in *Time in the Medieval World* cover a range of texts and disciplines,⁷³ including the useful overview by Deborah Deliyannis of historical methods of dating.⁷⁴ Humphrey concludes, ‘the chronological scope of the papers, from the early Middle Ages to the early modern, suggests that it is futile to try to define “medieval time” in absolute terms: then, as now, time was a malleable and relative medium.’⁷⁵ This thesis, however, works towards a sense of Anglo-Saxon literary time, as a sense that varies between genres. *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse* is even more diverse than *Time in the Medieval World*, and suffers from allowing too many contributions, and all of a short length due to their origins as conference papers that have not been largely extended.⁷⁶ The essays cover many periods, genres, and concepts, including calendars and the calculation of time, Jewish concepts of time, Christian philosophy, monasticism, and literary representations. The disparate nature and sheer number of the papers, each mostly focused on one small area, means that no real conclusions can be

⁷² Chris Humphrey, ‘Introduction’, in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. by Chris Humphrey and W. M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 1–4 (p. 1).

⁷³ Chris Humphrey and W. M. Ormrod, eds, *Time in the Medieval World* (York: York Medieval Press, 2001).

⁷⁴ Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’

⁷⁵ Humphrey, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño, eds, *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, International Medieval Research, 9 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003).

comfortably reached. The slightly tighter focus of *The Medieval Concept of Time*, which narrows its papers to philosophy, allows for more cohesion in a volume.⁷⁷ However, none of these three collections examines the interactions between temporal science and narrative texts in any detail, as this thesis will.

The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050 also arose from a conference.⁷⁸ The articles examine the turn of the millennium in medieval Europe using the years 979 to 1033/34 as boundaries, and the sections of the book cover medieval thought, art and literature, historiography, and tools and sources. Many of the papers have an agenda of debunking preconceived ideas about mass hysteria or otherwise at the approach of the year 1000, illustrated by in-depth research. *The Apocalyptic Year 1000* was part of a fashion in twentieth-century scholarship and criticism (medieval or otherwise) at the approach of the year 2000.⁷⁹ At this time millennial hysteria and apocalyptic expectations were popular subjects for scholars and media alike. The fascination of endings is easily understood, by the virtue of their unknown nature. We order our world with fictions, and as Kermode also writes, we have a need to form narrative:

⁷⁷ Porro, ed., *The Medieval Concept of Time*.

⁷⁸ Richard Landes, Andrew Gow, and David C. Van Meter, eds, *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷⁹ In addition to *The Apocalyptic Year 1000* see Malcolm Godden, ‘Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, 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. 130–62; and many essays in Jaritz and Moreno-Riaño, eds, *Time and Eternity*. For a recent summary of medieval eschatological scholarship, see Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, *Studies in Early Medieval Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 6–8, where he notes that eschatology need not be a strictly millennial pursuit (p. 7).

it makes little difference—though it makes some—whether you believe the age of the world to be six thousand years or five thousand million years, whether you think time will have a stop or that the world is eternal; there is still a need to speak humanly of a life's importance in relation to it—a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end.⁸⁰

In the absence of endings, due to living *in media res*, we create them.

The apocalypse is an irresistible image: the destruction of the world, the end of time, and perhaps the glory of being there and, better yet, surviving. It is a mainstay of film, especially the post-apocalyptic scenarios that would once have been impossible in Christian thought (there is no time after the end of time). The greatest power of apocalypse is its unknown quality. Anticipation, the act of waiting, breeds creative expectation. Because the end has not happened yet we are able to imagine it and re-imagine it endlessly. As Kermode discusses, 'the End is a fact of life and a fact of the imagination, working out from the middle, the human crisis.'⁸¹ The end was no less a fact for medieval humans than modern; apocalypse looms large in Anglo-Saxon literature and not just in the popular conception of millennial hysteria.⁸² Subtle imagery of apocalypses, biblical and otherwise, finds its way into the literature. There is considerable debate as to how serious apocalyptic expectations really were, but Christianity had made it clear that an end was coming.

What sort of ending that might be, and when, and how, were less clear. Christ told his disciples: 'And if I shall go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to

⁸⁰ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, pp. 3–4.

⁸¹ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 58.

⁸² See Richard M. Trask, 'Looking Forward to Doomsday: An Old English Pastime', *In Geardagum*, 21 (2000), 1–21.

myself; that where I am, you also may be’,⁸³ and St Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: ‘For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord shall so come, as a thief in the night.’⁸⁴ The Book of Apocalypse was a guide, of sorts, but in need of interpretation by way of exegesis; hence, commentaries like Bede’s proliferated.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Christians were told in Matthew, ‘watch ye therefore, because ye know not what hour your Lord will come.’⁸⁶ For the Anglo-Saxons, Malcolm Godden writes, the end of the world ‘raised complex problems about time and history: where exactly were they in that sequence of historical time from Christ to the end, and was the critical moment a particular spot in historical time or only a state of mind?’⁸⁷ Bede assisted with the first question, but the second was a source of difficulty across the Christian world.

⁸³ John 14.3. All biblical references in this thesis are to the Douay-Rheims translation. Note that the version of the Bible known to Bede and in common use throughout Anglo-Saxon England was the Vulgate, translated by St Jerome. Differences in translation became a source of contention for Bede, as noted in chapter one.

⁸⁴ I Thessalonians 5.2.

⁸⁵ Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, edited as *Expositio Apocalypseos: Bedae opera exegetica*, CCSL 121A, ed. by Roger Gryson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), translated as *The Explanation of the Apocalypse by the Venerable Bede*, trans. by Edward Marshall (Oxford and London: James Parker, 1878) and more recently as *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, trans. by Faith Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians, 58 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013). For information about the tradition of apocalyptic exegesis see Gerald Bonner, ‘Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary’, in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures 1958–1993*, ed. by Michael Lapidge, 2 vols (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994) I: 1958–1978, pp. 153–83, and also the Introduction to *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, trans. by Wallis, esp. ‘Bede and the Latin Tradition of Exegesis of Revelation’, pp. 5–22.

⁸⁶ Matthew 24.42.

⁸⁷ Malcolm Godden, ‘The Millenium, Time, and History for the Anglo-Saxons’, in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050*, ed. by Richard Landes, Andrew Gow, and David C. Van Meter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 155–80 (p. 156).

The texts under consideration in this thesis make occasional use of apocalyptic imagery, but do not in themselves constitute apocalyptic literature. Their relation with the future is more complicated. *Beowulf* repeatedly references future death and destruction, and the poem itself ends with the death of its hero, and uncertainty for his people. The elegies, too, offer bleak visions of the future when the future is broached at all. Peter Darby's recent study *Bede and the End of Time* demonstrates how Bede created 'a master narrative of the end-times, a coherent "history of the future"'.⁸⁸ Darby's approach is intertextual, considering Bede's works both separately and together, so as to trace Bede's intellectual development. This thesis follows a similarly intertextual methodology in considering Bede's temporality throughout his works, especially his constructions of the past and present.

Apocalypse in Old English poetry was considered long before the turn of the millennium by Martin Green, who also drew on Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*.⁸⁹ Green's article focuses on *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*. He follows on from Kermode's assessment that because men have to confront time, we create patterns and fictions to give time meaning, hence the fiction of the apocalypse, a feature of many cultures and literatures.⁹⁰ Green demonstrates that apocalypse relates to both the present and the past, because 'the end is implicit in the beginning',⁹¹ and so 'the future is the present, their present time is the last time, and the cataclysms and portents they so copiously catalogue are felt to be happening in full view of men, although only the apocalyptic writers have had the benefit of revelation which provides the key

⁸⁸ Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 218.

⁸⁹ Green, 'Man, Time and Apocalypse', p. 502.

⁹⁰ Green, 'Man, Time and Apocalypse', p. 502–03.

⁹¹ Green. 'Man, Time and Apocalypse', p. 504.

of understanding.⁹² Of the poems in question, he concludes, ‘the imagery of apocalypse functions in the background of the poems to bring into relief the human events in the foreground; we are constantly being reminded of the order of the world as the apocalyptic mind conceived of it, moving with utter resoluteness to its climax.’⁹³

Another important article for the study of time in the Old English elegies is J. E. Cross’s ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm’.⁹⁴ Cross illustrates the medieval belief in the parallel of macrocosm and microcosm, man and world, both containing the four elements;⁹⁵ a theory which Bede also referred to, writing: ‘man himself, who is called “microcosm” by the wise, that is, “a smaller universe”, has his body tempered in every respect by these same qualities; indeed each of its constituent humours imitates the manner of the season in which it prevails.’⁹⁶ Cross connects this theory with Old English poetry and a particular focus on the decline of the world, noting that classical and early Christian thinkers ‘believed that the men of their own generation and/or the world were physically weaker than mankind and/or world of some (often unspecified) preceding age.’⁹⁷ The connection of man and world finds further expression in the ages of man schemes

⁹² Green, ‘Man, Time and Apocalypse’, p. 504.

⁹³ Green, ‘Man, Time and Apocalypse’, p. 518.

⁹⁴ J. E. Cross, ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm in Old English Literature’, in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. by Stanley B. Greenfield (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1963), pp. 1–22.

⁹⁵ Cross, ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm’, p. 1.

⁹⁶ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 35, pp. 100–01. Latin: ‘Sed et homo ipse, qui a sapientibus microcosmos, id est minor mundus, appellatur, hisdem per omnia qualitatibus habet temperatum corpus, imitantibus nimirum singulis eius quibus constat humoribus, modum temporum quibus maxime pollet’, p. 392.

⁹⁷ Cross, ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm’, p. 5.

popular throughout the classical and medieval period, examined independently in books by Elizabeth Sears and J. A. Burrow.⁹⁸ The stages of human life were linked with the ages of the world and with associated qualities, elements, humours etc., and in the process provided temporal symbolism for authors to access. Diagrams and explanations of the ages of man were common in computus manuscripts but despite the acknowledgement of such schemata, their possible use in Anglo-Saxon literature has not been much studied beyond Cross.⁹⁹ The boundaries of each age of man vary, but Byrhtferth's diagram in St John's College, Oxford, MS 17, lists the ages of boyhood and infancy as ending at 14 years of age, while adolescence lasts to 28, and *iuventus*, maturity, to 48, and *senectus*, old age, until 70 or 80.¹⁰⁰ Isidore, by contrast, offers six ages of man.¹⁰¹ Infancy is from birth until the age of 7, childhood until age 14, adolescence until 28, youth until 50, maturity until 70, and old age ends in death, with no set number of years. The six ages of man could be and were aligned with the six ages of the world, described by Augustine and also Bede, as discussed in chapter one.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

⁹⁹ Though for a treatment of the Spheres of Apuleius and Pythagoras diagrams see R. M. Liuzza, 'The Sphere of Life and Death: Time, Medicine, and the Visual Imagination', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Andy Orchard, 2 vols, Toronto Old English Series (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), II, 28–52, and for other illustrations see Peter Richardson, 'Experienced Time in Old English Texts and Illuminations', *Studia Neophilologica*, 66 (1994), 27–34.

¹⁰⁰ Burrow discusses the diagram on p. 18 and Sears on p. 35 of their respective volumes; it is on folio 7^v of Oxford, St John's College, MS 17, which can be viewed online at: *The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford, St John's College MS17*, McGill University Library, Digital Collections Program, 2007 <<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17>> [accessed 5 August 2013].

¹⁰¹ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, XI.ii, p. 241.

Of course Old English as a language is somewhat limited in its range of tense, lacking a specific future tense. Some work has been done on words for time in Old English, beginning with Frederick Tupper whose work, though published in 1895, remains a valuable study of the Anglo-Saxon day and its divisions.¹⁰² His sources include Bede, Ælfric, and Byrhtferth and other ecclesiastical texts. His work on the various times of day, especially the nebulous *uhta*, is vital for chapters three and four of this thesis on *Beowulf* and the Old English elegies.¹⁰³ Janet Bately's work on time-words takes advantage of advances in the use of computers for Old English linguistics,¹⁰⁴ evaluating the range of meanings for Old English time-words and their contexts. The thesis draws on all of these works and more,¹⁰⁵ as discussed in each chapter, to work towards a coherent construct and poetics of time in Anglo-Saxon literature.

¹⁰² Frederick Tupper, Jr, 'Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl', *PMLA*, 10 (1895), 111–241.

¹⁰³ The main dictionary of Old English called upon for linguistic reference in this thesis is Bosworth-Toller: *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. by T. Northcote Toller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898).

¹⁰⁴ Janet Bately, 'On Some Words for Time in Old English Literature', in *Problems of Old English Lexicography*, ed. by Alfred Bammesberger (Regensburg: Pustet, 1985), pp. 47–64.

¹⁰⁵ See also Ulrich Detges, 'Time and Truth: The Grammaticalization of Resultatives and Perfects within a Theory of Subjectification', *Studies in Language*, 24 (2000), 345–77, on the verb *habban*, and Kiriko Sato, 'Old English *geond* Expressing Duration of Time: The Winchester Usage', *SELIM (Journal of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature)*, 6 (2009), 23–45, on the preposition *geond*.

Overview of Thesis

The modes of temporality uncovered in the texts under discussion include biblical time, historical time and historicity, natural time, divine time, a sense of eternity, personal or lived time, symbolic time, subjective time, and narrative time. I define temporality as a sense or understanding of time, often in conjunction with the experience of being in time. Temporality here has a strong phenomenological influence, being based on the subjective experience described in literary texts. The thesis builds on the work of other scholars and draws on the theory discussed above, in particular Augustine of Hippo and how Old English poetry makes use of his ideas.

Of Augustine's three types of time, it is the present sense of things past that would seem to loom largest in Old English literature. A story is, by definition, something that happened in the past; it is over at the time of telling, whether the telling is oral or written. The past exists not just in the memory of the singular medieval person, but in the cultural memory; a larger past of history and subjective experience is retold in the literature. For Augustine, God is the ultimate temporal authority; he exists outside time. But in a written narrative, the author might be said to have the ultimate control. It is the *Beowulf*-poet who refers obliquely to the future destruction of Heorot or the death of minor characters, and who is able to dive back into the past at will and tell stories outside of the timeline of the main action, such as the Last Survivor's treasure-burial. It is in the nature of Old English poetry to foreshadow constantly what is to come both within the poem and outside it.

Eternity is outside of time and apart from time; it is in some ways the opposite of time. The concept is discussed further in chapter one and throughout the thesis, for eternity recurs

throughout the texts. Eternity takes on a further dimension of meaning in the Christian context, for God is eternal, as Augustine recognised: God's time is all time. Furthermore, the Christian is assured of eternity in heaven after death, a timeless existence after enduring life on earth in which one is subject to time. In *Andreas* the eternity of the saint's own soul is confirmed in a vision of him enthroned in heaven, while in some of the Old English elegies eternity is posed as the answer to the anguish of being in time. For Bede, the eternal was also the stable.

Chapter one is a study of time and temporality in the works of the Venerable Bede. This chapter is the foundation for those that follow, outlining the extent of temporal knowledge in Anglo-Saxon England in both scientific and Christian contexts. Bede's textual authority endured for centuries; what most literate Anglo-Saxons knew about time they would have learned from Bede, even if at the remove of a vernacular translation.¹⁰⁶ As Liuzza suggests, 'monastic discipline is first and foremost a temporal discipline of punctuality and accurate timekeeping.'¹⁰⁷ Christianity itself is a temporal religion interested in eternity. The Bible is a sacred history, recording the beginning of time at the Creation of the world, and predicting the end of that world and perhaps time itself at the Last Judgement; outside these parameters are God and eternity. To understand God's involvement in time was to understand one's place in Christian history, a place that Bede was determined to cement for Anglo-Saxon England with his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede is sensitive to what Davidse calls 'the double effect of time: the fact that on the one hand time alienates and creates a distance, and that on the other hand it can create a link with the past,

¹⁰⁶ Such as Ælfric's *De temporibus anni* or Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*.

¹⁰⁷ 'Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context', p. 207.

bridging the gap of this distance';¹⁰⁸ all of his works but especially the *HE* work to form links between past and future. However, Bede's vision of time was not fixed from the beginning of his career as a writer; rather, as the chapter explores, he adapted his construct of time in response to political pressures. I study the theme of time across all of Bede's writings, rather than works in isolation, an approach hitherto relatively unused but gaining traction. The possible connections between Latinate prose writing and vernacular poetry have not often been studied, but such comparison is particularly fruitful in the area of time; it will become clear that classical ideas of time such as the Ages of Man, disseminated in Latinate literature, made their way through to the vernacular for use in poetry including *Beowulf* and the Old English elegies.

The other three chapters explore Old English poetry. The poems chosen cover three broad categories: verse saints' lives, epic (*Beowulf*), and the elegies; or three codexes: Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS CXVII; London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv; and Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501.¹⁰⁹ While 'genre' as a literary category is a modern distinction and a term of convenience, it is not without value for the medieval scholar. Though, as Anne Klinck notes, the medieval period lacked an organised study or awareness of genre, and so it cannot be proved that authors actively intended their works to fit in particular categories or genres,¹¹⁰ texts must be classified somehow. The Old English elegies are the most contentious of

¹⁰⁸ Jan Davidse, 'The Sense of History in the Works of the Venerable Bede', *Studi Medievali*, 23 (1982), 644–70 (p. 651).

¹⁰⁹ For an analysis of time in a poetic category not explored in this thesis, see David N. Klausner, 'Aspects of Time in the Battle Poetry of Early Britain', in *The Middle Ages in the North-West*, ed. by Tom Scott and Pat Starkey (Oxford: Leopard's Head, 1995), pp. 85–107.

¹¹⁰ Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), p. 223.

genres of the period, because ‘elegy’ as a genre in modern terms is far removed from these poems. However, as discussed in chapter four, the poems placed into this category share many themes, enough to suggest that they were compiled into the Exeter Book at least in part because of what they share. The matter of compilation thus overlaps with that of genre. While the elegies are all found in the Exeter Book, not all Old English poetic saints’ lives are found in the Vercelli Book. The two that are there, however, pay particular attention to the poetics of time and construct time in very deliberate ways. *Elene* and *Andreas* echo the larger themes of the Vercelli Book and suggest a compiler sensitive to temporal themes. *Beowulf* can, of course, be placed in a genre all its own, with nothing extant like it in Old English, but again the epic poem takes a particular attitude to time. It also engages in the elegiac mode, which suggests that a certain approach to time and temporality was considered appropriate for poetry of this type.

The two saints’ lives in the Vercelli Book, *Andreas* and *Elene*, offer different constructs of time, although both being hagiographical they also engage in typological and liturgical symbolism. *Elene* begins by giving a date for its narrative, in an apparent echo of Bede’s *HE* and other chronicles, and thus an attempt at historical authenticity. *Andreas* is more fully in the realm of myth, uninterested in historicity but insistent on marking the passage of time. The whole narrative of the poem adds up to a span of forty days, a time span neglected by previous scholarship, which opens up a range of biblical, typological, and liturgical meanings. Both *Andreas* and *Elene* construct time carefully, and are designed to prompt temporal reflection in learned readers familiar with biblical history. Their shared poetics of time is devotional and sacred.

Beowulf and *Andreas* have long been held to share some kind of relationship, usually characterised as the *Andreas*-poet borrowing from *Beowulf*, or to some less kind commentators, outright plagiarising. *Beowulf* consciously resists the historicity found in *Elene*, preferring to set its action in *geardagum*, a time both symbolic and semi-artificial given that some of historically 'real' characters are not particularly ancient. The poem engages with the schemata of ages of man and ages of the world, by presenting Beowulf in his youth and in his old age, and referring to past ages in the persona of Cain and the great age of the dragon's treasure. Overall, the poem's structure can be reduced to two parts, an echo of the poetic symbolism of night and day which the poet continually evokes. The second part of the poem, its 'night', makes use of the elegiac mode, in which time is disordered, full of loss, and mourning.

The elegiac mode is discussed further in chapter four, which explores the temporality of the group of poems designated the Old English elegies. These poems, far from being lengthy narratives of the lives of saints or heroes, are short descriptions of deeply personal experience, focused on the emotional present of each speaker. These speakers are trapped in their present, though able to look back into their past and ahead to bleak futures. Their minds range over time in perfect imitation of Augustine's *distentio animi*, but here the condition is presented as abnormal, unlike in narratives such as *Beowulf* where digressions in time are the norm. Some of the elegies use seasonal imagery and employ the ages of man schemata, especially the correlation of fours. The view of the past is generally nostalgic, and the views of the future bleak in different ways, and occasionally hinting at apocalypse. The elegies speak to the power of memory, but also suggest the tantalising possibility that time can be erased, that something that happened can now seem 'as if it never were' ('swa hit no wære', *The Wife's Lament*, 24; similar phrasing also occurs in *The Wanderer*). It is this instability of time that separates the elegies from

all other texts under discussion, which feature the firm hands of confident narrators, and an absolute trust in God.

Time, then, can be constructed and reconstructed according to the demands of the text. The poetics of time are wide-ranging, and the Anglo-Saxon author had many types of temporal symbolism at his disposal. This thesis begins with the controlled project of the Venerable Bede, to place Anglo-Saxon England within Christian history as a guarantee of its salvation in the future, and progresses through poetry which exemplifies that controlled Christian message, to the epic that mixes Christian and classical temporal ideas, to the chaotic time of the elegies, moving from order to disorder. Bede's works speak to the problems of time in his lifetime, and the need to connect Anglo-Saxon England with world time and history. With the Incarnation, God entered human time, and with the conversion the Anglo-Saxons joined the elect. *Elene* dates its narrative in relation to the date of the Incarnation – even though its date is historically wrong – because it depicts the discovery of the True Cross, the instrument by which Christ left human time and became immortal in the Resurrection, restoring the immortality that was promised to Adam and lost in the Fall. *Andreas* portrays these ideas through typology, as in the world of the poem St Andrew is a Christ-type who experiences Creation, the Flood, the Passion, and the Resurrection. *Andreas*'s setting *on fyrndagum* is an echo of *Beowulf*'s *in geardagum*, the setting for the interaction of history and myth. As *Beowulf* ends it suggests the end of heroic life as well as of the world, a theme continued in the Old English elegies, which mourn the loss of community and joy. Ultimately they suggest the nonbeing of time and the ability to erase it, 'as if it never were'.

Chapter One: Bede's Time

‘Naturas rerum uarias labentis et aeui
 Perstrinxi titulis, tempora lata citis,
 Beda Dei famulus. Tu fixa obsecry perennem
 Qui legis astra, super mente tuere diem.’
 – Bede, *De natura rerum*.¹

Introduction

Across the entire corpus of Bede's writings we find a sustained project to construct the time and temporality of the English people. Such a project was necessary because the conversion placed Anglo-Saxon England in the unique position of inheriting both a past in the Bible, and a future in the salvation of Christ. The newly Christian nation needed to understand both its place in salvation history and its place in liturgical time,² neither of which could be gleaned from natural

¹ Bede, ‘De natura rerum liber’, ed. by C. W. Jones and Fr. Lipp, in *Beda Venerabilis opera: Opera didascalica, Pars I*, ed. by C. W. Jones and others, CCSL, 123A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), pp. 173–234 (p. 189). Translation:

‘In brief chapters, I, Bede, the servant of God,
 Have lightly touched on the varied natures of things
 And on the broad ages of fleeting time. You who study the stars above,
 Fix your mind's gaze, I pray, on the Light of the everlasting day.’

From Bede, ‘De natura rerum’, in *Bede: ‘On the Nature of Things’ and ‘On Times’*, trans. by Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians, 56 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 71–103 (p. 71).

² By ‘salvation history’ I mean the biblical narrative of man's fall and the events following, culminating in the Resurrection of Christ and the anticipated Second Coming, Last Judgement, and Apocalypse. In the case of the Anglo-Saxons, their salvation history is their history of conversion and acceptance of the Christian faith. Biblical history encompasses salvation history to include all events of the Christian Bible.

cues, unlike the daily and yearly cycles which shaped agricultural life.³ We cannot know what ideas about time existed within the older, pagan communities,⁴ but the religious conversion meant a conversion to the calendar of Roman months as well as to the liturgical calendar, a new history to learn, and a new future to anticipate. These new constructions of time brought a new sense of temporality, the subjective sense or understanding of time, combined with the experience of being in time. Bede's temporality is both his understanding of time, and of the position of his society within time; from these, he forms a poetics of time. No one but Bede could have written what he did: his reading and study allowed him to understand, synthesise, and teach others about time, as no other contemporaries could. Bede wanted to advance understanding of time, particularly of the time to come, both on earth and in heaven, but he also wanted to right wrongs and refute incorrect ideas about time. Correction became more important as his career progressed and his ideas were misconstrued, as in the case of the accusation of heresy in 708. Bede also adjusted his construction of time throughout his life in response to interaction with his readers and changes in his own thought.

Recent years have seen a great growth of interest in all aspects of Bede's scholarship. Bede criticism, like its subject, has been and is wide-ranging. In a 2006 article Faith Wallis discussed the twentieth-century rediscovery of Bede as a 'scientist'.⁵ Peter Darby's summary of

³ See, for example, Nils E. Enkvist, *The Seasons of the Year: Chapters on a Motif from Beowulf to the Shepherd's Calendar* (Helsinki: Centraltryckeriet, 1957).

⁴ Not least because Bede is mostly silent on the topic (see below), but see also Peter Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede* (London: Gollancz, 1976), p. 79.

⁵ 'It would seem, then, that Bede's "science" is both uncertain in its boundaries and unclear in its definition. The presentism of the term "science" is also an embarrassment, not least because Bede himself, in his autobiographical note at the close of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, claims that his exclusive

Bedan scholarship highlights Roger Ray's 1976 article on Bede as exegete and historian as being the first to advocate an intertextual approach, noting that 'before Ray's essay, Bede scholars tended to separate different aspects of Bede's scholarly output and study them in isolation of each other'.⁶ In his recent discussion of 'The New Bede',⁷ Scott DeGregorio pointed to a renewed interest in Bede's exegetical works, as well as a recent 'appreciation of the inter-textual dimension of Bede's writings, to the recognition that they can and should be studied in full concert with each other rather than in isolation'.⁸ A third strand of interest in 'The New Bede' is focused on how Bede viewed himself and his work.⁹

This chapter will adopt an intertextual approach to Bede's works, which will be particularly valuable for this investigation into Bede's treatment of time because, as we shall see, Bede's poetics of time is not bound by genre. His different approaches to time span his works and interact with each other. Bede's interest in temporality and eternity manifests itself across many of his writings. Some works deal directly with time scientifically, as textbooks on chronology or cosmology, or the passage of time in human events as history, while others are

intellectual concern was the study of Scripture. To continue to isolate Bede's "science" also seems out of step with new approaches that stress the interpenetration of the genres within which Bede worked, especially history, exegesis, and hagiography.' Faith Wallis, 'Si Naturam Quaeras: Reframing Bede's "Science"', in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. by Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), pp. 65–99 (p. 68).

⁶ Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 9, citing Roger D. Ray, 'Bede, the Exegete, as Historian', in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. by Gerald Bonner (London: SPCK, 1976), pp. 125–40.

⁷ Scott DeGregorio, 'Introduction: The New Bede', in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. by Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), pp. 1–10.

⁸ DeGregorio, 'Introduction: The New Bede', p. 5.

⁹ DeGregorio, 'Introduction: The New Bede', p. 6.

more obliquely concerned with questions of time, such as Bede's commentaries on the books of Genesis and Apocalypse. Bede's works are, then, both resources through which can be gleaned how learned Anglo-Saxons understood and perceived time, and literary works worth studying on their own merits. Bede has a poetics of time all his own. Taken together, his works provide an insight into Bede's conception of the world and his place in it, a conception that is encapsulated by the verse quoted epigraphically at the beginning of this chapter from the opening of his *De natura rerum* (*DNR*). Everything Bede wrote was to the glory of God and to reinforce the church, his mind always fixed on Christ, 'the Light of the everlasting day'. He wrote so as to understand God and scripture, and to help others to do so. The modelling and framing of time he embedded in his works exerted a vast influence as many of his works continued to be read and studied both by his contemporaries and across the Middle Ages.

Bede had little interest in the philosophy of time, and was unwilling to ask or answer Augustine of Hippo's famous question on the nature of time. Bede's approach is generally more concrete and practical, and tied to human experience. His construction of time incorporates a science of time, a theology of time, and a politics of time. Bede's science and theology of time are based on both conventional understanding and his original thought, but in the politics of time Bede's originality was problematic for less intelligent readers when he challenged conventional wisdom. Bede is often celebrated for popularising *anno Domini* (AD) dating, but he did so at least in part because it was politically safer for him than the *annus mundi* calculations he used elsewhere. The elements of temporal science, philosophy, and politics are brought together across two of the best known episodes in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*: the story of Edwin's conversion which compares the human experience of time to that of a sparrow flying through a hall; and the Synod of Whitby where one of Edwin's successors in Northumbria presided over a

debate on the science of dating Easter. In both episodes science, human perception, and politics meet.

The Historia ecclesiastica and the ‘Present Life of Man on Earth’ (‘uita hominum praesens in terris’)

The *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HE*) is one of the last texts Bede wrote in his long career, and is the culmination of his ideas about time and the text in which his construction of temporality is particularly overt. The aim of the *HE* is to legitimate the conversion of the English people to the Christian religion, and the attendant conversion to *anno Domini* dating. With this history Bede paints his nation as a chosen people, whose conversion to Christianity was ordained by God, and who can now share in Christian history and particularly in the glories of heaven and the world to come. In the words of Colgrave, Bede ‘had one great aim. It was to tell the story of the development of God’s plan for the conversion of the English people and the building up of one united Church in the land.’¹⁰ Bede does this by creating a narrative and timeline of conversion across the island that brings the English church into unity with the catholic church. The key scene in this construction is the famous image of the flight of the sparrow, a metaphor for the life of man, described by a councillor of King Edwin in Book II. This scene and the overarching narrative of conversion make clear that Anglo-Saxon England is anchored in

¹⁰ Bertram Colgrave, ‘Historical Introduction’, in Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, ed., *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. xvii–xxxviii (p. xxx).

Christian time, thanks to God's grace and Edwin's inspired choice to embrace the new religion which explains both history and eternity.

HE opens with a description of Britain: 'Brittania Oceani insula, cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et occidentem locata est, Germaniae Galliae Hispaniae, maximis Europae partibus, multo interuallo aduersa' etc.¹¹ This geographical description was a first for ecclesiastical history, according to R. A. Markus.¹² However, it is a conventional beginning to other types of history, and the section is not entirely original, having been described as 'a mosaic of quotations',¹³ and derived from Mediterranean authorities such as Pliny.¹⁴ Bede opens his work in this way for practical reasons. Britain is not a biblical or an ancient land, and its attributes need describing to foreign and even domestic readers, who may know little of the lands beyond their locality. Britain also needs to be connected to the better known regions of Europe,

¹¹ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.i. 'Britain, once called Albion, is an island of the ocean and lies to the north-west, being opposite Germany, Gaul, and Spain, which form the greater part of Europe, though at a considerable distance from them.'

¹² R. A. Markus, 'Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Hagiography', in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures 1958–1993*, ed. by Michael Lapidge (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), pp. 385–403 (p. 388).

¹³ Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 14, n. 1.

¹⁴ Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, p. 17, also Thomas R. Eckenrode, 'Venerable Bede as a Scientist', *The American Benedictine Review*, 22 (1971), 486–507 (p. 500). Heather Blurton also notes a connection with Gildas' *De excidio*; Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*, The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 23. See especially Calvin B. Kendall, 'Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*', in *Saints, Scholars, and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones*, ed. by Margot H. King and Wesley M. Stevens, 2 vols (Collegeville, MN: Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, Saint John's Abbey and University, 1979), I, pp. 169–90, and then Diane Speed, 'Bede's Creation of a Nation in his *Ecclesiastical History*', *Parergon*, n. s. 12 (1992), 139–54.

for if the English people are to join the elect, then their lands and their customs have to be known and documented. For Bede, Britain was akin to the Promised Land, as Charles Jones writes:

Although Bede named his best-known book *Historia Ecclesiastica*, he also spoke of it without the epithet. An instance in the Dedicatory Letter seems to indicate that he thought of it as a history of his people, not his Church. There was no real difference. He thought of the English as Children of God. [...] Whereas Gregory of Tours started his history with Adam, and Paul the Lombard started with his pagan ancestors, Bede started with the geography of Britain, as if it were the Promised Land.¹⁵

The value of implicitly comparing the Anglo-Saxons with the Jewish people is clear: both are a chosen people. However, the New Testament demonstrates that tribes and nations matter little in Christ: ‘Where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free. But Christ is all, and in all.’¹⁶ Though part of Bede’s project in the *HE* is to make the Anglo-Saxons a chosen people,¹⁷ he wrote it for them to read themselves.¹⁸ He needed to convince his people, not the world at large, that their conversion was ordained by God. While the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes did not receive an ancestral promise, and instead took the

¹⁵ Charles Jones, ‘Some Introductory Remarks on Bede’s Commentary on Genesis’, *Sacris Erudiri*, 19 (1969), 115–98 (p. 125).

¹⁶ Colossians 3.11. For Bede, the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons foreshadows the final conversion of the Jews; while the comparison is not direct it is part of the fulfillment of apocalyptic expectation. Noted by Alan Thacker, ‘Bede and the Ordering of Understanding’, in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. by Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), pp. 37–63 (p. 62)

¹⁷ It is by no means his only aim. Jones: ‘I do not suggest that Bede composed his *Historia* primarily as a demonstration of the Election of the English, but that Election is among his foremost doctrinal concerns’, ‘Some Introductory Remarks’, p. 126.

¹⁸ George Hardin Brown, *Bede, the Venerable*, Twayne’s English Authors Series (Boston: Twayne, 1987), p. 89.

country by force, as the *HE* unfolds it is implied that their residence and more importantly their conversion were inevitable.

The topic of time arises in this first section when the seasonal variation of daylight is described: '[...] unde etiam plurimae longitudinis habet dies aestate sicut et noctes contra in bruma [...] id est horarum XVIII; plurimae item breuitatis noctes aestate et dies habet in bruma.'¹⁹ Bede is simply stating a fact here, while indirectly referring to the variability of time, a theme that recurs throughout his works. Faith Wallis notes that 'Bede frames his vision of English identity by measured space, measured time and an inventory of the natural world'.²⁰ The variable nature of time justified Bede's writing of *De natura rerum*, as well as *De temporibus* and the lengthier *De temporum ratione*. The mutability of time, and the various ways of understanding and reckoning it, are precisely why Bede's books exist. In this instance, it is the practice of dividing daylight into twelve equal parts, and night-time into twelve equal parts, and calling each part an 'hour' that Bede refers to. This practice was common at the time, but meant the length of hours was variable, as Bede says. The more familiar modern system of day and night divided into twenty-four equal hours was also in use.²¹

¹⁹ '[...] the summer days are extremely long. On the other hand, the winter nights are also of great length, namely eighteen hours [...] In summer too the nights are extremely short; so are the days in winter.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.1.

²⁰ Faith Wallis, 'Bede and Science', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. by Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 113–26 (p. 113).

²¹ Bede explains: 'Verum notandum est quia si omnes anni dies duodenis horis putentur, aestiuos necesse est dies longioribus, brumales uero breuioribus horis include. Si uero omnes horas aequiperare, hoc est aequinoctiales habere uolumus, brumali diei nihilominus pauciores, et aestiuo necesse est plures tribuamus.' Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', *Bedaе Venerabilis opera: Opera didascalica, Pars VI*,

The next paragraph begins, ‘haec in praesenti’, ‘at the present time’, Bede’s idiomatic way of referring to his own time.²² The issue of reckoning the years first arises in chapter II, when Bede dates an event to both the reign of Julius Caesar and the period before Christ: ‘Verum eadem Britannia Romanis usque ad Gaium Iulium Caesarem inaccessa atque incognita fuit. Qui anno ab Vrbe condita sescentesimo nonagesimo tertio, ante uero incarnationis Dominicae tempus anno sexagesima [...]’.²³ Colgrave and Mynors’ footnote explains that the dates do not correlate correctly, as Rome 693 is 61 BC, but Bede took this date from Orosius. Nor is the date for the expeditions under discussion correct, as they occurred in Rome 699 and 700.²⁴ The inaccuracy was obviously unknown to Bede, or he would have corrected his sources. Brown excuses Bede’s occasional inaccuracy with dates as due to the vast and varying nature of his sources and records,²⁵ but Bede had no compunction about correcting or changing his sources, as will be seen below. However, as Wallis notes, Julius Caesar created the solar calendar currently in use,²⁶ so Bede makes an implicit connection in the *HE* by referring to him as consul here.

CCSL, 123B, ed. by C. W. Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), p. 276. Translation: ‘Now it should be noted that if all the days of the year were thought to have twelve hours, summer days would of necessity be composed of longer hours and winter days of shorter hours. But if we wish to make all hours equal, that is, to have equinoctial [hours], we must then give fewer hours to the winter day, and more to the summer day.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 3, p. 14.

²² *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors I.i. p. 17.

²³ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors I.II, p. 20. Translation: ‘Now Britain had never been visited by the Romans and was unknown to them until the time of Gaius Julius Caesar who, in the year of Rome 693, that is, in the year 60 before our Lord [...]’.

²⁴ Colgrave & Mynors, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, p. 20, n. 1.

²⁵ Brown, *Bede, the Venerable*, p. 90.

²⁶ Wallis, ‘Bede and Science’, p. 113.

In the early chapters of the *HE* Bede gives dates in both years from the founding of Rome (when appropriate), and *anno domini* years. He uses both because AD dating is still relatively new, and Roman dating gives a reference point for those unfamiliar with the new system but with some knowledge of the old. The two can be reconciled. The newness of AD dating was perhaps a barrier to its use, but Bede overcomes this by presenting it as a companion system, rather than a complete overhaul. Further, by using Roman dating and referencing events in Roman history – particularly at this first instance, the crossing of Roman troops to Britain²⁷ – Bede links Anglo-Saxon England with the glory of Rome, and links the present-day church and its new way of dating with the old ways. However, as the history progresses, dates are given in AD only. By using AD dating, Bede confirms the place of Anglo-Saxon England in world history, because AD dates can be used by all. Regnal years, as used in the chronicle in *DT*, are only good for the nation of the ruler in question – the exception being Roman years because of Rome’s far reach – but AD can be used by all Christian countries. The system also demonstrates the primacy of Christ as Lord and ruler over all, whose dates take precedence over the temporary authority of earthly kings. The AD chronology, as Davidse writes, ‘makes clear that the history of the English church and people is included in the context of the divine plan for redemption’.²⁸ AD dating joins England with the rest of the (Christian) world, to share in its past and, more importantly, in its future.

One of the reasons Bede also uses AD dating in the *HE* is because *annus mundi* dating previously led him into fruitless controversy. In chapter 22 of *De temporibus*, on the sixth age of

²⁷ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.ii.

²⁸ Jan Davidse, ‘The Sense of History in the Works of the Venerable Bede’, *Studi Medievali*, 23 (1982), 644–70 (p. 661).

the world, Bede writes: ‘Huius anno XLII *Dominus nascitur*, completis ab Adam annis IIIDCCCCLII iuxta alios VCXCVIII.’²⁹ These two counts derive from two translations of the Bible: the Vulgate, i.e. the Hebrew bible mainly translated by St Jerome, and the Septuagint or Seventy Translators bible. Bede preferred the Vulgate, ‘post Christianum nobis interpretem translatae potius quam Iudaicis interpretationibus’ and not by Jewish scholars,³⁰ and thus the count of AM 3952 for the Incarnation. He makes clear that Christ’s birth is still the beginning of the sixth age, which ‘continet annos praeteritos DCCVIII’.³¹ However, 3952 years since the world began was a figure at odds with some prevailing views.

Five years after writing *DT* Bede wrote his *Epistola ad Pleguinam*.³² Bede writes to Plegwin because he has heard, from a ‘nuntius tuae sanctitatis’, ‘quod me audires a lasciuintibus

²⁹ Bede, ‘De temporibus liber’, in *Bedaes Venerabilis opera: Opera didascalica, Pars VI*, CCSL, 123C, ed. by C. W. Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), pp. 579–611 (p. 607). Translation: ‘Our Lord was born in the forty-second year of his [Octavian’s] reign, when three thousand nine hundred and fifty-two (or according to others, five thousand one hundred and ninety-nine) years had passed since Adam.’ Bede, ‘De temporibus’, in *Bede: ‘On the Nature of Things’ and ‘On Times’*, trans. by Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians, 56 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 106–131 (p. 126).

³⁰ Bede, ‘Epistola ad Pleguinam’, in *Bedaes Venerabilis opera: Opera didascalica, Pars VI*, CCSL, 123C, ed. by C. W. Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), pp. 613–26 (p. 618). Translation: ‘as it is translated by our Christian interpreter’, Bede, ‘Letter to Plegwin’, in *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Faith Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians, 29 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. 405–15 (p. 406).

³¹ Bede, ‘De temporibus liber’, p. 607. Translation: ‘comprises, to date, seven hundred and three years’, Bede, ‘De temporibus’, trans. by Kendall and Wallis, p. 126

³² In the letter he recalls ‘my short work *On Times* which I wrote five years ago’, Bede, ‘Letter to Plegwin’, trans. by Wallis, p. 406. Latin: ‘opusculum meum De temporibus quod ante quinquennium edidi’, Bede, ‘Epistola ad Pleguinam’, p. 618.

rusticis inter hereticos per pocula decantari.’³³ The main accusation is that Bede had ‘negarem in Sexta Aetate saeculi Dominum Salvatorem in carne uenisse’.³⁴ It is clear that Bede did no such thing, but his work had been misinterpreted. In his Chronicle Bede had followed Isidore of Seville and eschewed Eusebius, who ‘in Descriptione Temporum neque Hebraicam Veritatem neque LXX Translatorum [...] secutus’.³⁵ Isidore was the first to use *annus mundi* dating together with Augustine’s six ages,³⁶ but he used the Septuagint translation of the Bible, whereas Bede uses the Vulgate. As Peter Blair describes it, ‘Bede exposed himself to this charge, though all unwittingly, because his own standards of scholarship persuaded him that it was better to go back to primary sources, in this case the Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible, rather than to accept without questioning figures derived at third or fourth hand.’³⁷ But it was worse than that, as Darby writes: ‘By challenging Eusebius, Bede was questioning an established Church Father whose chronological work had been legitimised in the medieval West through the weighty endorsement of St Jerome’, however, Bede managed to maintain confidence in his work.³⁸ His letter to Plegwin was necessary to explain fully his choices and defend himself with reference to both Augustine and Jerome.

³³ Bede, ‘Epistola ad Pleguinam’, p. 617. Translation: ‘messenger from your Sanctity’; ‘that you had heard it babbled out by lewd rustics in their cups that I was a heretic.’ Bede, ‘Letter to Plegwin’, trans. by Wallis, p. 405.

³⁴ Bede, ‘Epistola ad Pleguinam’, p. 617. Translation: ‘denied that our Lord and Saviour had come in the flesh in the Sixth Age of the world’. Bede, ‘Letter to Plegwin’, trans. by Wallis, 405.

³⁵ Bede, ‘Epistola ad Pleguinam’, p. 618. Translation: who ‘in his designation of times followed neither Hebrew Truth nor the version of the Seventy’. Bede, ‘Letter to Plegwin’, trans. by Wallis, p. 406.

³⁶ Faith Wallis, ‘Commentary’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Faith Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians, 29 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. 251–375 (p. 357).

³⁷ Blair, Peter Hunter, *The World of Bede* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970), p. 267.

³⁸ Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 45.

The misunderstanding arose from a belief that the world would both last for 6000 years, and that each age of six would comprise one thousand years. By such reasoning, neither 3952 nor 5199 is a suitable date for the beginning of the sixth age. It is probable that Bede was mindful of such views, and ‘restructured world history to counter a contemporary tradition that associated the year 6000 with the apocalypse’.³⁹ In fact, Darby writes, ‘Bede’s novel calculations shattered the notion of the thousand-year age. By placing the Incarnation at the end of a fourth millennium of historical time, Bede, in the mind of his accuser, had effectively denied that Christ lived in the sixth age of the world.’⁴⁰ The concept of the thousand-year age was a persistent one and must have continued to circulate throughout Bede’s lifetime, despite his best efforts.

In response to the accusation Bede defended himself with the letter to Plegwin, but he also responded indirectly in some of his later works. The chronicle in chapter 66 of *De tempore ratione* also uses AM dating, and both Vulgate and Septuagint numbers, but structures the information a little differently. The year forms the heading, followed by the discussion of events of that year or time period, but the initial year is the *annus mundi* according to the Vulgate, while the Septuagint number is buried in the description. Bede remains staunch that the Incarnation occurred in 3952, but uses a different wording: ‘Jesus Christus filius Dei sextam mundi aetatem

³⁹ Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 32, citing Richard Landes, ‘Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography 100–800 CE’, in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. by W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 137–209.

⁴⁰ Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 42.

suo consecrauit aduentu’,⁴¹ so that there can be no question of Bede’s orthodoxy as regards the current age.

The *HE* is in part another form of response to this episode. The use of AD dating essentially ‘wipes the slate clean’, and dating the Incarnation to AD 1 makes it obvious that Christ’s birth heralded a new age. The world ages scheme is less important to the *HE*, as the history takes place entirely in the sixth age, with Julius Caesar’s campaign the only event mentioned to occur in a previous age.⁴² Furthermore, AD dating removes any question of thousand-year ages, since the years of previous ages melt into one, becoming simply ‘before Christ’. This is not to say that the world ages were not still important to Bede, for they clearly were, and he discusses them in *DTR* with greater depth and clarity than in *DT*. In fact, Peter Darby argues convincingly that Bede expanded his world ages scheme from six to eight in response to the controversy he endured in 708.⁴³ The world ages will be discussed further later in this chapter.

The *HE* is in effect the history of the salvation of the English people. They have the distinction of coming to the faith during the sixth world age, after the Incarnation and Resurrection have made immortality possible again (see below on *In Genesim*). Throughout the history Bede presents the nation’s conversion to Christianity as inevitable. He lays the ground for the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons by demonstrating that Britain was a Christian place long

⁴¹ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 495. Translation: ‘Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hallowed the Sixth Age of the world by His coming’. *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 195. Latin: ‘Iesus Christus filius Dei sextam mundi aetatem suo consecrauit aduentu’.

⁴² As noted by Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 207.

⁴³ Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 74.

before their arrival. In Book II, chapter 4, Lucius, ‘Brittaniarum rex’, becomes a Christian, ‘susceptaque fidem Britanni usque in tempora Diocletiani principis inuiolatam integramque quietam in pace seruabant.’⁴⁴ With this short chapter Bede establishes that Christianity has been practised in parts of Britain from AD 156, implying that the later conversion instigated by Gregory is not new, but a renewal. Christianity has a history on the island, and a lengthy one at that, a history that includes persecutions, martyrdoms, saints, miracles, and heresies. It is true, as Blair writes, that ‘we do not know how strong was the hold of paganism among the English of Northumbria, nor can we be certain of the extent to which Christianity may have survived, or even prospered, among the native population since its first introduction during the Roman occupation’;⁴⁵ however Bede emphasises God’s plan for the island: ‘sed non tamen diuina pietas plebe suam, quam praesciuit, deseruit; quin multo digniores genti memoratae praecones ueritatis, per quos crederet, detinuit.’⁴⁶

God’s plan comes to fruition when, ‘in the year of our Lord 582’, ‘qui diuino admonitus [...] misit seruum Dei Augustinum et alios pccum eo monachos timentes Dominum praedicare

⁴⁴ ‘and the Britons preserved the faith which they had received, inviolate and entire, in peace and quiet, until the time of the Emperor Diocletian.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.IV, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, p. 117.

⁴⁶ ‘God in His goodness did not reject the people whom He foreknew, but He had appointed much worthier heralds of the truth to bring this people to the faith’. *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.XXII, p. 69. Bede’s use of *praeco* refers to the early missionaries, but perhaps he counted himself one among them, a ‘crier’ or ‘herald’ of the faith.

uerbum Dei genti anglorum'.⁴⁷ From the outset, the converters emphasise future rewards,⁴⁸ bringing 'qui sibi obtemperantibus aeterna in caelis gaudia et regnum sine fine cum Deo uiuo et uero futurum sine ulla dubietate promitteret'.⁴⁹ The importance of salvation as opposed to earthly joys is made explicit when Bede copies Gregory's letter to King Æthelberht. He comments that Gregory 'temporalibus quoque honoribus regem glorificare satagens, cui gloriae caelestis suo labore et industria notitiam prouenisse gaudebat'.⁵⁰ The emptiness of 'temporal honours' as compared with 'heavenly glory' becomes a deciding factor at the council of King Edwin.

The spreading of the faith is a slow process, with individuals and nations converted gradually. Æthelberht allows the missionaries to begin their work in Canterbury, and after an indeterminate amount of time, 'at ubi ipse etiam inter alios [...] credens baptizatus est'.⁵¹ The rules of the religion are developed over time as well, as demonstrated by the missionary Augustine's questions for Gregory, described and answered in chapter XXVII. Augustine's

⁴⁷ 'Gregory, prompted by divine inspiration, sent a servant of God named Augustine and several more God-fearing monks with him to preach the word of God to the English race.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.XXIII, p. 69

⁴⁸ Salvation is, of course, more than 'future rewards': it is the promise of eternal life after death as made possible when Christ redeemed the sins of man. That those who converted the Anglo-Saxons in Bede's account focused on heavenly joys suggests that the converts (and perhaps the converters also) were not as theologically knowledgeable as Bede, which is not unexpected.

⁴⁹ 'the sure and certain promise of eternal joys in heaven and an endless kingdom with the living and true God to those who received it.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.XXV, p. 72.

⁵⁰ 'was anxious to glorify the king with temporal honours, while at the same time he rejoiced to think that Æthelberht had attained to the knowledge of heavenly glory by Gregory's own labour and industry'. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.XXXII, p. 111.

⁵¹ 'at last the king, as well as others, believed and was baptized.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.XXVI, p. 77.

question on ‘diuersae consuetudines’, ‘varying customs’,⁵² is especially relevant to Bede’s concerns. Elsewhere in *HE* he discusses controversies within the church, and his textbooks are greatly concerned with correcting false doctrine. Gregory’s reported answer is to embrace difference: ‘Ex singulis ergo quibusque ecclesiis quae pia, quae religiosa, quae recta sunt elige, et haec quasi in fasciculum collecta apud Anglorum mentes in consuetudinem deponere.’⁵³ This advice is not followed strictly in the years to come.

The conversion of King Edwin and his kingdom spans several chapters of the *HE*. As the crux of Book II, the story serves several purposes for Bede. Edwin’s gathering of his councillors suggests a rational and democratic process behind the acceptance of the new religion, portraying it as a decision entirely of the men’s making, with no element of coercion from Edwin or Augustine. The experience is personalised by the accounts of the two speakers, one unnamed and the other Coifi, a priest of the old religion. Coifi makes clear that the current faith has awarded him no temporal honours, while the other speaker expresses the uncertainty of their current situation in life. The council concludes that Christianity offers both knowledge, particularly of the future, and the reward of future salvation. This is the key claim: Christianity offers a construction of time better than any other method.

⁵² *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.XXVII, p. 81.

⁵³ Translation: ‘choose from every individual Church whatever things are devout, religious, and right. And when you have collected these as it were into one bundle, see that the minds of the English grow accustomed to it.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, I.XXVII.

King Edwin is introduced in chapter IX of Book II, with a sign from God: ‘Cui uidelicet regi, in auspiciū suscipiendae fidei et regni caelestis, potestas etiam terreni creuerat imperii.’⁵⁴

Edwin is the king whose rule inspired the famous story of peacetime Britain: ‘Tanta autem eo tempore pax in Brittania, quaquauersum imperium regis Eduini peruenerat, fuisse perhibetur ut, sicut usque hodie in prouerbio dicitur, etiam si mulier una cum recens nato paruulo uellet totam perambulare insulam a mari ad mare, nullo se ledente ualeret.’⁵⁵ Edwin’s conversion is precipitated by his marriage to the Christian Kentish princess Æthelburhand. Their daughter Eanflæd is baptised into the faith, but Edwin’s own personal conversion is slow. He

uerum primo diligentius ex tempore et ab ipso uenerabili uiro Paulino rationem fidei ediscere et cum suis primatibus, quos sapientiores nouerat, curauit conferre, quid de his agendum arbitrarentur. Sed et ipse, cum esset uir natura sagacissimus, saepe diu solus residens ore quidem tacito sed in intimis cordia multa secum conloquens, quid sibi esset faciendum, quae religio seruanda, tractabet.⁵⁶

Edwin follows a careful path here: education, consultation, and contemplation. He is the human face of conversion; his personal experience is key to persuading the reader that Christianity is the

⁵⁴ Translation: ‘The king’s earthly power had increased as an augury that he was to become a believer and have a share in the heavenly kingdom.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.IX, p. 163.

⁵⁵ Translation: ‘It is related that there was so great a peace in Britain, wherever the dominion of King Edwin reached, that, as the proverb still runs, a woman with a new-born child could walk throughout the island from sea to sea and take no harm.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.16 p. 193.

⁵⁶ Translation: ‘made it his business, as opportunity occurred, to learn the faith systematically from the venerable Bishop Paulinus, and then to consult with the counsellors whom he considered the wisest, as to what they thought he ought to do. He himself being a man of great natural sagacity would often sit alone for long periods in silence, but in his innermost thoughts he was deliberating with himself as to what he ought to do and which religion he should adhere to.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.9 p. 167.

way. The promise of conversion – life after death – is the consequence of Christ’s resurrection, as Boniface assures Edwin: once ‘per aquam et Spiritum Sanctum renati, ei cui credideritis in speldnore gloriae sempiternae cohabitare eius opitulatione munificentiae ualeatis.’⁵⁷ Edwin models the ideal behaviour of penitent convert.

In the wider structure of the *HE* the meeting of King Edwin and his council to decide the future of the kingdom foreshadows the Synod of Whitby, at which a similar process is followed, and a decision of equal importance (for Bede) is made.⁵⁸ However, Edwin’s conversion in Bede’s telling is not in fact dependent on the outcome of this meeting, because he is already ‘both willing and bound to accept the faith’.⁵⁹ Rather, it is for his advisors that he calls the meeting, ‘ut, si et illi eadem cum eo sentire uellent, omnes partier in fonte uitae Christo consecrarentur.’⁶⁰ Coifi immediately speaks in favour of conversion:

‘Tu uide, rex, quale sit hoc, quod nobis modo praedicatur; ego autem tibi uerissime, quod certum didici, profiteor, quia nihil omnino uirtutis habet, nihil utilitatis religio illa, quam hucusque tenuimus. Nullus enim tuorum studiosius quam ego culturae deorum nostrorum se subdidit; et nihilominus multi sunt qui ampliora a te beneficia quam ego et maiores accipiunt dignitates, magisque prosperantur in omnibus, quae agenda uel acquirenda disponunt. Si autem dii aliquid ualerent, me potius iuuare uellent, qui illis inpensius seruire curauit. Unde restat ut, si ea quae nunc nobis noua praedicantur, meliora esse et

⁵⁷ Translation: ‘having been born again by water and the Holy Spirit, may you through his bountiful aid dwell with Him in whom you have believed, in the splendour of eternal glory.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.10 p. 171.

⁵⁸ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, n. 1 p. 182 suggests that Bede has merged three traditions about Edwin’s conversion, culminating in the council meeting.

⁵⁹ Latin: ‘rex suscipere quidem se fidem, quam docebat, et uelle et debere respondebat’. *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.13.

⁶⁰ Translation: ‘so that, if they agreed with him, they might all be consecrated together in the waters of life’. *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.13 p. 183.

fortiora habita examinatione perspexeris, absque ullo cunctamine suscipere illa festinemus.’⁶¹

Coifi’s conclusion is that he received nothing from the old gods despite his dedicated worship, therefore, the old practice is no good. It is either unfair, because those who work hard do not receive the rewards they deserve, or non-existent: the gods do not exist and fortune is bestowed at random. The implication is that if even a priest of the old religion was willing to abandon it, then it must have been worthless indeed, and the truth of Christianity is self-evidently superior. However, the inclusion of this episode could point to some contemporary resistance which Bede is trying to counter. If Christianity was really self-evidently better, then the deliberation of the councillors would make little sense. There is no real temporal element to Coifi’s complaint, except that he expected to be rewarded on earth, during his lifetime. He is not chided for this greed, so this attitude was probably considered normal, but as will become clear temporal rewards are nothing compared to eternal ones. Despite Coifi’s eagerness to try the new religion, he does not rush in, and later asks to hear more from Paulinus.⁶² Afterwards, though, his zeal as a convert is such that he hurries to deface the shrines he kept. This is in keeping with Boniface’s

⁶¹ ‘Notice carefully, King, this doctrine which is now being expounded to us. I frankly admit that, for my part, I have found that the religion which we have hitherto held has no virtue nor profit in it. None of your followers has devoted himself more earnestly than I have to the worship of our gods, but nevertheless there are many who receive greater benefits and greater honour from you than I do and are more successful in all their undertakings. If the gods had any power they would have helped me more readily, seeing that I have always served them with greater zeal. So it follows that if, on examination, these new doctrines which have now been explained to us are found to be better and more effectual, let us accept them at once without any delay.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.13, p. 183.

⁶² ‘Adiecit autem Coifi, quia uellet ipsum Paulinum diligentius audire de Deo quem praedicabat, uerbum facientem’. *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.13. p. 185.

letter to Edwin which argues against retaining old forms of worship: ‘Ipsa enim eorum dissolution corruptioque, quae numquam uiuentem spiritum habuit, nec sensibilitatem a suis factoribus potuit quolibet modo suscipere, uobis patenter insinuet, quam nihil erat quod eatenus colebatis.’⁶³

Coifi’s speech does not demonstrate how Christianity can account for the temporality of human existence. That task is given to the other major figure in the scene, an unnamed man, who makes his argument using the enduring image of the sparrow flying through the hall:

Cuius suasioni uerbisque prudentibus alius optimatum regis tribuens assensum continuo subdidit, ‘Talis’ inquit ‘mihi uidetur, rex, uita hominum praesens in terris, ad comparationem eius quod nobis incertum est temporis, quale cum te residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac ministris tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio et calido effecto caenaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemalium pluuiarum uel niuium, adueniens unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens, mox per aliud exierit, ipso quidem tempore quo intus est hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen paruissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens, tuis oculis elabatur. Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Unde, si

⁶³ Translation: ‘in fact the very destruction and decay of those things which have never had the breath of life nor could by any means acquire understanding from their makers, should show you clearly the worthless nature of what you have worshipped up to now.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.13II.10 p. 171

haec noua doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda uidetur.’ His similia et ceteri maiores natu ac regis consilarii diuinitus admoniti prosequebantur.⁶⁴

There is much that is poetic about this passage. The use of the second person to address the king invites the reader to imagine themselves in the hall. The image of the hall, of communal warmth and festivity as a buffer against the winter outside, would be familiar to all. The meaning of the sparrow’s flight is clear even within the text, when the man explains: ‘So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all.’ All that anyone can know, whether king or otherwise, is the present. What came before and what will come after are unknowns, akin to winter darkness. But, the man continues, ‘if this new doctrine brings us more certain information, it seems right that we should accept it.’ That this councillor should be unnamed when Coifi is not adds to the generalising effect, although the episode is written with symbolism in mind, rather than historical accuracy.⁶⁵ The man speaks for anyone who may have

⁶⁴ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.13, II.13, pp. 183–185. Trans: ‘Another of the king’s chief men agreed with this advice and with these wise words and then added, “This is how the present life of man on earth, King, appears to me in comparison with that time which is unknown to us. You are sitting feasting with your ealdormen and thegns in winter time; the fire is burning on the hearth in the middle of the hall and all inside is warm, while outside the wintry storms of rain and snow are raging; and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside, the storm and wintry tempest cannot touch it, but after the briefest moment of calm, it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again. So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all. If this new doctrine brings us more certain information, it seems right that we should accept it.” Other elders and counsellors of the king continued in the same manner, being divinely prompted to do so.’

⁶⁵ Roger Ray suggests that *HE* was aimed at a general audience and so Bede might not have paid too much attention to the exact truth, but instead ‘he took pains to gather what in all regions people commonly thought was their true past. He then arranged these materials in ways that would both engage

had their doubts about the old religion. He is not alone in his views, as others ‘continued in the same manner, *being divinely prompted to do so*’ (emphasis added). Bede does not state whether the first speaker spoke with divine inspiration, but he is firm that God has inspired those who spoke next.

The image of the sparrow’s flight constructs time from an imagined pagan perspective as an understanding which sees everything outside the present as dark, unknowable, and potentially dangerous. Like the sparrow, the advisor suggests, all the non-Christian can know is the fleeting present. This thought is reminiscent of Augustine of Hippo’s comments on time’s passage across the mind: ‘When time is passing, it is able to be sensed and measured, but when time is passed, it cannot, because it is not.’⁶⁶ However, Christianity has answers. The new religion tells us what came before and what will come after, and provides a point of reference for both nations and individuals. The life of a Christian is elongated beyond the hall, and the history of a Christian community is linked to the greater history of all Christianity, a history of the world beginning with Creation and ending in Apocalypse. The English are a part of this now. It is fitting then that Book II began with the death of Gregory the Great, because Gregory ‘ut mortem quoque, quae

prevailing beliefs and depict England growing up to orthodox unity.’ Ray, ‘Bede, the Exegete, as Historian’, p. 130. However, a desire for accuracy does become more apparent towards the end of the *HE*, as the narrative approaches Bede’s present. Peter Blair suggests that in this episode Bede seeks a different kind of truth than historical accuracy: ‘We can only approach the conversion of the Northumbrians through the words of a man who was himself removed by more than a century from the events which he describes. Even at that distance of time, detail and episode are lost or transmuted, emphasis changed, tradition established. The flight of the sparrow expressed in vivid, simple terms a whole philosophy of life to be overthrown, like the images of the heathen temple, by those who accepted Christianity, and this for Bede was the truth that mattered most.’ *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, p. 108.

⁶⁶ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by Maria Boulding (New York: New City, 1997), XI.XVI.

pene cunctis poena est, uidelicet ut ingressum uitae et laboris sui praemium amaret.⁶⁷ The conversion of the English people will bring them the reward of life after death.

What Went Before ('quidue praecesserit')

Across Bede's works he offers a construction of the Christian past built on scripture. Bede's theology of time, that is, time as ordered by God and interpreted by him as a Christian scholar, is especially marked in his commentaries on the first book of the Bible, *In Genesim (IG)*, and on the last, *Expositio Apocalypseos (EA)*. These books are typologically related: by reading one, the other can be understood; and Bede's commentary follows this approach so that *IG* is both an exploration of Creation and an anticipation of Apocalypse.⁶⁸ Genesis is also an origin story, and as such it can be read as the early origin story of the Anglo-Saxons too.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Translation: 'loved death, which in the eyes of almost everybody is a punishment, because he held it to be the entrance to life and the reward of his labours.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.I, p. 125.

⁶⁸ As Jones notes, 'it is in line with Bede's early addiction to the beginning and ending of things that his first Scriptural commentaries should center in Creation and Last Judgment', Charles W. Jones, 'Introduction', *In principium Genesim*, ed. Jones, CCSL 118A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1967), pp. i-x (p. viii). However Darby argues against Jones' chronology, placing *IG* in the middle phase of Bede's career. His argument rests on Bede's revision of his world ages scheme, which in Book I of *IG* is expanded to eight ages. Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 191.

⁶⁹ See Daniel Anlezark, *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), esp. chapter two, 'A Manifold Mystery: Bede on the Flood', pp. 44–111.

The methodological anchor of Bede's exegesis is typology; typology is, in essence, a theory that assumes human historical time is patterned by God.⁷⁰ Understanding typology requires knowledge of the entirety of Biblical history. As Frank Kermode writes in *The Sense of an Ending*:

The Bible is a familiar model of history. It begins at the beginning ('In the beginning...') and ends with a vision of the end ('Even so, come, Lord Jesus'); the first book is Genesis, the last Apocalypse. Ideally, it is a wholly concordant structure, the end is in harmony with the beginning, the middle with beginning and end. The end, Apocalypse, is traditionally held to resume the whole structure, which it can only do by figures predictive of that part of it which has not been historically revealed.⁷¹

This is the essence of typology as described in Jean Daniélou's *From Shadows to Reality*, where he writes:

All the work of the Prophets, which is of cardinal importance in the Old Testament, rests on a twofold movement. It recalls the great works of God in the past, but it recalls them only as a foundation for a faith in great works to come. It is at the same time both commemorative and prophetic.⁷²

⁷⁰ In *De schematibus et tropis* Bede describes three levels of spiritual Biblical interpretation: typological, tropological, and anagogical, as summarised by Calvin Kendall in his 'Introduction', in *On Genesis*, trans. by Calvin B. Kendall, Translated Texts for Historians, 48 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp.1–61 (p. 10). These levels are in addition to the literal meaning, and refer respectively to the past, present, and future. Or, as Kendall summarises, 'a typological allegory refers to Christ or the Church; a tropological, or moral, allegory refers to the moral experience of the individual Christian in the present; and an anagogical allegory refers to the joys of heaven that the Christian may look forward to,' p. 11. These three levels each have a temporal element, but typology is especially temporal in its premise that the beginning signifies the end.

⁷¹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 7.

⁷² Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. by Dom Wulstan Hibberd (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), p. 12; orig. pub. as *Sacramentum Futuri: Études sur les Origines de la Typologie biblique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950).

Scripture does not simply describe events of the past, but has implications for the present and the future. Each Biblical episode provides some clue to the current or future time. To take an example of Bede's from *IG*, the fratricide of Cain foreshadows 'sancti in hac uita pressuras essent a reprobis mortisque passuri'.⁷³

Typological time is linear, in that it progresses from the beginning through to the end, from anticipation to fulfilment, but it is metaphorically circular or spiral-shaped in that types recur (a type can be an event, a person, a theme, and so on). Events are prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New, but any event can also be a figuration of an event that is yet to happen. Typology requires a dislocation of time, for it assumes that events cannot be fully made sense of when they stand alone, but instead require the full context of Biblical history to be understood. Nonetheless, the narrative of that history is assumed to be continuous, and there is no point of origin except God, the beginning and the end. Biblical events have always made sense from the eternal divine perspective, in which all time is present.⁷⁴ Christians must resign

⁷³ Bede, 'In Genesim', *Libri quatuor in principium Genesis: Bedae opera exegetica, Pars II*, CCSL 118A, ed. by C. W. Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 1967), p. 73. Translation: 'that the saints in this life were going to suffer affliction and death at the hands of the wicked', Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Calvin B. Kendall, *Translated Texts for Historians*, 48 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), trans. by Kendall, p. 140

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.16: 'You have precedence over the past by the loftiness of your ever-present eternity, and you live beyond all the future, because future times are future, but as soon as they have arrived they will be past, whereas you are ever the same, and your fears fail not. Your years do not come and go. Our years pass and new ones arrive only so that all may come in turn, but your years stand all at once, because they are stable: there is no pushing out of vanishing years by those that are coming on, because with you none are transient. In our case, our years will be complete only when there are none left. Your years are a single day, and this day of yours is not a daily recurrence, but a simple "Today," because your Today does not give way to tomorrow, nor follow yesterday. Your Today is eternity, and

themselves to never knowing the whole story, only part of it, for the linear narrative is incomplete and awaits the final judgement at the end of time. Although that event is yet to occur, it has been prefigured.

Book 1 of *In Genesim* is largely concerned with the creation of the world and with it the construction of time; Bede prioritises the authority of God and his atemporal nature. The opening words of Genesis, ‘in the beginning God created heaven, and earth’,⁷⁵ establish that for Bede God ‘ante tempora eternaliter extitisse’.⁷⁶ God’s existence is both eternal and predates time; eternity can exist without time. Bede’s thought is in harmony with Augustine of Hippo’s theorisations here, which established that eternity was outside time, as was God in his eternal nature: ‘in eternity nothing passes, for the whole is present, whereas time cannot be present all at once’;⁷⁷ ‘nor can it be said that you [God] are “earlier in time” than all eras of time, for that would mean that there was some kind of time already in existence before you.’⁷⁸ This, however, is as close as Bede comes to philosophical reflection on the nature of time.

In *IG* Bede emphasises the authority of God as the creator and organiser who brought light to the darkness. The creation of the stars including the sun on the fourth day brought light to the world as well as temporal measurement; they were made ‘to mark off divisions in the flow of

therefore your Son, to whom you said, *Today have I begotten you*, is coeternal with you. You have made all eras of time and you are before all time, and there was never a “time” when time did not exist.’

⁷⁵ Genesis 1.1.

⁷⁶ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 3. Translation: ‘existed eternally before time’, Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 68.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.11, 13

⁷⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.16

time' ('ut distinctio quoque temporum labentium per ea posit dinosci').⁷⁹ The verb *dignosco* means simply 'distinguish', while *distinctio* is a noun that means 'difference', but can also refer to grammatical punctuation. The stars are like punctuation marks for time, in that they do not create the sentence, but assist in its reading. Bede continues: 'Quia nimirum priusquam sidera fierent, non erat quibus ordo temporum porum adnotaretur indicatiis, non erat unde meridian hora dinosceretur', again using *dignosco*.⁸⁰ The previous days of creation were marked as days alone, because day is 'aer sole illustratus', or 'proprie autem dies ·xxiiii· horis, id est circuitu solis totum orbem lustrantis impletur'.⁸¹ The circuit could be marked, but no further divisions such as hours.

Sunt ergo *luminaria in signa et tempora et dies et annos*, non quod a conditione eorum uel tempora coeperint, quae constat coepisse a *principio* quo fecit Deus caelum et terram, uel dies et anni qui originem sumsisse noscuntur ex quo dixit Deus, *Fiat lux et facta est lux*, sed quia per ortus eorum siue transitus temporum ordo dierumque annorumque signatur.⁸²

Bede makes clear here that the creation of the stars as markers (*signa*) for the seasons, days, and years, is independent from the creation of the seasons, days, and years themselves. The *dies et*

⁷⁹ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 81; Bede, 'In Genesim', p. 15.

⁸⁰ Bede, 'In Genesim', pp. 15–16. Translation: 'Because truly before the lights were made, there was not a distinction by the marks of which the order of times might be noted; there was not a distinction by means of which the midday hour might be known', Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 81.

⁸¹ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 283. Translation: 'air which is lit up by the Sun', or 'properly speaking, a day comprises 24 hours, that is, a circuit of the Sun lighting up the entire globe', *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 19.

⁸² Bede, 'In Genesim', p. 16. Translation: 'Therefore there are *lights for signs and for seasons and for days and years*, not because the seasons, which as we know arose in the beginning when God made heaven and earth, or because the days and years, which are known to have originated in God's words, *Let light be made, and light was made*, began with their creation, but because the succession of seasons and days and years is marked by their risings and transits.' Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 81.

annos were made when light was made, and the seasons, *tempora*, when God made the *caelum et terram*. *Tempora* is Bede's usual word for the seasons, and not to be taken as referring to time itself, which Bede explicitly does not discuss.

Bede's etymological basis for the times, or *tempora* in Latin, is that they are named for *temperamentum*, 'measure'.⁸³ Bede evades any question of what time is. He defines a year as a 'cycle of time', and so there are solar years and lunar years, and even planetary years, when a year is taken to mean a circuit or cycle.⁸⁴ Such years are *naturalis*, natural, because marked by nature. Other measurements, however, are unnatural or non-natural in that they are not marked by movements of the celestial bodies. An hour has various divisions: 4 *puncti*, 10 *minuta*, 15 *partes*, 40 *momenta*, although 'non enim hae diuisiones temporum naturalis, sed uidentur esse conductuae'.⁸⁵ The *atomus* is 'minimum autem omnium, et quod nulla ratione diuidi queat tempus'.⁸⁶ Night is the absence of the sun and 'quam mira prouiso creatoris ita temperauit ut ubi ob solis longinquitatem rigidior, ibi ad opera breuinda et fouenda sit membra prolixior'.⁸⁷ There are seven parts of the night, identified by Bede as 'crepusculum, uesperum, conticinium,

⁸³ '*Tempora* igitur a '*temperamento*' nomen accipit'. Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 274.

Translation: 'Times (*tempora*) take their name from "measure"'. *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 13.

⁸⁴ *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, trans. by Wallis, p. 103.

⁸⁵ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 276. Translation: 'these divisions of time are not natural, but apparently are agreed upon by convention.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 277. Translation: 'the smallest time of all, and one which cannot be divided by any reckoning.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 15.

⁸⁷ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 298. Translation: 'was given to mortals for the body's repose lest mankind perish because of unendingly immoderate exertion at its work.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 30. Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 298.

intempestum, gallicinium, matutinum, diluculum’.⁸⁸ The margins, or *ora* of night seem to overlap with day: dusk and daybreak. ‘Crepusculum,’ Bede writes, ‘est dubia lux, nam creperum dubium dicimus, hoc est inter lucem et tenebras.’⁸⁹ Bede’s periodization is a theoretical exercise in naming only, for the *puncti, minuta, partes* and *momenta* that comprise the hour cannot have had any practical use in telling time. Even a sundial can only mark the hours of daylight,⁹⁰ and the night hours have to be observed through the movement of the stars in the absence of a water-clock or other device. And yet it is clear that knowing the divisions of time was important to Bede. The seven times of night had practical use in a monastic setting, with eventide or *vesperum* corresponding to the canonical hour for evening prayer. The weeks and months must be marked by a calendar, or approximated by the moon.

In Bede’s thinking, time existed before it was measured and can exist without measurement, for in the three days of Creation prior to the stars, time ‘indiscreto cursu sui processu transierat, nullam penitus dimensionem habens horarum’.⁹¹ Time was *indiscreto*, ‘indiscriminate’ or ‘indistinguishable’ in its course (*cursus*), lacking internal [*penitus*] divisions [*dimensionem*]. Nor, presumably, were there *external* divisions of time, but Bede probably has in mind here the named parts of the hour which he discusses elsewhere. Nonetheless, it is important

⁸⁸ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 299. Translation: ‘dusk, eventide, the first part of the night, dead of night, cock-crow, early morning, and daybreak.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 31.

⁸⁹ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 299. Translation: ‘Dusk is uncertain light, for we say that something doubtful is “murky” [*creperum*], that is, between light and darkness.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 31.

⁹⁰ Evidence suggests that the only timekeeping device at Jarrow was a rough dial set in a south-facing wall. Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, p. 73.

⁹¹ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 16. Translation: ‘had earlier passed in the undivided progress of its course, having internally no measurement of hours’, Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 81.

to note that the creation of the stars did not create time itself, but just a way to measure it. Further forms of measurement are not discussed in *IG*, but left to Bede's textbooks. This separation in content marks a distinction between divine time — i.e. the movement of the heavenly bodies — and human time, which is the way we measure and relate to divine time.

Future events in Christian history are prefigured in Genesis, especially the creation and Fall of Man. Man was created on the sixth day,⁹² just as God was made man at the beginning of the sixth age.⁹³ In the beginning, Adam 'est immortalis create, ut, adminiculis adiuta temporalis alimoniae, mortis expers ac doloris existeret, donec corporalibus incrementis ad illam usque perductus aetatem quae conditori placeret'.⁹⁴ There are two important points here: one, Adam was to receive *temporalis alimoniae*, 'temporal nourishment', apparently the same as *cibi corporalis*; second, *placeret* is not quite 'determined', as Wallis translates, but more usually means to please or satisfy, or perhaps deemed good or resolved. God was to determine the age of Adam as it pleased him. The Tree of Life was to sustain Adam until, 'ex quo perfecte immortalis

⁹² Charles Jones observes, 'the whole section which treats Adam and Eve and the Earthly Paradise is virtually copied verbatim from Augustine, but despite his evident haste Bede chose what he wanted', 'Some Introductory Remarks', p. 121.

⁹³ 'Sextadie terra suis animantibus impletur et homo primus ad imaginem Dei creatur [...] sexta aetate praeconantibus prophetis filius Dei in carne qui hominem ad imaginem Dei recrearet apparuit.' Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 311. Translation: 'On the sixth day the earth was filled with its living creatures, and the first man was made in the image of God [...] In the Sixth Age, as the Prophets foretold, the Son of God appeared, who would recreate man in the image of God.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, pp. 40–41.

⁹⁴ Bede, 'In Genesim', p. 30. Translation: 'was created immortal so that, with the aid and support of temporal nourishment, he would be free of death and pain, until he was brought by bodily sustenance to the age determined upon by the Creator', Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 95.

effectus sustentacula cibi corporalis ulterius nulla requireret.⁹⁵ Man was to become immortal and therefore outside time, but the Fall made man subject to time.

By eating of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the flesh of Adam and Eve became susceptible to death: ‘mortuus est enim homo in anima cum peccauit, quia recessit ab eo Deus, qui est uita animae. Cuius merito mortem secuta est mors corporis, discedente ab illo anima, quae est uita eius. Quaeque mors eidem primo homini tunc euenit, cum presentis uitae terminum accepit non paruo post tempore quam uetitum comedit.’⁹⁶ And later in Book I, Bede confirms: ‘mortales post peccatum facti sumus.’⁹⁷ Had Adam and Eve not eaten the fruit they would not have endured death: ‘si obedientiam conseruarent, in meliorem spiritalemque habitum sine morte mutari’;⁹⁸ death is therefore the legacy of the Fall, and Bede refers often to the ‘body of death’, or ‘*corpus mortis*’, the flesh that is now subject to decay and anchored in time instead of eternal. Thus, soon after the beginning of time itself, time began to work on the human body. Man could never again achieve immortality and incorruptibility of the flesh in life. Instead, Bede

⁹⁵ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 30. Translation: ‘having been made perfectly immortal by this, he would require no further support of corporeal food.’ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 95.

⁹⁶ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 52. Translation: ‘man died in the soul when he sinned, because God, who is the life of the soul, withdrew from him. The death of the body rightly followed the death of the soul, when the soul, which is its life, departed from it. And this death befell that first man when he came to the end of the present life a long time after he ate the forbidden fruit.’ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 118.

⁹⁷ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 68. Translation: ‘we became mortals after sin.’ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 135.

⁹⁸ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 61. Translation: ‘if they had maintained their obedience, to be changed into a better and spiritual condition without death’. Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 128.

specifies, ‘In qua intuendum nobis est quia alia est immortalitas carnis quam in prima conditione in Adam accepimus, alia quam nos in resurrection per Christum accepturos esse speramus.’⁹⁹

Much of this exegesis is only implicitly linked with Christ and the Resurrection, but Bede does make some use of Christology. Adam and Eve hide themselves when God is walking in Paradise after noon, and so:

Dominus meridie crucem ascendit, at, promissa latroni habitatione paradise, post meridiem, id est hora nona, spiritum tradidit; ut uidelicet eadem hora qua primus homo lignum praeuaricationis tetigerat, secundus homo lignum redemptionis ascenderet, at qua hora diei praeuaricatores paradise expulerat, ea confessorum in paradisum induceret.¹⁰⁰

Bede makes clear here the typological relevance of the Fall. It directly leads to the Resurrection, which occurs at the same time of day, explicitly linking the two events. Bede’s connection between the two events makes clear the relationship between Adam and Christ, and especially its temporal element, that one atones for the sins of the other and in doing so changes the expectation of the future. Adamic typology offers both repair and replacement, as Daniélou describes:

In St Paul the parallelism between Adam and Christ bore a twofold aspect: Christ both accomplishes and restores what had been done by Adam. This is the exact meaning of recapitulation. We are concerned with a new beginning (*κεφαλή*) which is a resumption of the first, while at the same time it both restores the broken harmony (here we have the

⁹⁹ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 30. Translation: ‘In this regard, we should observe that the immortality of the flesh that we received in the first creation in Adam is one thing, and the immortality that we hope we will receive in resurrection through Christ is another.’ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 95.

¹⁰⁰ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 63. Translation: ‘The Lord ascended the cross at noon, and having promised a room in paradise to the thief, after noon, that is, at the ninth hour, he gave up the spirit; so that clearly at the same hour that the first man had touched the tree of transgression, the second man would ascend the tree of redemption, and at that same hour of the day he expelled the sinners from paradise, he would lead the witness of the faith into paradise.’ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 129.

idea of reparation for sin) and surpasses the original work (the aspect of accomplishment).¹⁰¹

At the end of time, the mortality of man will be reversed. Bede writes, ‘electi habitu immortalitatis, quem in Adam in exordio seculi perdiderunt’, and so ‘filii autem resurrectionis ita erunt immortales, ut nec mori umquam, nec metu mortis possint affici’.¹⁰² Christ’s resurrection is a turning back of time that reverses both the death of Jesus, and the death of Adam’s immortality when he sinned. To be clear, no one will need temporal nourishment after the resurrection: ‘Sic uero incorruptibilis et immortalis in fine erit caro nostra, ut ad similitudinem angelicae sublimitatis in eodem semper statu permaneat neque cibis corporalibus.’¹⁰³ *IG* thus provides a temporal context for Christ’s death and resurrection by demonstrating how salvation occurred in response to the Fall, and how Christ was prefigured in Noah, and the cross in the ark. Furthermore, *IG* implies the salvation of the English, because all the chosen people are descendants of Abraham.¹⁰⁴ The Lord’s promise to Abraham refers to not just the flesh but the spirit, ‘haec eius qui de uniuersis cognationibus terrae in Christo saluator.’¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality*, p. 30.

¹⁰² Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 69. Translation: ‘the elect are to receive in Christ at the end of time the garment of immortality, which they lost in Adam at the beginning of time’; ‘the children of the resurrection will be immortal, in that they can never die nor be affected by the fear of death’. Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 136.

¹⁰³ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 31. Translation: ‘our flesh will assuredly be incorruptible and immortal in order that it may always remain in the same state like the sublimity of the angels, and so that it cannot be in need of corporeal food.’ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 95.

¹⁰⁴ See Charles Jones, ‘Some Introductory Remarks’, p. 128.

¹⁰⁵ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 169. Translation: ‘the propagation of his people from all the kindreds of earth who are saved in Christ.’ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 245.

In his exegesis of the flood in Genesis Bede anticipates the end of time that is signalled in Apocalypse. After the destruction of the flood, God promises never again to destroy the world with water and instead to allow the seasons to proceed in their normal course, uninterrupted: ‘All the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, night and day, shall not cease.’¹⁰⁶ Bede adds, ‘nec tamen defuturum tempus quando, cessante hac labentium rerum uicissitudine quae annuatim geritur, orbis uniuersus cum animantibus sit igne periturus, Petro adtestante.’¹⁰⁷ Though there will not be another flood, there will be another kind of end, signalled in Apocalypse.

The Reckoning of Time

Because time cannot be marked by the stars alone, especially when it comes to complicated processes such as determining the date of Easter, Bede wrote three textbooks that cover time in various ways. Two were early in his career — *De natura rerum* (*DNR*) and *De temporibus* (*DT*) — and one towards the end, *De temporum ratione* (*DTR*), which builds upon the earlier works. These books address the ‘natural’ workings of time, i.e. the cycle of days, lunar months, and solar years in God’s creation, as well as the ways that humans grapple with time in order to follow the liturgical calendar and record events. Bede’s agenda is to emphasise not only the authority of God, but the superiority of one system over another when there is a question of

¹⁰⁶ Genesis 8.22

¹⁰⁷ Bede, ‘In Genesim’, p. 130. Translation: ‘but the time will come, after this constant succession of passing events that goes on year by year has ceased, when the whole world with its living creatures will be destroyed by fire, as Peter attests.’ Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 203.

divergence. With these works Bede constructs a reckoning of time that is logical, rational, and able to be followed by those who will come after him.

Bede wrote his textbooks out of both interest and necessity. As Wallis and Kendall observe, ‘Bede’s deepest interest was undoubtedly in the temporal order of nature’,¹⁰⁸ because ‘his comprehension of the physical world was of a piece with his understanding of what it meant to be a Christian, a monk and an Englishman’.¹⁰⁹ The temporal order of nature was devised by God, after all, as Peter Blair notes: ‘For those who had eyes to see and patience to understand, the world which God had created was no random chaos, but a place of order whose seeming aberrations could not only be explained and understood, but even trusted.’¹¹⁰ *DNR*, *DT*, and *DTR* thus explain the nature of the world to those who might have thought it random. Thomas Eckenrode describes *DNR* as an example of ‘how an educated person of the eighth century envisioned the universe’,¹¹¹ although Bede should not be considered in this way, but rather as the most educated person of his age.

Time was a problem in the present, particularly the intersection of divine and human time. Human time, especially political and liturgical time, called for more complex methods of observation and measurement. The passing of the hours had to be marked, especially for monastic purposes. The feast days of the liturgical calendar had to be known in advance so that

¹⁰⁸ Calvin B. Kendall, and Faith Wallis, ‘Introduction’, in *Bede: ‘On the Nature of Things’ and ‘On Times’*, Translated Texts for Historians, 56 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 1–68 (p. 3).

¹⁰⁹ Kendall and Wallis, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

¹¹⁰ Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, p. 83.

¹¹¹ Thomas R. Eckenrode, ‘The Growth of a Scientific Mind: Bede’s Early and Late Scientific Writings’, *Downside Review*, 94 (1976), 197–212 (p. 489).

Easter could be celebrated at the appropriate time. The correct determination of the date of Easter involves ‘principles which in Bede’s view were bound up with both the integrity of nature as God’s creation and the theological significance of Christ’s death and resurrection’.¹¹² Bede’s scientific works illuminated the links between divine or natural time, in the movements between sun, moon, and stars, and both human and liturgical time.

Bede writes that Easter must follow the full moon after the equinox, ‘certi utique mysterii gratia, quia uidelicet sol ille creatus omnium illuminator astrorum aeternum *ueramque lucem* significat, *quae illuminat omnem hominem uenientem in hunc mundum.*’¹¹³ It is not just for the sake of symbolism, but an attempt to celebrate Easter at the same time as it occurred in that first year, on the Sunday after Passover on Thursday. The problem was that the Jewish calendar was tied to the moon and so the date of Passover was changeable. In the absence of guaranteed dissemination of such information in advance, individual institutions had to be capable of making the calculations for themselves. And as the years passed, there needed to be a mutually understood method for recording events, so that all could refer to the same dates.

DT and *DNR* were completed *c.* 703, around the time Bede reached the age of thirty and was ordained.¹¹⁴ In the words of Kendall and Wallis, the translators of these works, they ‘set up

¹¹² Kendall and Wallis, ‘Introduction’, p. 20.

¹¹³ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 292. ‘for the sake of a certain symbolism, because the created Sun which lights up all the stars signifies the *true* and eternal *light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 25. I have preserved the italics of both editors, which indicate that Bede is quoting from another source, in this case John 1.9.

¹¹⁴ Kendall and Wallis, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

certain landmarks for his future development as a thinker and writer'.¹¹⁵ They were probably intended to be read together, a view shared by Wallis and Kendall.¹¹⁶ Darby in particular sees *DT* and *DNR* as companion books, arguing that the epigraph for *DNR* (quoted at the start of this chapter) is suitable for *DT* as well, especially because *DNR* does not cover time while *DT* does.¹¹⁷ However, while *DNR* may not directly address time it is a discussion of the natural processes which mark time. While writing *DNR* and *DT* Bede was also working on his commentary on Apocalypse, and thus the ending of time. In fact, Darby places *DT* and *DNR* alongside *EA* in his study, because 'these works tackled the same problem, the heresy of calculation, from three different angles'.¹¹⁸

That there was a need for guidance is clear from the preface to *DTR*, in which Bede writes that when his fellow monks expressed their appreciation for his earlier works, *De temporibus* was 'propter rationem paschae potius uidebatur usus indigere'.¹¹⁹ While *De temporibus* fostered an interest in time-reckoning, *De temporum ratione* 'united cosmology and time-reckoning to form a unified science of *computus* that would become the framework for Carolingian and Scholastic basic scientific education'.¹²⁰ As Peter Blair points out, *DTR* is more

¹¹⁵ Kendall and Wallis, 'Introduction', p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Kendall and Wallis, 'Introduction', p. 3: 'It would be natural for Bede to conceive of paired works on cosmology and chronology, because the beginning of time was part of the story of creation as narrated in the first and second chapters of Genesis.'

¹¹⁷ Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 20.

¹¹⁸ Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 215.

¹¹⁹ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 263. Translation: 'rather more in demand because of the calculation of Easter.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 3.

¹²⁰ Kendall and Wallis, 'Introduction', p. 31.

than twelve times the length of *DT*,¹²¹ but it is not simply an ‘extended version’; *DTR* is a cohesive, self-contained work, which according to Darby represents the maturity of Bede’s eschatological thought.¹²² While Bede was clearly the expert on time at his monastery, it is telling that the brothers wished to know how to calculate Easter for themselves, and that Bede was willing to share his knowledge. Their eagerness forms a contrast with the perceived laziness of Byrhtferth’s contemporaries in the early eleventh century, who clearly did not want or feel the need to study as carefully as Bede’s brothers.¹²³ Before Bede, there were no other comprehensive or easily accessible reference works available, one of Bede’s motivations in writing them. As George Brown notes, while Bede generally avoids criticising his predecessors, ‘the fact that he found it necessary to spend most of his lifetime furnishing good or improved texts to students indicates the deficiencies in the texts he himself as a student originally had to work with.’¹²⁴ The value of a text such as *DTR* is that it distils a large library into a summary of the most important information. *DTR* is formed from the sum of Bede’s reading, as he states: ‘quod haec rogatu fratrum undecumque collegi uniusque libelli tenore conclusi.’¹²⁵ It is the first single source book

¹²¹ Blair, *The World of Bede*, p. 262.

¹²² Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 3.

¹²³ To choose one example of many: ‘Some ignorant clerics, alas, who do not want to keep their phylacteries with them, make a mess of calculations of this sort; in a word, they do not preserve the discipline they received in the bosom of Mother Church, nor do they persevere in the pursuit of holy wisdom.’ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, EETS, s.s. 15 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for EETS, 1995), I.3.1–12.

¹²⁴ Brown, *Bede, the Venerable*, p. 18. Peter Blair, however, suggests that *IG* was probably written because earlier, imported commentary books were expensive. *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, p. 179.

¹²⁵ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 265. Translation: ‘I have compiled this work from a number of sources at the request of my brethren and enclosed it in the bounds of a single book.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 4.

of its kind, and yet Bede felt a need to defend himself against possible accusations of superfluity, by quoting Augustine on the necessity of writing books in different styles, ‘ut ad plurimos res ipsa perueniat; ad alios sic, ad alios autem sic.’¹²⁶

As we learned from *IG*, the movements of celestial bodies mark time though they do not themselves move it. God and his creation are the origin of time, though Bede does not explicitly say so. Bede says that there are three ways to reckon time: ‘aut enim natura, aut consuetudine, aut certe auctoritate decurrit.’¹²⁷ Authority, he goes on to specify, can be human or divine, for example the four-year cycle of Olympic Games (human), versus the decree to keep the Sabbath on the seventh day (divine). According to Faith Wallis, ‘this distinction of the three modes of time-reckoning is original to Bede, being found neither in Isidore nor in prior computistic literature.’¹²⁸ *DNR* covers the natural transit (*decurrit*) of time, while *DT* and especially *DTR* demonstrate the intersection of human and divine authority over time. The problem of calculating the date of Easter is the problem of reconciling the divine event of Christ’s resurrection with the imperfect Julian (human) calendar and the changing liturgical calendar. ‘Quae natura [...] ab uno uero Deo creata est, quando sideribus caelo inditis praecepit ut sint in

¹²⁶ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 265. Translation: ‘so that the subject-matter itself might be available to the greatest number: one way to some, another way to others.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 4, italics removed.

¹²⁷ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 274. Translation: ‘it operates either according to nature, or according to custom, or according to authority.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 13.

¹²⁸ Faith Wallis, ‘*Si Naturam Quaeras*: Reframing Bede’s “Science”’, p. 79.

signa et tempora et dies et annos',¹²⁹ but man made the calendar and named the months and seasons. Human authority is not perfect, as Bede implies: 'Consuetudine uero humana firmatum est ut mensis ·xxx· diebus putaretur, cum hoc nec solis nec lunae cursui conueniat.'¹³⁰

The concordance or occasional discordance between natural signs of time and human understanding of time are the basis of the textbooks. Bede wrote *DNR* and *DT*, and combined them in part in *DTR*, so as to explain both how nature governs time and how other natural events occur. This was probably also to persuade people not to ascribe too much importance to natural events such as thunderstorms and comets, a practice that persisted, if Ælfric's despair and the manuscript evidence of prognostications are anything to go by.¹³¹ Bede writes in *DTR* that to

¹²⁹ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 275. Translation: 'This Nature was created by the one true God when He commanded that the stars which He had set in the heavens should be the signs of seasons, days, and years.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 14.

¹³⁰ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 274–75. Translation: 'Now it is by human custom that the month is considered as having 30 days, even though this does not match the course of either the Sun or the Moon.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 13.

¹³¹ Ælfric writes that 'no Christian must divine anything according to the moon; if he does so, his faith is nothing', *Ælfric's 'De Temporibus Anni'*, ed. and trans. by Martin Blake, *Anglo-Saxon Texts*, 6 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), p. 91. For prognostications, see the following editions: *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900–1100: Study and Texts*, ed. by László Sándor Chardonnens, *Brill's Studies in Intellectual History*, 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2007); *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.iii*, ed. and trans. by R. M. Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Texts*, 8 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011); for scholarship see also: R. M. Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context: A Survey and Handlist of Manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), 181–230; Rolf H. Bremmer, and L. S. Chardonnens, 'Old English Prognostics: Between the Moon and the Monstrous', in *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, ed. by K. E. Olsen and L. A. J. R. Houwen (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 153–66; Eric Shane Bryan, 'Prognostications by Thunder in the Zodiac: MSS Trinity R.14.52, Sloane 636, and Pml M.775', *ANQ*, 19 (2006), 16–22.

attempt to predict the future using astrology is ‘uana et a nostra fide aliena’.¹³² Though the moon is vital as a sign of the times and a religious symbol, it cannot tell the future or foreshadow weather events. As Bede writes, ‘numquid credibile est lunae statum, qui fixus in aethere permanent, pro subiacentium mutatione flabrorum uel nubium posse aliorum quam fuerat conuerti, et eam quasi futurae metu tempestatis aliquanto altius cornu quam naturae ordo poscebat attollere, maxime cum non omnibus in terris idem fluctuantium possit existere flatus aurarum?’¹³³ He then explains the practical reasons behind *how* the moon changes rotation. According to Thomas Eckenrode, Bede believed ‘that natural phenomena have their origins in natural causes and, therefore, one must explain natural happenings in terms of the laws of nature’.¹³⁴ Furthermore, discussing the natural world allows Bede to make symbolic connections, especially with the moon.

A computational treatise is of necessity concerned with the moon, given its importance in determining the date of Easter, but Bede’s interest in the moon extends to allegory. He makes the lunar course a metaphor for Christ: the waxing moon signifies the doctrine and virtues of Jesus on earth, and as the moon waxes and loses light it ‘resurrectionis illius ac posterioris gloriae

¹³² Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 278. Translation: ‘futile and alien to our faith.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 16.

¹³³ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 357. Translation: ‘Is it really credible that the position of the Moon, which remains fixed in the ether, could be altered under the influence of a change in the winds or clouds which lie beneath it, and that it should lift up its horns any higher than nature [*naturae ordo*] dictates, as if it dreaded bad weather to come, particularly when such a blast of wayward wind would not occur everywhere on earth?’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 75.

¹³⁴ Eckenrode, ‘The Growth of a Scientific Mind’, p. 209.

miracula demonstrat'.¹³⁵ Bede writes in *IG* that 'uerno tempore mundi est perfectus ornatus, in hoc enim solent herbae uirentes apparere in terra et ligna pomis onustari'.¹³⁶ In *DTR* he names the fourth day of creation as the vernal equinox and says it is fitting that Easter should occur after it.¹³⁷ Were the full moon to occur before the equinox, it would mean that 'ecclesiam sanctam priusquam saluator in carne ueniret extitisse perfectam, uel quemlibet fidelium ante praeuentum gratiae illius aliquid posse supernae lucis habere'.¹³⁸ Similarly, though the full moon initially occurred on the fourth day of Creation, by the time of Christ it 'in quintam sabbati incidit, ut uidelicet Dominus sexta sabbati crucifixus, sabbato ipso in sepulchre quiesceret, ac primam sabbati sua resurrectione consecraret, et nobis quoque in ea, in qua at lux facta est resurgendi a mortuis ac lucem perpetuam intrandi fidem spemque donaret'.¹³⁹ The sun, as the light of the world, represents Christ, while the moon and stars, with their borrowed light, represent the body of the Church and the saints,¹⁴⁰ and 'Christus ecclesiae debuit anteponi, quae non nisi per illum

¹³⁵ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 458. Translation: 'manifests the miracle of [Christ's] resurrection and subsequent glory.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 153.

¹³⁶ Bede, 'In Genesim', p. 14. Translation: 'that the adornment of the world was accomplished in springtime, for that is the time when green plants usually appear on earth and trees are usually loaded with fruits.' Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 79.

¹³⁷ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 24.

¹³⁸ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 292. Translation: 'the Holy Church existed in its perfection before the Saviour came in the flesh, or that one of the faithful, before the bestowing of His grace, can have something of the supernatural light.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 26.

¹³⁹ Bede, 'In Genesim', p. 20. Translation: 'occurred on the fifth day of the week, so that the Lord, who was crucified on the sixth day, might rest in the sepulchre on the sabbath itself, and consecrate by his resurrection the first day of the week, and give to us also on that day on which light was made the faith and hope of rising up from the dead and entering into eternal light.' Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Kendall, p. 85.

¹⁴⁰ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 25.

luceret'.¹⁴¹ Lunar symbolism extends to Easter and the sacrament of Baptism: 'mystica paschae solemnia singuli nostrum in die baptismatis egerint, spiritalem uidelicet exterminatorem signo preciosi sanguinis euadendo, spiritales transeundo tenebras.'¹⁴²

Humans live by natural time, the hours of daylight and the passing of the seasons, but they must also mark time by the liturgical calendar and through methods of dating the years. It is not always easy to reconcile these methods. The natural solar year, with its 365 days and 6 hours, does not fit neatly into the human calendar and so we must add one day every leap year — a problem that existed in Bede's day also. The human calendar consists of a somewhat artificial year, even though to do otherwise would be impossible as a calendar cannot contain partial days. Lunar reckoning is also imprecise, and 'longa sui facit exundantia crementi lunam aliquoties maiorem quam putatur uideri'.¹⁴³ As Bede writes in *DT*, incorrect or inaccurate calculation of the moon is done by people looking for an easier method.¹⁴⁴

Time reckoning must be precise for purposes such as the calculation of Easter. The Synod of Whitby episode in *HE* emphasises the importance of this. To that end, having named

¹⁴¹ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 292. Translation: 'it was necessary that Christ precede the Church, which cannot shine save through Him.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 25–26.

¹⁴² Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 455. Translation: 'each of us enacts the mystical celebrations of Easter on the day of our baptism, in that we escape spiritual annihilation through the sign of the precious blood, and pass over from spiritual darkness.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 151.

¹⁴³ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 412. Translation: 'by its slowing compounding increase, causes the Moon sometimes to be visibly older than it is reckoned to be.' *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 115.

¹⁴⁴ Bede, 'De temporibus liber', p. 595. Latin: 'non in hoc tamen ueritatem naturae sed calculandi facilitatem inquirunt'. Bede, 'De temporibus liber', p. 595. Translation: 'looking more to ease of calculation than to the facts of nature.' 'Bede, 'De temporibus'', trans. by Kendall and Wallis, p. 113.

and described the units of time, Bede explains in chapter 65 of *DTR* the ‘Great Paschal Cycle’, the 532-year repetition of the Easter tables, comprised of lunar and solar years, months, and days. He writes, ‘Qui ubi memoratam ex ordine mensium dierumque summam compleuerit, mox in seipsum reuolutus, cuncta quae ad solis uel lunae cursum pertinent eodem quo praeterierant semper tenore restaurat.’¹⁴⁵ The main value of the 532-year table is that ‘quatenes legentes quique non solum praesentium uel futurum prospicere, sed et praeteritum omnem paschalis statum temporis inerrabili possent intuitu respicere, atque ad dilucidationem priscae lectionis annos omnes, qui aliquando in quaestionem uenerant, quando uel quales fuerint, euidentius agnoscent.’¹⁴⁶ This was a dangerous area for Bede. As Wallis notes, the art of computus is inherently dangerous, because ‘to project the dates of Easter is to project the future, and to give names to years which have not yet been.’¹⁴⁷ The future is in God’s hands only, as Bede is at pains to point out when he says over and over that no one but God can know the hour of His coming,¹⁴⁸ but the Easter tables anticipate future years up to an arbitrary end date which is of course the end of the table, not of all time. However, there was a political benefit to Bede’s Great

¹⁴⁵ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 460. Translation: ‘when it has completed this total through the sequence of months and days, it immediately returns upon itself, and recommences everything pertaining to the course of the Sun and Moon in exactly the same fashion as it happened before.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 155–56.

¹⁴⁶ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 460. Translation: ‘whoever reads them can, with unerring gaze, not only look forward to the present and future, but can also look back at each and every date of Easter in the past; and in order to clarify an ancient text, he can clearly identify all the years, since it sometimes is doubtful when and of what sort they were.’ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 156.

¹⁴⁷ Wallis, ‘Introduction’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. lxxi.

¹⁴⁸ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 239, quoting Matthew 24. 36.

Paschal Cycle, in that it implicitly counters chiliasm or any end to the age, world, or time in the year 1000 by running to AD 1063.

As Wallis notes, the table of the cycle ‘solved the problem of *computus* forever’ because the data can be recycled.¹⁴⁹ Instead of calculating by observance of the current moon, man can look to dates in the future and past. Wallis casts Bede’s process as ‘yoking *naturalis* with *fixa*’, a process that

also implies that *natura* is consistent and stable, a theme of particular importance for Bede when he is thinking about the reckoning of time. Time itself is inherently unstable, “fleeting and wave-tossed”. [...] But *computus* foreshadows that stability through the ordering of time into cycles. The guarantee of the correctness of the Alexandrian system of Easter reckoning is precisely that it produces a permanently repeating cycle of valid dates for the feast, thus lending time something of the permanence of eternity.¹⁵⁰

Time that is named is known and knowable, and therefore within man’s control. But human authority and custom can only work on the past and present, and man has no control over the future – and yet, with an Easter table, he can visualize it.

The Politics of Time

The disunity of the church in certain areas of practical matters was a major concern for Bede, and the *HE* is at times as much a history of attempts at conformity as a history of the church in

¹⁴⁹ Wallis, ‘Commentary’, p. 353.

¹⁵⁰ Wallis, ‘*Si Naturam Quaeras*’, p. 90.

general. Rosalind Love writes, ‘the early church was concerned to establish key tenets of the Christian faith which were not only *correctly* in line with Scripture, and so orthodox, but also acceptable and common to the *whole* Church, that is, catholic.’¹⁵¹ Thus two points of doctrine are ongoing concerns in the *HE*: the dating of Easter and the correct form of tonsure, and how the Irish church differs from the English in both regards. The former issue concerns Bede the most, as he addresses it also in *DTR*. As Peter Hunter Blair writes, ‘for Bede it was not merely a matter of chronology, a subject on which he could certainly speak with the greatest authority. It was also a question of heresy and sin, and here there could be no compromise.’¹⁵² Throughout the *HE* Bede ‘names and shames’ those who refuse to conform to the practices which have been adopted as the standard of the Roman church, and rejoices when a particular bishop or community does conform. And yet, Bede does not explain the Easter problems in full until near the end of *HE*, even after the Synod of Whitby, and he does so by quoting Ceolfrith’s letter to King Nechtan.¹⁵³ It is likely that Bede reproduces this letter in an attempt to persuade any stubborn dissenters who might be reading, but it is interesting that he does not make his case earlier in the history. The letter is omitted entirely in the Old English version of the *HE*, an indication that the dating of Easter was no longer so important by the time of translation.¹⁵⁴

An example of the tension between old and new temporalities is that while the names of the pagan Anglo-Saxon months were usurped by the Roman months, they were not entirely

¹⁵¹ Rosalind Love, ‘The World of Latin Learning’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. by Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 40–53 (p. 44).

¹⁵² Blair, *The World of Bede*, p. 84.

¹⁵³ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, V.21, pp. 535–53.

¹⁵⁴ *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Miller, 2 vols, EETS, o.s. 95, 96 (London: Trübner for EETS, 1890–91), I, V.21.

unknown in Bede's day. Bede is able to name the English months in *DTR* as a kind of personal curiosity,¹⁵⁵ alongside the months of the Romans, Egyptians, and Greeks. When Bede writes, 'antique autem Anglorum populi [...]' he treats the English as a great yet ancient civilisation, however he claims membership in that civilisation: 'neque enim mihi congruum uidetur aliarum gentium annalem obseruantiam dicere et meae reticere.'¹⁵⁶ As Wallis notes, this is actually unusual for Bede: 'Though Bede is generally taciturn about English paganism, he makes an exception for the months precisely because they illustrate the triumph of the conversion process.'¹⁵⁷ New names signified the new time that was taking place, and that England had joined the rest of the Christian world. Bede, as both a product and tool of the conversion process, still ongoing at this stage, constructs a perception of time that supports the Christian calendar.

Bede creates a deliberate structural symmetry in the *HE* between the account of King Edwin's council and the Synod of Whitby, held in 664 to determine the correct date of Easter. Indeed, the Easter controversy is signalled and anticipated in *HE* before the conversion of Edwin is narrated, giving the dispute thematic prominence in Bede's work. In Book II the missionary Augustine calls a meeting of 'episcopos siue doctores', bishops and teachers, because 'non enim paschae diem dominicum sui tempore [...] obseruabant [...] sed et alia plurimi unitate

¹⁵⁵ Bede: *The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch 15.

¹⁵⁶ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 329. Translation: "'in olden time the English people [...]'; 'it did not seem fitting to me that I should speak of other nations' observance of the year and yet be silent about my own nation's.' Bede: *The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 53.

¹⁵⁷ Wallis, 'Commentary', *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. 286.

ecclesiasticae contraria faciebant'.¹⁵⁸ This argument is settled by Augustine performing a miracle, but the others 'non se posse absque suorum consensus ac licentia priscis abdicare maoribus'.¹⁵⁹ Another conference is called, and Augustine is unsuccessful in his attempts to persuade the men 'to keep Easter at the proper time; to perform the sacrament of baptism [...] and to preach the word of the Lord to the English people'.

By the time of the Synod, differences in observing the date of Easter had split kingdoms:

Obseruabat et egiua Eanfled cum suis, iuxta quod in Cantia fieri uiderat, habens secum de Cantia presbyterum catholicae obseruationis, nomine Romanum. Unde nonnumquam contigisse fertur illis temporibus, ut bis in anno uno pascha celebraretur, et cum rex pascha dominicum solutis ieiuniis faceret, tum regina cum suis persistens adhuc in ieiunio diem palmarum celebraret.¹⁶⁰

Similarly, father and son rulers Oswiu and Alhfrith are divided in the matter. The controversy is presented as a very serious one, and threatens the integrity of Christianity on the island: 'unde

¹⁵⁸ Translation: 'they did not keep Easter Sunday at the proper time, [...] They did other things too which were not in keeping with the unity of the Church.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.II, p. 137.

¹⁵⁹ Translation: 'could not disown their former customs without the consent and approval of their own people.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, II.II, p. 137.

¹⁶⁰ Translation: 'Queen Eanflæd and her people also observed it as she had seen it done in Kent, having with her a Kentish priest named Romanus who followed the catholic observance. Hence it is said that in these days it sometimes happened that Easter was celebrated twice in the same year, so that the king had finished the fast and was keeping Easter Sunday, while the queen and her people were still in Lent and observing Palm Sunday.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XXV, p. 297.

merito mouit haec quaestio sensus et corda multorum, timentium ne forte accepto Christianitatis uocabulo in uacuum current aut cucurrissent.’¹⁶¹

So, Bede writes, ‘mota ergo ibi quaestione de pascha uel tonsura uel aliis rebus ecclesiasticis, dispositum est ut in monasterio, quod dicitur Strenaeshalc.’¹⁶² Bede does not say *who* exactly decided, but King Oswiu runs the proceedings. Bede’s account bears structural similarities to his description of the council of King Edwin, as the central episode of Book III and resolving the Easter controversy first discussed in Book II. With this episode, however, Bede is very careful to get all the details right: he names all the participants and their roles and opinions. There are no unnamed councilors speaking words of divine wisdom here; instead, there are lengthy reported speeches demonstrating exactly who was right and who was wrong. The characters have to be named because they are closer in time to the present day, and because the Synod is a matter of canon law. The Synod has a theological importance where the King Edwin episode had a poetic importance. Bede thus has a vested interest in giving a true and correct account of the meeting.

¹⁶¹ Translation: ‘this dispute naturally troubled the minds and hearts of many people who feared that, though they had received the name of Christian, they were running or had run in vain’, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XXV, p. 297.

¹⁶² ‘Primusque rex Osuiu, praemissa praefatione—quod oporteret eos, qui uni Deo seruirent unam uiuendi regulam tenere, nec discrepare in celebratione sacramentorum caelestium, qui unum omnes in caelis regnum expectarent; inquirendum potius, quae esset uerior traditio, et hanc ab omnibus communiter esse sequendam.’ Translation: ‘when this question of Easter and of the tonsure and other ecclesiastical matters was raised, it was decided to hold a council to settle the dispute at a monastery called *Streaenæshealh* (Whitby)’, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XXV, p. 299.

The arguments presented by both sides are straightforward, although not without emotion. Of course each man feels that the way he has been taught is correct; no one wants to abandon tradition without good reason, and there is no reason here as compelling as the sparrow's flight from darkness into light and back into darkness. The future of each man's soul is not at stake; it is already assured, but, Oswiu says, they need to ensure they share the same future.¹⁶³ Oswiu is primarily asking for unity, but the question of heaven will return.

The discussion becomes a battle between two traditions, inspired by different saints.

Colman says:

‘Pascha,’ inquit, ‘hoc, quod agere soleo, a maioribus meis accepi, qui me huc episcopum miserunt, quod omnes patres nostri, uiri Deo dilecti, eodem modo celebrasse noscuntur. Quod ne cui contemnendum et reprobandum esse uideatur, ipsum est, quod beatus euangelista Iohannes, discipulus specialiter Domino dilectus, cum omnibus, quibus praeerat, ecclesiis celebrasse legitur.’¹⁶⁴

While Colman has St John on his side, Wilfrid has not one apostle, but two:

Tum Wilfrid, iubente rege, ut diceret, ita exorsus est: ‘Pasca, quod facimus,’ inquit, ‘uidimus Romae, ubi beati apostoli Petrus et Paulus uixere, docuere, passi sunt, et sepulti, ab omnibus celebrari; hoc in Italia, hoc in Gallia, quas discendi uel orandi studio pertransiuimus, ab omnibus agi conspeximus; hoc Africam, Asiam, Aegyptum, Greciam,

¹⁶³ ‘First King Oswiu began by declaring that it was fitting that those who served one God should observe one rule of life and not differ in the celebration of the heavenly sacraments, seeing that they all hoped for one kingdom in heaven; they ought therefore to inquire as to which was the truer tradition and then all follow it together.’ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XV, p. 299

¹⁶⁴ “‘The method of keeping Easter which I observe, I received from my superiors who sent me here as bishop; it was in this way that all our fathers, men beloved of God, are known to have celebrated it. Nor should this method seem contemptible and blameworthy seeing that the blessed evangelist John, the disciple whom the Lord specially loved, is said to have celebrated it thus, together with all the churches over which he presided.’” *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XV, pp. 299–301.

et omnem orbem, quacumque Christi ecclesia diffusa est, per diuersas nationes et linguas, uno ac non diuerso temporis ordine geri conperimus; praeter hos tantum et obstinationis eorum complices, Pictos dico et Brettones, cum quibus de duabus ultimis oceani insulis, et his non totis, contra totum orbem stulto labore pugnant.¹⁶⁵

Wilfrid also has the geographical advantage, pointing out that the Picts and Britons alone are ‘contra totum orbem’, against the whole world, but Colman’s reply ignores that aspect and is defensive of John, accusing Wilfrid of calling the saint ‘stultum’, ‘foolish’. Wilfrid’s reply acknowledges John’s adherence to Mosaic law but argues that the use of such law has changed, and it is not always necessary. Then he makes his most successful argument, which is worth quoting in full:

Itaque Iohannes secundum legis consuetudinem quarta decima die mensis primi ad uesperam incipiebat celebrationem festi paschalis, nil curans utrum haec sabbato, an alia qualibet feria proueniret. At uero Petrus cum Romae praedicaret, memor quia Dominus prima sabbati resurrexit a mortuis ac mundo spem resurrectionis contulit, ita pascha faciendum intellexit, ut secundum consuetudinem ac praecepta legis quartam decimam lunam primi mensis, aequae sicut Iohannes, orientem ad uesperam semper exspectaret; et hac exorta si dominica dies, quae tunc prima sabbati uocabatur, erat mane uentura, in ipsa uespera pascha dominicum celebrare incipiebat, quomodo et nos omnes hodie facere solemus. Sin autem dominica non proximo mane post lunam quartam decimam, sed sexta decima aut septima decima aut alia qualibet luna usque ad uicesimam esset uentura, exspectabat eam, et praecedente sabbato uespere, sacrosancta paschae sollemnia inchoabat; sicque fiebat, ut dominica paschae dies non nisi a quinta decima luna usque ad uicesimam primam seruaretur. Neque haec euangelica et apostolica traditio legem soluit, sed potius adimplet, in qua obseruandum pascha a quarta decima luna primi mensis ad

¹⁶⁵ ‘Wilfrid, receiving instructions from the king to speak, began thus: “The Easter we keep is the same as we have seen universally celebrated in Rome, where the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul lived, taught, suffered, and were buried. We also found it in use everywhere in Italy and Gaul when we travelled through those countries for the purpose of study and prayer. We learned that it was observed at one and the same time in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, and throughout the whole world, wherever the Church of Christ is scattered, amid various nations and languages. The only exceptions are these men and their accomplices in obstinacy, I mean the Picts and the Britons, who in these, the two remotest islands of the Ocean, and only in some parts of them, foolishly attempt to fight against the whole world.”’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XV, p. 301.

uesperam usque ad uicesimam primam lunam eiusdem mensis ad uesperam praeceptum est; in quam obseruantiam imitandam omnes beati Iohannis successores in Asia post obitum eius, et omnis per orbem ecclesia conuersa est. Et hoc esse uerum pascha, hoc solum fidelibus celebrandum, Niceno concilio non statutum nouiter sed confirmatum est, ut ecclesiastica docet historia. Vnde constat uos, Colmane, neque Iohannis, ut autumatis, exempla sectari neque Petri, cuius traditioni scientes contradicitis, neque legi, neque euangelio in obseruatione uestri paschae congruere. Iohannes enim, ad legis Mosaicae decreta tempus paschale custodiens, nil de prima sabbati curabat; quod uos non facitis, qui non nisi prima sabbati pascha celebratis. Petrus a quinta decima luna usque ad uicesimam primam diem paschae dominicum celebrabat; quod uos non facitis, qui a quarta decima usque ad uicesimam lunam diem dominicum paschae obseruatis, ita ut tertia decima luna ad uesperam saepius pascha incipiatis; cuius neque lex ullam fecit mentionem, neque auctor ac dator euangelii Dominus in ea, sed in quarta decima, uel uetus pascha manducauit ad uesperam uel noui testamenti sacramenta in commemorationem suae passionis ecclesiae celebranda tradidit. Itemque lunam uicesimam primam, quam lex maxime celebrandam commendauit, a celebratione uestri paschae funditus eliminates. Sicque, ut dixi, in celebratione summae festiuitatis neque Iohanni neque Petro neque legi neque euangelio concordatis.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ ‘So John, in accordance with the custom of the law, began the celebration of Easter Day in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month, regardless of whether it fell on the sabbath or any other day. But when Peter preached at Rome, remembering that the Lord rose from the dead and brought to the world the hope of the resurrection on the first day of the week, he realized that Easter ought to be kept as follows: he always waited for the rising of the moon on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month in accordance with the custom and precepts of the law, just as John did, but when it had risen, if the Lord’s Day, which was then called the first day of the week, followed in the morning, he proceeded to celebrate Easter as we are accustomed to do at the present time. But if the Lord’s Day was due, not on the morning following the fourteenth day of the moon but on the sixteenth or seventeenth or any other day until the twenty-first, he waited for it, and began the holy Easter ceremonies the night before, that is, on the Saturday evening; so it came about that Easter Sunday was kept only between the fifteenth day of the moon and the twenty-first. So this evangelical and apostolic tradition does not abolish the law but rather fulfils it, by ordering the observance of Easter from the evening of the fourteenth day of the moon in the first month up to the twenty-first of the moon in the same month. All the successors of St. John in Asia since his death and also the whole church throughout the world have followed this observance. That this is the true Easter and that this alone must be celebrated by the faithful was not newly decreed but confirmed afresh by the Council of Nicaea as the history of the Church informs us. So it is plain, Colman, that you neither follow the example of John, as you think, nor of Peter, whose tradition you knowingly contradict; and so, in your observance of Easter, you neither follow the law nor the gospel. For John who

Wilfrid convincingly argues that not only is the Irish way wrong, but it is wrong in the ways it thinks it is correct. The argument exposes the arbitrary nature of the time in question: if both ways of calculating Easter are in common practice, and each has the authority of a saint behind it, then why can they not both be right? This question is implied, but not addressed; Bede will not acknowledge any suggestion that both sides can be right, though he clearly enjoys reporting the discussion of the dating systems, and the details of the historical processes.

The particular symbolism of the moon which Bede describes in *DTR* as a metaphor for Christ is not referenced in the *HE*; Bede's account of the synod is strictly concerned with its theology and politics. Colman invokes his predecessors Anatolius and Columba, but Wilfrid again has a reply, arguing that they do not follow Anatolius exactly as they claimed, and further, that those who did not know the correct way cannot be blamed for such error:

Sed absit, ut hoc de patribus uestris dicam, quia iustius multo est de incognitis bonum credere quam malum. Unde et illos Dei famulos ac Deo dilectos esse non nego, qui simplicitate rustica sed intentione pia Deum dilexerunt. Neque illis multum obesse reor talem paschae obseruantiam, quamdiu nullus aduenerat, qui eis institute perfectioris decreta, quae sequerentur, ostenderet; quos utique credo, siqui tunc ad eos catholicus

kept Easter according to the decrees of the Mosaic law, took no heed of the Sunday; you do not do this, for you celebrate Easter only on a Sunday. Peter celebrated Easter Sunday between the fifteenth and the twenty-first day of the moon; you, on the other hand, celebrate Easter Sunday between the fourteenth and the twentieth day of the moon. Thus you very often begin Easter on the evening of the thirteenth day of the moon, which is never mentioned in the law. This was not the day—it was the fourteenth, in which the Lord, the author and giver of the Gospel, ate the old Passover in the evening and instituted the sacraments of the new testament to be celebrated by the church in remembrance of his passion. Besides, in your celebration of Easter you utterly exclude the twenty-first day, which the law of Moses specially ordered to be observed. So, as I have said, in your celebration of the greatest of the festivals you agree neither with John nor Peter, neither with the law nor the Gospel.' *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XV, p. 303.

calculator adueniret, sic eius monita fuisse secuturos, quomodo ea quae nouerant ac didicerant Dei mandata probantur fuisse secuti. Tu autem et socii tui, si audita decreta sedis apostolicae, immo uniuersalis ecclesiae, et haec litteris sacris confirmata sequi contemnitis, absque ulla dubietate peccatis. Etsi enim patres tui sancti fuerunt, numquid uniuersali, quae per orbem est, ecclesiae Christi eorum est paucities uno de angulo extremae insulae praeferenda? Et si sanctus erat ac potens uirtutibus ille Columba uester, immo et noster si Christi erat, num praeferrī potuit beatissimo apostolorum principi, cui Dominus ait: ‘Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et portae Inferi non praeualebunt aduersus eam, et tibi dabo clauēs regni caelorum’?¹⁶⁷

Particularly notable is the question whether ‘a handful of people in one corner of the remotest of islands is to be preferred to the universal Church of Christ which is spread throughout the world’.

The rule here is clear: those ignorant that they were wrong can be excused, but anyone who continues to celebrate Easter incorrectly after being corrected is indeed a sinner.

This last speech of Wilfrid’s proves most persuasive, and the king agrees: ‘Thereupon the king concluded, ‘Then, I tell you, since he [St Peter] is the doorkeeper I will not contradict him

¹⁶⁷ Translation: ‘Far be it from me to say this about your fathers, for it is much fairer to believe good rather than evil about unknown people. So I will not deny that those who in their rude simplicity loved God with pious intent, were indeed servants of God and beloved by Him. Nor do I think that this observance of Easter did much harm to them while no one had come to show them a more perfect rule to follow. In fact I am sure that if anyone knowing the catholic rule had come to them they would have followed it, as they are known to have followed all the laws of God as soon as they had learned of them. But, once having heard the decrees of the apostolic see or rather of the universal Church, if you refuse to follow them, confirmed as they are by the holy Scriptures, then without doubt you are committing sin. For though your fathers were holy men, do you think that a handful of people in one corner of the remotest of islands is to be preferred to the universal Church of Christ which is spread throughout the world? And even if that Columba of yours—yes, and ours too, if he belonged to Christ—was a holy man of mighty works, is he to be preferred to the most blessed chief of the apostles, to whom the Lord said, “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven”?’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XV, p. 307.

[...].¹⁶⁸ Then the Synod ends abruptly: ‘Haec dicente rege, fauerunt adsidentes quique siue adstantes maiores una cum mediocribus, et abdicata minus perfecta institutione, ad ea quae meliora cognuerant sese transferre festinabant.’¹⁶⁹ We are told that Colman returned to Ireland and Tuda became bishop of Northumbria, and ‘he had the ecclesiastical tonsure in the form of a crown, according to the custom of that kingdom, and also observed the catholic rules for the date of Easter.’¹⁷⁰ The political authority of King Oswiu joined theological authority to standardise the calendar. Whichever outcome was favoured is the one that Bede would have had to use: there is no changing now; his is ‘the science that won’. Bede’s writings therefore legitimate the politics of time that resulted from this meeting.

While the Synod of Whitby settled a long-standing argument, it did not solve all related problems or all nonconformity. While most Christians in Anglo-Saxon England now agreed on the correct date of Easter, the act of calculating it in advance still caused some confusion. *DT*, *DNR*, and the genre of computus in general were dedicated to finding the correct date of Easter. Nor was the church instantly unified after 664. Uncertainty of orthodoxy and unity within the English church pervades the *HE*, even in the later chapters. Bede ends with the state of the church at the present time because he realises that it may change; in speaking of the Northumbrian monasteries he writes, ‘quae res quem sit habitura finem, posterior aetas

¹⁶⁸ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XV, p. 307.

¹⁶⁹ Translation: ‘When the king had spoken, all who were seated there or standing by, both high and low, signified their assent, gave up their imperfect rules, and accepted in their place those which they recognized to be better.’ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XV, pp. 307-09.

¹⁷⁰ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, III.XV, p. 309.

uidebit.¹⁷¹ Pockets of difference and dissension persisted, despite Bede's best efforts across a lifetime of writing.

Aside from the need for church unity, emphasised by the three uses of the word 'catholic' in the Synod of Whitby section, the synod was predicated on a need to live by God's rule on earth so that men could be rewarded in heaven. An implicit theme in the *HE* is the future that Christianity offers its adherents: life after death, and heavenly rewards. This is the personal possible future of each person, but there was a communal future to be expected as well: the Last Judgement and Apocalypse.

What Follows ('quid autem sequatur')

The conversion to Christianity gave Anglo-Saxon England a beginning in Genesis, and an expected end and new life in the world to come after Christ's return. But what would this future be like? When might the world end, and would that be the end of time as well? Christian ideas of the future were based on biblical sources, especially the New Testament and book of Apocalypse, and theologically informed constructs such as the systems of the world ages. The 'basic principle' of typology, according to Daniélou, 'is that there is an imperfect order which prepares for and prefigures an order of perfection.'¹⁷² This perfection is in the world to come. However, the books of the Bible are not always clear on exactly what would happen when Christ returned and the Day of Judgement occurred; patristic writers had to 'fill in the gaps'.

¹⁷¹ Translation: 'what the result will be, a later generation will discover', *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, V.XXIII, p. 561.

¹⁷² Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality*, p. 31.

The *Expositio Apocalypseos* is one of Bede's earliest works, characterised by a terseness which is not found in his mature commentaries. He states in his preface that he aimed at brevity because of 'the indolence of our nation, I mean of the English'.¹⁷³ His fears for *EA* may have been correct, for its low manuscript numbers indicate it was one of the least popular of his works: it 'was copied with great seriousness in the ninth and tenth centuries, but in insignificant numbers compared to the overwhelming preponderance of Haimo's commentary'.¹⁷⁴

As has been noted, Bede subscribed to the theory of the Six World Ages, a theory 'which he inherited from Augustine and Isidore, and which clearly appealed to his orderly mind and strong sense of divine architectural planning'.¹⁷⁵ The six ages correspond allegorically to the six days of Creation, 'sicut Augustinus ait, ideo dominus, qui omnia simul creare ualebat, in eo dignatus est operari, quia numerus est perfectus',¹⁷⁶ and so the Six Ages follow 'in all respects

¹⁷³ *The Explanation of the Apocalypse by the Venerable Bede*, trans. by Edward Marshall (Oxford and London: James Parker, 1878), p. 8–9. Latin: 'Nostrae siquidem, id est Anglorum gentis inertiae consulendi, ratus', in *Expositio Apocalypseos*, CCSL 121A, ed. by Roger Gryson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), p. 233. It should be noted that Marshall did not of course translate from this recent edition, but from an 1844 text.

¹⁷⁴ Guy Lobrichon, 'Stalking the Signs: The Apocalyptic Commentaries', in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050*, ed. by Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 67–79 (p. 72). The difference in the commentaries is summarised by Lobrichon as follows: 'the historical tradition of the Venerable Bede, who left the future indeterminate; and the allegorical tradition of Haimo, who preached a realized eschatology accomplished by the redemption on the cross. In effect, these are two strategies of silence', p. 74.

¹⁷⁵ Brown, *Bede, the Venerable*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁶ Bede, 'De temporum ratione liber', p. 300. Translation: 'because (as St Augustine says) the Lord, who was capable of creating everything in an instant, deigned to do His work within this number, because it is a perfect number', *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 32.

the pattern of the first week'.¹⁷⁷ With a typological aptness, the sixth day is when God created man, and the sixth age is when God appeared on earth as man;¹⁷⁸ it is the age in which Bede and his readers live. The greater part of Bede's homily 1.14 also describes how the six vessels of water in John 2.1–11 each signifies an age of the world. The six vessels themselves represent 'uasa sex quibus continebatur corda sunt deuota sanctorum quorum perfectio uitae et fidei exemplum recte credenda ac uiuendi proposita est generi humano per sex saeculi labentis aetates, id est usque ad tempus dominicae praedicationis.'¹⁷⁹ That the water is transformed into wine instead of being created as wine signifies that Jesus 'sed maluit de aqua facere uinum quo typice doceret non se ad soluendum inprobandumque sed adimplendum potius legem prophetasque uenisse';¹⁸⁰ it is the replacement of the Old Law with the New.

The sixth age will end with the Day of Judgement and the end of the world. Chiliasm and millennialism were widespread in medieval England,¹⁸¹ with many people believing that each

¹⁷⁷ Bede: *The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 40.

¹⁷⁸ Bede: *The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 41.

¹⁷⁹ Bede, 'Homelia 14', in *Bedae Venerabilis opera: Opera homiletica, Pars III, Opera Rhythmica, Pars IV*, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL, 122 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), pp. 95–104 (p. 98). Translation: 'the devout hearts of the holy, whose perfection of life and faith was set before the human race as an example of believing and living properly through the six ages of this transitory world, up to the time of the Lord's preaching', Bede, 'Homily 1.14', *Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. by Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1991), pp. 134–147 (p. 138).

¹⁸⁰ Bede, 'Homelia 14', p. 99. Translation: 'had not come to cancel and repudiate the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them', *Homilies*, Bede, 'Homily 1.14', trans. by Martin and Hurst, p. 139.

¹⁸¹ See Malcolm Godden, 'The Millenium, Time, and History for the Anglo-Saxons', in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050*, ed. by Richard Landes, Andrew Gow, and David C. Van Meter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 155–80. The two terms are sometimes conflated, but Godden argues for a difference in meaning.

world age was to last a thousand years, and that the current age would end one thousand years after Christ's birth. Some also believed that Christ would be on earth for a thousand years before earth's end. For this reason, Bede is careful to emphasise across his works that nowhere in the Bible is it said that each age will span a thousand years, and furthermore, that no one but God can know his coming: '*Sexta, quae nunc agitur, nulla generationum uel temporum serie certa sed, ut aetas decrepit ipsa, totius saeculi morte finienda.*'¹⁸² At the end of the chronicle in *DT* Bede writes simply, '*Reliquum sextae aetatis Deo soli patet.*'¹⁸³ This repetition, or as Brown terms it, 'Augustinian insistence', allows Bede to avoid 'the critical danger of inexorably linking computus, history, chronology, and the end of time.'¹⁸⁴ As God began time, so shall he end it, and man can know nothing more of the divine plan than what has been revealed in scripture.

In Bede's later works the scheme of the world ages is developed and expanded. A seventh age, parallel to the six others, is one 'perpetuae quietis in alia uita quam solutae a corporibus percipient animae sanctae cum Christo',¹⁸⁵ while in the eighth age Christ will take the souls of the faithful, 'eorum animas Christus incorruptibilium corporum munere donas ad perceptionem

¹⁸² Bede, 'De temporibus liber', p. 601. The italics indicate where Bede is quoting from Isidore's '*Chronicon B*'. Translation: 'The Sixth Age, which is unfolding now, has no fixed sequence of generations or times, but, like extreme dotage itself, will end in the death of the whole world-age.' Bede, 'De temporibus', trans. by Kendall and Wallis, p. 118.

¹⁸³ Bede, 'De temporibus liber', p. 611; again using Isidore. Translation: 'the rest of the sixth age is known to God alone', Bede, 'De temporibus', trans. by Kendall and Wallis, p. 131.

¹⁸⁴ George H. Brown, 'Bede and Change', in *Aedificia Nova: Studies in Honor of Rosemary Cramp*, ed. by Catherine E. Karkov and Helen Damico (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 2008), pp. 33–42 (p. 38).

¹⁸⁵ Bede, 'De temporibus ratione liber', p. 537. Translation: 'of rest in another life which the holy souls, released from their bodies, will possess in Christ', *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 240.

regni caelestis contemplationemque diuinae suae maiestatis inducat.’¹⁸⁶ The mortal nature of human bodies, caused by Adam and Eve’s sin, will be reversed and they will once again have immortal flesh. In fact, these ages will perfect the troubled times that brought each previous age to a close: ‘sed ubi tempus iudicii et resurrectionis advenerit, gloriosiore perpetuae beatitudinis perfectione complebitur’,¹⁸⁷ not through ‘fearful anxiety’.¹⁸⁸ This paradise ‘non alium finem quam glorificae resurrectionis habet initium’.¹⁸⁹ We may infer that time will continue and will be able to be measured, but that the souls of the faithful will have no need to measure it, and so instead it will be as eternity to them.

The eighth age is like the eighth day of the week on which Christ rose; it follows the preceding seven ages but is the first of its kind and ‘ipsa una maneat caelesti luce perennis’;¹⁹⁰ it has a beginning but no end. In his Homily on John 2.1–11, Bede finds further meaning in the circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day after birth. It is both baptism and a symbol of

ad generalem humani generis resurrectionem quando mortalis propago cessabit mortalitas
tota in immortalitatem mutabitur interpretaris et circumcisos induci in templum cum

¹⁸⁶ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 542. Translation: ‘endowed with the gift of incorruptible bodies, into the possession of the kingdom of heaven and into the contemplation of His divine majesty’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 246.

¹⁸⁷ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 542. Translation: ‘when the time of judgement and resurrection comes, it will be fulfilled in the more glorious perfection of eternal bliss’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 247.

¹⁸⁸ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 542. Translation: *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 247. Latin: ‘anxietate turbata’, p. 542.

¹⁸⁹ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 543. Translation: ‘has no end other than the beginning of the glorified Resurrection’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 247.

¹⁹⁰ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 544. Translation: ‘alone will abide, one and unending, in the eternal light’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 248.

hostiis intellexeris quando post resurrectionem uniuersali expleto iudicio sancti iam incorruptibiles facti ad contemplandum perpetuo speciem diuinae maiestatis cum bonorum operum muneribus intrabunt.¹⁹¹

For Bede, the resurrection of Christ and the saints in the eighth age confirms the eternal nature of the human soul: The ‘quae uitae dies in se quidem ipsa mansit semper, manet et manebit aeterna’.¹⁹² But to anyone who is too eager to look ahead to the end times, or who believes that each World Age will consist of exactly one thousand years, Bede is careful to emphasise that the ages are unequal in length and no one can know the year or day when the Lord will come, for Matthew 24.36 states, ‘no one knows the last day and hour, not even the angels, but only the Father.’¹⁹³ As Richard Landes notes, ‘the exegetical legacy of Augustine banned all chiliastic or apocalyptic speculation from orthodox theology’; as a result, ‘chiliasm deserved mention only as a condemned popular belief.’¹⁹⁴ The Paschal Table of the manuscript proves that time may be calculated past the year 1000, for time will continue, and the 532-year cycle will repeat, unless or until God chooses to end it. And even then, time will not cease to

¹⁹¹ Bede, ‘*Homelia* 14’, p. 102. Translation: ‘[a symbol of] the general resurrection of the human race, when mortal generation will cease, and all mortality will be changed into immortality; and you can understand the leading of the circumcized into the temple with sacrificial offerings [as a symbol of] the time after the resurrection when the universal judgment is finished, and the saints, then made incorruptible, will enter with their offerings of good works to contemplate forever the form of divine majesty.’ ‘Bede, ‘Homily 1.14’, trans. by Martin and Hurst, p. 143.

¹⁹² Bede, ‘*De temporum ratione liber*’, p. 544. Translation: ‘day of this life has always abided, abides, and will abide, eternal in itself’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 249.

¹⁹³ Quoted in *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 239, italics removed. Latin: ‘quia *de die ultima et hora nemo scit neque angeli caelorum, nisi pater solis*’, p. 536.

¹⁹⁴ Richard Landes, ‘The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern’, in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050*, ed. by Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 243–70 (p. 176).

operate, but it will simply cease to matter, for all souls will be at rest – an *eternal* rest. And so Bede famously ends *DTR* ‘aeterna stabilitate ac stabili aeternitate’,¹⁹⁵ safe and secure in the eternal nature of his soul and of all souls. While humans struggle with the cycles of months and years, and of liturgical feasts, they are simply marking time until they can be taken into God’s care, until divine time overtakes human cares. In the Preface to *DTR* Bede describes God, ‘qui aeternus permanens tempora quandō uoluit constituit et qui nouit temporum fines immo ipse labentibus temporum curriculis finem cum uolerit imponet.’¹⁹⁶ The eternity of God is the solution to the problems of Augustine’s *distentio animi*; eternity is indeed the opposite of time. God has ultimate temporal authority in Bede’s works because He is before all times, the creator of time, and the one who will decide when time will end.

Is the end of the world the end of time? In *DTR* Bede explains what will happen on the day of judgement. The continuation of time is implied because, though the world will be destroyed, and heaven burnt, the stars will not be damaged.¹⁹⁷ The heavens will pass away, not the firmament or ethereal heaven, ‘sed caelum hoc aerium, id est terrae proximum, a quo aues caeli, quod in eo uolent, appellantur.’¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, ‘peracto iudicio fuerit caelum nouum et terra noua, id est non alia pro aliis, sed haec ipsa per ignem innouata et quasi quadam

¹⁹⁵ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 544. Translation: ‘in eternal stability and stable eternity’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 249.

¹⁹⁶ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 263. Translation: ‘who, abiding eternal, established the seasons when it pleased Him, and who knows the limits of the ages; indeed, when He sees fit, He himself shall decree an end to the unstable cycles of time’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 244.

¹⁹⁸ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 540. Translation: ‘but this heaven of air [*aerium*], the one close to the Earth, from which the birds [*aues*] of heaven that fly therein take their name’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 244.

resurrectionis uirtute glorificata claruerint.¹⁹⁹ The sun, the moon, and the stars will shine on, with a renewed light, and so they will continue to be a sign of the seasons, a measure of the times.

A more personal vision of the Last Judgement can be found in the Latin poem *De die iudicii*, generally attributed to Bede.²⁰⁰ Its sentiments correspond with his writings on time and the apocalypse, although none are so personal in tone as the poem, which begins as a lament ‘among fertile flowers and grasses on the earth’.²⁰¹ In this scene of pastoral tranquillity, the speaker’s ‘lugubria mente’ (‘mourning mind’, 5) turns to ‘scelerum commissa meorum, | Et maculas uitae, mortisque inamabile tempus’ (‘the sins I was guilty of, and stains on my life, and the hateful time of death’, 6–7). Death is literally an *inamabilis* time: unlovely, or without love. The poem explains why death is so loveless when it enumerates the punishments that await the *malorum*, the evil ones (11). Such torments are contrasted, however, with the joys of heaven. *De die iudicii* is a poem about two contrasts: the difference between the ordinary present and the Judgement to come, and the rewards of heaven versus the horrors of hell. The speaker urges

¹⁹⁹ Bede, ‘De temporum ratione liber’, p. 540 Translation: ‘there will be a new heaven and a new Earth after the Judgement – which is not one [heaven and Earth] replacing another, but these very same ones [which] will shine forth, having been renewed by fire and glorified by the power of the Resurrection’, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 244.

²⁰⁰ See Michael Lapidge, ‘Bede the Poet’, in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures 1958–1993*, ed. by Michael Lapidge, 2 vols (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), II: 1979–1993, pp. 927–56.

²⁰¹ Line 1, ‘De die iudicii’, in *Opera homiletica, Pars III, Opera Rhythmica, Pars IV*, CCSL 122, ed. by D. Hurst (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), pp. 439–44. All quotations from the poem are from this edition; the translations are my own. Michael Lapidge felt that ‘Bede’s treatment of this simple theme is expansive and (unnecessarily?) verbose’, ‘Bede the Poet’, p. 932. It may be so, but the Old English version of the poem is even more expansive; its author seems to relish describing in detail the miseries of the life to come.

himself, and so the reader, to confess now ‘ueniae dum tempus habebis’ (‘while you have time for forgiveness’, 34).

The text is simple and emphatic on the common future of all: ‘Ille dies ueniet, iudex dum uenerit orbis, | Debebis qua tu rationem reddere de te’ (‘That day will come, when the judge of the world will come, on which you will have to give a reckoning of yourself’, 36–37). Twice the speaker urges that there is still time for forgiveness (*ueniae tempus*, 34 and 45), and so ‘aeternus fuerit placidus te iudice iudex’ (‘the eternal judge will be gentle if you make a claim now’, 44). There is no question about the possibility of the Judgement Day: it is not a matter of *if* it will happen, but *when*. The poem lists the customary signs, among them the ‘astra cadunt rutilo et titan tenebrescit in ortu, | Pallida nocturnam nec praestat luna lucernam’ (‘the stars fall and the sun grows dark in the red east, the pale moon does not show nocturnal lamp’, 54–55). The signs relate to a change in the natural order as ordained by God at Creation; the Apocalypse is the transformation of such order so that a new one may emerge. The actual Judgement is described, and then the darkness continues in the description of hell, which is of course *aeternae* (94). There, ‘miseri uoluuntur in aeuum, | Obscuras inter picea caligine noctes’ (‘the miserable ones wallow forever, among pitch darkness and the black of night’, 98–99). A warning of the reversals that time can bring precedes the passage describing hell, for the hour ‘misera seruire libidine gaudes | Luxuriae stimulis te tuae agitabis acutis’ (‘you rejoice to serve with wretched desire will harry you with sharp pangs of your extravagance’, 88–89).

Those who have repented and are sent to heaven have ‘saecula felix’, eternal happiness (124). Heaven is a place of light, in contrast to the darkness of hell and the world at the time of the Last Judgement: ‘nox ubi nulla rapit splendorem lucis amoenae’ (‘where no night takes away

the splendour of the delightful light', 128). The poem resonates with the flight of the sparrow described in the account of Edwin's conversion, not only with its explanation of the future life, but in the imagery of light and consolation extended beyond the hall and into eternity. Absent will be the dreariness of mortal life, with no hunger or labour or bad weather; in fact, time will cease to operate on man for there will be no 'fessa senectus' ('weary old age', 129) and no death ('mors', 134). God is always present ('semper adest praesens', 139), and His rewards are perpetual ('praemia perpetuis', 142). The perpetual joys of heaven are emphasised throughout Bede's works, most particularly in the *HE*, as the end-reward of suffering through human time.

In *De die iudicii* heaven is a state of eternity in which there is no time because it will last forever. The speaker knows that, by contrast, his life on earth will *not* last, and he must confess now so as to avoid the punishments of hell, which are no less eternal. The poem perhaps implies that time is more keenly felt in hell because the misery will never end, while time is less important in heaven because it is joy that will never end. There is a difference in the operation of time between the two kinds of emotion or feeling. Sorrow and pain are more deeply rooted in time than joy and pleasure – an idea that will be explored further in chapter four on the Old English elegies.

Conclusion

Bede's synthesis of history, science, and exegesis forms a poetic of time that emphasises divine patterning. His work 'solved' the problem of time, making clear the advantages of AD dating, and linking Anglo-Saxon England to the Christian world, centred in Rome. The two episodes of the *HE* discussed above demonstrate the importance of time in Christianity: it is created and

ordained by God, and has to be used appropriately and communally. Christianity offers a secure temporality which Bede imagines the Anglo-Saxons previously lacked. The history of the Anglo-Saxons joins biblical history, linked implicitly to the creation of man in *IG* and to the Apocalypse as described in *EA*. Across his works Bede addresses the beginning of time and the end of time, and makes clear that his present time is part of a new age. AD dating is part of that new age, but it also helped with some of Bede's political problems.

Bede was so successful in his construction of time that he had no immediate successor as historian, exegete, teacher, or scholar. His works remained standard for centuries after his death. There are no Anglo-Saxon biblical commentaries that substantially expand upon or differ from his with respect to time, and while the textbooks and *HE* remained in circulation in Latin, after a time this was not enough for the readers or schoolrooms of Anglo-Saxon England and translations became necessary. The works were not updated with new, more complex information, as one might expect, but rather the opposite: later textbooks by the likes of Ælfric and Byrhtferth are simpler, leaving out much of the complex computistical calculations, and written wholly or partly in the vernacular due to the decline of Latin learning. That people did read and use Bede's works is clear from the manuscript evidence, however they did not have to read them all. Just one of Bede's books, perhaps *DT* or *DTR*, was sufficient to learn the basics of computus. Should one wish to know more about the natural world, he could read *DNR* and its account of natural phenomena, or read Genesis in conjunction with Bede's exegesis. An Anglo-Saxon curious about his land and people found their political and religious history in *HE*, and anyone who looked to the future could read the Apocalypse and heed the warnings Bede scattered throughout his works: none can know for sure the timing of the end.

Chapter Two: Religious Poetry of the Vercelli Book

Introduction

Chapter one has shown the ways in which the Venerable Bede constructed and represented time for his learned and literate Christian Anglo-Saxon readership. One of Bede's methods, especially with regards to historical time, was to model a poetics of time based on biblical typology. Typology embeds a pattern of expectation and fulfilment in the human experience of a temporality that is a creation of God. The two poems examined in this chapter, *Elene* and *Andreas*, are vernacular literary products of a scholarly Christian class that cultivated literature in Latin and vernacular poetry based on Latin sources. These poems have been chosen because they both develop distinct discourses on narrative time and exploit the significance of typology to do this in different ways. Their presence in the same manuscript suggests a recognition that they are alike in paying such close attention to time. The poem *Elene*, by Cynewulf, begins with a precise date according to the *anno Domini* system, signalling a particular kind of historicity for its narrative. This deliberate (and in ways innovative) construct of time is, however, problematic within the time-world of the poem, which presents temporal difficulties in the form of serious chronological dislocation. The most significant temporal difficulty is that the initial date of the events is, strictly speaking, historically incorrect. A second poem, *Andreas*, associated with the Cynewulfian canon, does not locate its story in the enumerated chronology of historical time, but is nevertheless very interested in time and history, and careful to mark the timeframes of its narrative for poetic effect. Time is manipulated, elongated, lost, and elided, but it can always be traced by the attentive reader.

Elene and *Andreas* both survive uniquely in Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII, also known as the Vercelli Book.¹ This late tenth-century manuscript of Old English texts includes 23 prose homilies and saints' lives, and six poetic works: *Andreas*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Homiletic Fragment I*, *Soul and Body I*, *The Dream of the Rood*, and *Elene*. The poems are generally dispersed between the prose items, though *Andreas* and *The Fates of the Apostles* are placed adjacent to each other, prompting speculation as to whether they constitute two poems or one.² The contents of the Vercelli Book as a whole suggest a compiler interested in themes of

¹ It is no. 394 in N. R. Ker's *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957). The poetic texts have been edited as volume II of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: The Vercelli Book*, ed. by George Krapp (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); the homilies separately as *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. by D. G. Scragg, Early English Text Society, o.s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for The Early English Text Society, 1992). Scragg examined the physical arrangement of the Vercelli book in the 1970s, see D. G. Scragg, 'The Compilation of the Vercelli Book', *ASE*, 2 (1973), 189–207. He stated: 'It is difficult to discern any principle of arrangement in the items of the collection. No attempt is made to follow the order of the church year, and the poems are distributed amongst the homilies in a way that is difficult to understand' (p. 190), and concluded: 'The first thing which can be said with some assurance is that the collection was not planned in its entirety before execution began, and the explanation for the confused order of items, with overlaps in content, is that a number of different exemplars were used for the material' (p. 205).

All quotations from and references to *Elene* in this chapter are to P. O. E. Gradon, *Cynewulf's Elene*, rev. edn (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1977). The edition's use of yogh and wyn have been changed to g and w respectively. All translations are my own. All quotations from and references to *Andreas* are to *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. by Kenneth N. Brooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); again, translations are my own.

² *Fates* carries Cynewulf's runic signature and is separated from *Andreas* in the manuscript by a blank line. It is possible that Cynewulf composed *Andreas*, with *Fates* as a kind of coda. Scholarly opinion is still divided, but generally the issue is discussed less than the possible relationship between *Andreas* and *Beowulf*. See below for further discussion and references.

conversion and the liturgical calendar, and the two poems under discussion share an interest in time with both a historical and an eschatological aspect.

Andreas scholarship has in the past focused mainly on certain questions: the possibility of Cynewulf's authorship, and thus the poem's potential relationship to others in the Cynewulfian canon; the intriguing problem of the possibly close relationship between *Andreas* and *Beowulf*; and the development of typological imagery in the poem. Relatively little has been published on these questions within the last ten years,³ as a level of critical exhaustion on these issues seems to have been reached in relation to these lines of enquiry. Though many have argued in favour of the *Andreas*-poet's originality in his treatment of his source,⁴ the comparisons with *Beowulf* present strong evidence of some kind of debt, whether literary or rhetorical, or both. The *Andreas*-poet would seem at times to have consciously imitated *Beowulf*. Critical consensus on this question has proved impossible to achieve: in 1951 Leonard Peters argued against any provable relationship between the two poems; in 1968 Arthur Brodeur refuted much of his argument.⁵ Anita Riedinger in 1993 declared that 'the formulaic relationship between *Beowulf*

³ Though see Daniel Anlezark, *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 210–30 and pp. 347–59.

⁴ Those who praise the *Andreas*-poet's originality include David Hamilton, 'Andreas and *Beowulf*: Placing the Hero', in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. by Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 81–98; Wallace G. Gobar, 'Andreas, Lines 360–362', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 73 (1972), 672–74; John C. Unrue, 'Andreas: An Internal Perspective', in *In Geardagum: Essays on Old English Language and Literature*, ed. by Loren C. Gruber and Dean Loganbill (Denver: Soc. for New Lang. Study, 1974), pp. 25–30; Edward B. Irving, Jr, 'A Reading of *Andreas*: The Poem as Poem', *ASE*, 12 (1983), 215–37.

⁵ Leonard J. Peters, 'The Relationship of the Old English *Andreas* to *Beowulf*', *PMLA*, 66 (1951), 844–63; Arthur G. Brodeur, 'A Study of Diction and Style in Three Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poems', in

and *Andreas* is stunning. I believe that the later poet needed no other technique of composition here than a *Beowulf*-manuscript at his elbow (with his Latin source nearby) and that this explains the very special relationship that scholars long believed existed between these two poems alone.⁶ Few other critics have been so bold in their assertions, and there is still no agreement on the level of influence.

Elene scholarship is more expansive, and beside a body of feminist approaches, has also focused on source comparisons and typological readings, with particular interest in the prominent theme of conversion.⁷ *Elene* and *Andreas* belong to the genre of Old English saints' lives, alongside *Juliana* and *Guthlac A and B*. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, while there is no evidence to suggest a concerted effort by vernacular authors to mould their works into particular categories, Old English poetic narratives about saints stem from and have much in common with their sources and counterparts in Latin and Greek. Saints' lives are in

Nordica Et Anglica: Studies in Honor of Stefan Einarsson, ed. by Allan H. Orrick (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), pp. 97–114.

⁶ Anita Riedinger, 'The Formulaic Relationship between *Beowulf* and *Andreas*', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess. B. Bessinger Jr.*, ed. by Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1993), pp. 283–312 (p. 209).

⁷ See, for example, Thomas D. Hill, 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English "Elene"', *Traditio*, 27 (1971), 159–78; Daniel G. Calder, 'Strife, Revelation, and Conversion: The Thematic Structure of *Elene*', *English Studies*, 53 (1972), 201–10; Earl R. Anderson, 'Cynewulf's *Elene* 1115b–24, the Conversion of the Jews: Figurative or Literal?', *English Language Notes*, 25 (1988), 1–3; Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations'; Zollinger, 'Cynewulf's *Elene* and the Patterns of the Past'; Heidi Estes, 'Colonization and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*', in *Conversion and Colonization in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Catherine E. Karkov and Nicholas Howe, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon studies*, 2; *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 318 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp. 133–51.

essence stories about ‘real’ people, in as much as the saint in question usually has some kind of historical reality and evidence for their existence. In the saint’s life, however, historical accuracy is not the goal: the focus is the meaning of the acts of a saint, whether ‘real’ or purported. As Philip Rollinson writes, ‘the significance of the deeds of saints resides in their imitation of Christ, following whom they should perform miracles, endure persecution, and suffer martyrdom. The legitimate Christological significance of saints’ lives is thus not hidden in the way that the significance of the lives and actions of pre-Christian (Old Testament) figures is.’⁸ There is an expected formula for saints’ lives, because, as Robert Bjork outlines: ‘All saints transcend the world; all are identified with Christ. As part of Christ’s body, they are alike in all their essential features, a fact that explains the extreme conventionality of hagiography. In the communion of saints all things are common, all characteristics Christ’s.’⁹

Some modes and meaning of typology have been discussed in chapter one in regards to Bede and biblical history. The use of the typological mode extends into the closely related literature of the saint’s life. Charles Jones explains: ‘The entities recorded in the Old Testament are *types, figures, or prefigurations* – creatures of God in His Prescience, not of man. History is typified, not by words, but by history. The letter, the fact, the action, the history is foreshadowed. God’s creatures, whether organic, inorganic, or conceptual, in God’s Word make Truth manifest by a method of divine revelation.’¹⁰ This way of reading and writing was absorbed by authors of

⁸ Philip Rollinson, ‘Some Kinds of Meaning in Old English Poetry’, *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 11 (1970), 5–21 (p. 13).

⁹ Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints’ Lives*, p. 19.

¹⁰ Charles Jones, ‘Some Introductory Remarks on Bede’s Commentary on Genesis’, *Sacris Erudiri*, 19 (1969), 115–98 (p. 134).

saints' lives. As Jean Daniélou explains, 'the past is only recalled as a foundation for future hope. As God had set man in Paradise so must Israel wait to be brought into a New Paradise. This is precisely the essence of typology, which is to show how past events are a figure of events to come. These events, recounted in themselves, are not particularly important. There is no striving to bring back again these past events.'¹¹ Typology in saints' lives reflects the same purpose; it is not about bringing back Christ, but rather, imitating him. Broadly speaking, typology in hagiography, described by Marie Welsh, is 'the literary technique of borrowing details from Old Testament accounts to describe incidents which in some way are like the earlier ones'.¹² It is well-suited to the form; as James Earl writes: 'typology is the essence of Christian historical writing in general, and of the saint's life in particular.'¹³

For a reader alert to the significance of time, the meaning afforded to figures in number symbolism, and the many uses and expressions of typological tropes, *Andreas* emerges as rich with Christian metaphor and meaning. In *Andreas* this typological rhetoric of time is overtly 'unreal' in its chronology; *Elene*, on the other hand, aspires to a kind of historical accuracy, but one inseparable from typological patterning. Saints' lives function to inspire imitation and reflection in the reader. As Earl writes: 'The saint's life is ultimately devotional rather than historical in our sense of the word; it is more concerned with the truths which underlie Christian

¹¹ Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. by Dom Wulstan Hibberd (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), p. 12. Orig. pub. as *Sacramentum Futuri: Études sur les Origines de la Typologie biblique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950).

¹² Marie Michelle Walsh, 'The Baptismal Flood in the Old English *Andreas*: Liturgical and Typological Depths', *Traditio*, 33 (1977), 132–58 (p. 137).

¹³ James W. Earl, 'The Typological Structure of *Andreas*', in *Old English Literature in Context: Ten Essays*, ed. by John D. Niles (Cambridge: Brewer, 1980), pp. 66–89 (p. 66).

history, which motivate it and can be derived from it, than with the particulars of actual historical events.’¹⁴ For hagiographers, ‘these narratives have no necessary relationship with literal history, but are rather, allegorical revelations of the spiritual truths implicit in the saint’s very nature.’¹⁵ Both *Andreas* and *Elene* reflect these interests, however, in ways which might suggest two authors rather than one.

Performative Historicity in Elene

Elene’s narrative is devoted almost entirely to the legend of the finding of the True Cross by Queen Helena, mother of Constantine I; in this search she is aided by Judas Cyriacus.¹⁶ Signed by Cynewulf,¹⁷ the poem is placed towards the end of the Vercelli Book on fols 121–133^v, and is divided into fifteen sections. The title *Elene*, bestowed by modern editors,¹⁸ is somewhat misleading as the poem is not a biographical account of St Helena’s life, but instead recounts the *inventio crucis* narrative and the conversion of St Judas Cyriacus. Elene is a woman of words and few deeds; she acts upon the orders of her son and in God’s name, but is not herself represented in a close narrative relationship with God, and does not merit a personal visit from him, as Andrew does in *Andreas*. Structurally, *Elene* is not about Elene in the same way that

¹⁴ Earl, ‘The Typological Structure of *Andreas*’, p. 69.

¹⁵ Earl, ‘The Typological Structure of *Andreas*’, p. 70.

¹⁶ Note that I use ‘Helena’ to refer to the historical figure, and ‘Elene’ to refer to the title character of *Elene*.

¹⁷ Asserted by his ‘verbal signature’ at lines 1256–76.

¹⁸ For a short account see ‘History and Description of the Text’, in *Cynewulf’s ‘Elene’*, ed. by P. O. E. Gradon, rev. edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1977), pp. 1–9. All quotations from *Elene* are from this edition; translations are my own.

Andreas is about Andrew; however, as Matthew gives way to Andrew, so Elene gives way to Judas. As Jackson Campbell observes, Elene is the catalyst who brings about change in others but not herself.¹⁹ In *Elene*, Judas is the one who endures the hallmarks of sainthood: torture, conversion, and the working of miracles through prayer. His discovery of the Cross brings about the conversion of the Jewish people, and indeed conversion is the poem's major theme.

The possible sources of the poem are many and varied. Accounts of the lives of Constantine, Helena, and Judas Cyriacus are found across medieval Greek, Latin, and vernacular literature, and are also incorporated into versions of the *inventio crucis*.²⁰ Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* is the main source for Constantine's life and reign.²¹ This was probably begun

¹⁹ Jackson J. Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations', in *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1869, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England, 4 (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 229–50 (p. 234). On Helena's character, see Stacy S. Klein, 'Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33 (2003), 47–89. Karin Olsen argues that Cynewulf makes Helen subject to her son more than in his sources, and that his 'representation of the empress reflects his own orthodox attitudes towards women', 'Cynewulf's *Elene*: From Empress to Saint', in *Germanic Texts and Latin Models: Medieval Reconstructions*, ed. by K. E. Olsen, A. Harbus, and T. Hofstra (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), pp. 141–56 (p. 156).

²⁰ For more about this event in history and literature, see Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend*, Bibliotheca theologiae practicae, 47 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1991).

²¹ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, trans. and ed. by Averil Cameron and Stuart George Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999). Some articles that include source study are: Robert DiNapoli, 'Poesis and Authority: Traces of an Anglo-Saxon *Agon* in Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Neophilologus*, 82 (1998), 619–30; David F. Johnson, 'Hagiographical Demon or Liturgical Devil? Demonology and Baptismal Imagery in Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Leeds Studies in English*, 37 (2006), 9–29; Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations'; Joyce Tally Lionarons, 'Cultural Syncretism and the Construction of Gender in Cynewulf's *Elene*', *Exemplaria*, 10 (1998), 51–68; Samantha Zacher, 'Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality: The Evidence of the Puns in *Elene*', *Oral Tradition*, 17 (2002), 346–87; Robert E. Bjork, 'Judas

during Constantine's reign, but the *Vita* does not describe the finding of the True Cross at all (though Eusebius appears as a character near the end of *Elene* to baptise Judas and confer him with a bishopric, an historical detail lending weight to the version of events as repeated by Cynewulf). The *inventio crucis* legend first appeared approximately sixty years after Queen Helena's death.²² Helena's life is not as well-documented as Constantine's, making her a more flexible figure for incorporation into legend, and for appropriation into national mythology, as noted by Antonina Harbus.²³ Helena later came to be associated with Britain when legends circulated that she was born there; however, her origins are not discussed in *Elene* and they seem to be of no interest to Cynewulf. Indeed, the tradition may not have been known to him.²⁴ The story of *Elene* is focused on the *inventio* itself as well as the conversion of Judas; in this approach it is close to the *Acta Quiriaci* in the *Acta Sanctorum*.²⁵

with a New Voice: Revelatory Dialogue in Cynewulf's *Elene*', in Robert E. Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives: A Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style*, McMaster Old English Studies and Texts, 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 62–89.

²² Antonina Harbus, *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), p. 20.

²³ Harbus, *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend*, p. 10. Harbus also notes that *Elene* does not address the national origins of either Helena or Constantine, p. 36.

²⁴ For more about Helena in medieval literature and legend, see Harbus, *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend*, and Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992). Hans A. Pohlsander's *Helena: Empress and Saint* (Chicago: Ares, 1995) is a study of Helena in art and literature; Pohlsander has also produced a work on Constantine: *The Emperor Constantine* (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁵ The original text of the *Acta Quiriaci*: 'ACTA APOCRYPHA: Iudas, alias Quiriacus, Episcopus Martyr Hierosolymis (S.); Pars I', in *Acta Sanctorum, Maii, Tomus I* (Antwerp: Societe des Bollandistes, 1680), pp. 445–48 (p. 445), available online at Documenta Catholica Omnia

<http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_1643-

1925__Societe_des_Bollandistes__Acta_Sanctorum_05_Maii_Tomus_01_1680__LT.pdf.html>

The first two hundred lines of the poem describe the pre-battle vision of the Cross that precipitates the Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity.²⁶ He soon sends his mother Elene on a search for the True Cross on which Christ was crucified. After a sea-journey, described in about twenty-five lines (219b-246a),²⁷ Elene arrives in Jerusalem where she holds a series of meetings with the wisest of the Jewish people ('þam snoterestum', 277). At each of the first three assemblies (an example of the conventional literary pattern of trebling)²⁸ Elene castigates them for not recognising Christ as saviour, and commands them to tell her the location of the True Cross (276–410). The people are bewildered, but then a man named Judas reveals that he knows the place, the secret having been passed down in his family from father to son. His forefathers privately acknowledged Christ as the Son of God, but did not want the Cross to be found for fear of persecution and losing their Jewish way of life. Judas's father told him:

'Gif þe þæt gelimpe on lifdagum
þæt ðu gehyre ymb þæt halige treo

[accessed 22 August 2013]. It is translated as 'The Acts of Saint Cyriacus', in *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation*, trans. by Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder (Cambridge: Brewer, 1976), pp. 60–68. Anderson suggests that Cynewulf may have used more than one version of the *Vita Cyriaci*: see Earl R. Anderson, 'Cynewulf's *Elene*: Manuscript Divisions and Structural Symmetry', *Modern Philology*, 72 (1974), 111–22 (p. 116).

²⁶ On this episode, see Antonina Harbus, 'Text as Revelation: Constantine's Dream in *Elene*', *Neophilologus*, 78 (1994), 645–53.

²⁷ A new addition to the legend, as many have noted including Zacher, 'Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality', p. 357, and Zollinger, 'Cynewulf's *Elene*', p. 186. Jackson Campbell observes that the passage uses the 'traditional metaphor of the sea as the tribulations of this earthly life over which man must sail', Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations', p. 236.

²⁸ For more on the use of threes in *Elene*, see Robert Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives: A Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style*, McMaster Old English Studies and Texts, 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 71–72.

frode frignan ond geflitu ræran
 be ðam sigebeame on þam soðcýning
 ahangen wæs, heofonrices weard,
 eallre sybbe bearn, þonne þu snude gecyð,
 mín swæs sunu, ær þec swylt nime.
 Ne mæg æfre ofer þæt Ebrea þeod,
 rædþeahtende rice healdan.’ (441–49)

‘If it should happen in your lifetime that you hear a wise (one) ask concerning that holy tree and raise strife concerning the tree of victory on which the true king was crucified, guardian of the heavenly kingdom, then you quickly reveal, my dear son, the child of all peace before death takes you. Ever after that the Hebrew nation will not be able to hold deliberating power.’

Judas’s story spans over a hundred lines, from 419b–535. The other Jews betray him to Elene, who starves the knowledge from him by keeping him underground without food for seven days. This period passes in a few lines (691–696), in an example of temporal compression.

When Judas relents and takes Elene to the site of the burial of the Cross (which Elene calls Calvary at lines 672 and 676, but Judas does not name), Judas cannot remember the exact location of the buried Cross. He prays to God for a sign, and smoke rises to point to the location of three crosses: one each for Christ and the two thieves crucified either side of him. The miracle prompts Judas to convert to Christianity. Judas works another miracle to find out which cross was Christ’s by having each held over a corpse; the True Cross revives the dead body. This whole episode runs from approximately 709 to 899, about two hundred lines, in contrast with the compression of the time of Judas’s imprisonment (691–696). Judas is baptised and then renamed Cyriacus. Elene is then determined to find the nails that were used to crucify Christ, and Judas again helps her find them by asking God for a sign, this time of fire and light (1062b–1200; the three miracles provide another example of rhetorical trebling). The Jewish people are converted *en masse* and Elene makes preparations to return home to Constantine with the new relics, while Judas is installed as a bishop. The poem ends with Cynewulf describing his own meditations on

the Cross, and warning the reader of the imminence of Judgement Day. Thus the reader's present moment is fused with that of the author, and both are prompted to share the expectation of judgement experienced by the characters of the legend.

The temporal duration of the whole narrative (the length of *Elene* is 1321 lines) is not specified, but appears to take place over a number of months (from Constantine's victory) and weeks (in Jerusalem). It is significant that the overall temporal framework is not articulated, beside other frames which are. The story ends in spring, when Cynewulf names the date of the *inventio* (1226b-28a). The only individual narrative event given a timeframe is the seven days of imprisonment for Judas, but it is described in just a few lines. These seven days may deliberately allude to the symbolic significance of the seven days of Creation, or realistically describe a week and therefore a lengthy period of starvation, or both. The largest number of lines is given to the *inventio crucis* narrative, which can be said to begin with Elene's journey and end with her return home, one thousand lines later (219–1228). Within this narrative, her meetings with the Jewish people (276–410) and discussions with Judas take up a few hundred lines each (598–708), as do the actual search for the Cross (709–899), and the search for the nails (1062–1200). Cynewulf's epilogue stretches over nearly a hundred lines (1236–1321). Because the narrative duration is not specified, meaning is derived instead from the use of typology and time markers, with the most obvious and puzzling time marker coming at the beginning of the poem.

The thematic importance of time in *Elene* is signalled by its opening. The poem begins with a precise date:

þa wæs agangen geara hwyrftum
tu hund ond þreo geteled rimes,
swylce XXX eac, þinggemearces

wintra for worulde, þæs þe wealdend God
 acenned wearð cyninga wuldor
 in middangeard þurh mennisc heo
 soðfæastra leoht. þa wæs syxte gear
 Constantines caserdomes. (1–8)

Then was passed two hundred and three years by reckoning, likewise thirty also, of a period of time, winters in the world, since the ruler God, glory of kings, light of the truth-fast, was born in the world in human form. It was the sixth year of Constantine's empire.

The first system of dating employed is *anno Domini*, as popularised by Bede in his *HE*. Even allowing for the difference in language and literary form, the rhetoric of time deployed here clearly recalls Bede's *HE* or entries in his chronicles in *DT* and *DTR*. The second system of dating is the regnal years of Constantine, so the action that follows is set within two overlapping historical timeframes. The poem's style presents a deliberate imitation of the temporal rhetoric of an historical text. The demarcation of a specific date within two different systems fixes the story in time, and indicates it is not a mythical or heroic legend, but a story concerned with real people. Constantine, Queen Helena, Judas Cyriacus, and Eusebius are important names in church history, with documented existences. Their inclusion in the poem, combined with a historical date, establishes a historical authenticity for the narrative.

There is one major problem, from the historical perspective: the *anno Domini* date is wrong, while the regnal date is correct. Constantine reigned from AD 306 to 337, and the Battle of Milvian Bridge, at which his vision is said to have occurred, took place in 312.²⁹ The sixth year of Constantine's reign is therefore correct for the events of *Elene*, but AD 233 is not; it should be

²⁹ For general background see Averil Cameron, and Stuart George Hall, 'Introduction', in Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, trans. and ed. by Averil Cameron and Stuart George Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), pp. 1–53.

AD 312. Helena's journey to the Holy Land took place around 326, according to Eusebius,³⁰ though *Elene* does not state how much time has passed between Constantine's vision and his commission of Elene. The error in the *anno Domini* date is not an error on the part of Cynewulf or a later scribe, but comes from the Latin source, which begins similarly: 'Anno ducentesimo tricesimo tertio, post passionem Domini nostri Jesu Christi, regnante venerabili Dei cultore magno viro Constantino, in sexto anno regni ejus.'³¹ However, the *Acta Quiriaci* takes its date from the *passion* of Christ, not his birth. Two possibilities arise here: one, Cynewulf misread his source and took the date from Christ's passion for the date from his birth; or two, Cynewulf retained the date but changed the point of origin to the birth of Christ for his own reasons. In either case, the question arises: did Cynewulf know the date itself was wrong, and if so, why did he retain it? Cynewulf is not slavishly attentive to his source in other details: for instance, the location of the battle in *Elene* is changed from the banks of the Tiber to the Danube, although this detail could have been derived from the *Acta Sanctorum*. However, the *Acta Sanctorum* does not include the names of the tribes who replace the Roman challenger Maxentius as Constantine's adversaries in battle in the poem. Cynewulf names them as the Germanic tribes of Huns, Hrethgoths, Franks, and Hugas, suggesting that he is happy to depart from the source when he wishes.³² The chronological dislocation of the date does not continue in the poem's

³⁰ Harbus, *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend*, p. 17.

³¹ *Acta Quiriaci*, p. 445. Trans: 'in the two hundred and thirty-third year after the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the sixth year of the reign of Constantine (a great man and reverent worshipper of God)', 'The Acts of Saint Cyriacus', trans. by Allen and Calder, p. 60.

³² Zollinger argues that Cynewulf does this to make the story more Germanic, as well as 'to highlight the symmetry between the historiographical concerns of the legend and the Anglo-Saxons' relationship with their own past', Zollinger, 'Cynewulf's *Elene* and the Patterns of the Past', pp. 181, 182.

main narrative, and its internal chronology proceeds logically, Judas's lengthy familial memory notwithstanding. In other words, the poet does not have a problem understanding time.

It would seem, then, that superficially at least, the presence of a date is more important than its accuracy – that the literary effect of defining the date is more important than the date itself. Robert DiNapoli suggests that the Anglo-Saxons had an ‘instinctive respect for antiquity’,³³ and from this perspective the older a story was said to be, the more it was worth reading. However, while the earlier date of the poem does indeed signal its importance to the reader as a narrative of the early church, a precise date was not necessary to do this, and the correct date would have done just as well. Had Cynewulf had the resources to check historical facts, or to read the Eusebius he praises as ‘forðsnoterne’ (‘very wise’, 1052),³⁴ he might have discovered the actual *anno Domini* dates of Constantine's reign. Indeed, as Schaefer writes, ‘the metacommunicative function of this opening seems to be to signal the precision which may be arrived at only “þurh halige bec”’,³⁵ a precision Cynewulf lacks. Cynewulf might have realised that AD 233 was far too early for the main historical figures, Constantine, Helena, and Judas Cyriacus of Ancona, who died in AD 360 (although there was another Judas Cyriacus, of Jerusalem, who died in AD 133).³⁶ It is also possible that Cynewulf was confused by the other Constantines in the historical record, the successors of his subject Constantine. Historical dating

³³ DiNapoli, ‘Poesis and Authority’, p. 621.

³⁴ Admittedly, in *Elene* Eusebius appears as a bishop, rather than a historian, at line 1050.

³⁵ Ursula Schaefer, ‘Hearing from Books: The Rise of Fictionality in Old English Poetry’, in *Vox Intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. by A. N. Doane and Carol Braun Pasternack (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 117–36 (p. 132).

³⁶ Although the Judas character of this tradition is also ‘thought to be entirely fictional’, in the words of Zollinger, ‘Cynewulf's *Elene* and the Patterns of the Past’, p. 181.

was by no means straightforward in the medieval period, as Deborah Deliyannis explains.³⁷ She notes that ‘the plethora of dates in use in the early Middle Ages made the task of an early medieval historian rather difficult’,³⁸ and while *anno Domini* dating was supposed to simplify these problems, chronological errors were frequent.³⁹ However, the fact that in *Elene* the 233 begins from Christ’s birth rather than His passion as in the Latin source suggests Cynewulf made a deliberate choice.

Having a date at all is unusual for a saint’s life, for hagiographical time is eternal.⁴⁰ As we will see in *Andreas*, Andrew’s deeds on earth occur simultaneously with his life in heaven. The acts of a saint have repercussions beyond the present. We can compare this aspect of *Andreas* and *Elene* with another saint’s life, the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, written by Bede in prose, and later rendered into verse form. In the preface to the prose life, Bede writes of his attention to truth: ‘I have written nothing about the saint without first subjecting the facts to the most thorough scrutiny and have passed on nothing to be transcribed for general reading that has not been obtained by rigorous examination of trustworthy witnesses.’⁴¹ His sources include those who actually knew Cuthbert in life. Bede’s purpose here, commissioned as he was by Bishop Eadfrid of Lindisfarne, is to write Cuthbert’s life story accurately. While the work contains the

³⁷ Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. by Chris Humphrey and W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge: Boydell for York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 5–22.

³⁸ Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, p. 13

³⁹ ‘AD provided a default: available to everyone via Easter tables, it was politically neutral and spiritually appropriate.’ Deliyannis, ‘Year-Dates in the Early Middle Ages’, p. 13.

⁴⁰ For more on the characteristics of saints’ lives, see Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints’ Lives*.

⁴¹ ‘Bede: Life of Cuthbert’, trans. by J. F. Webb, in *The Age of Bede*, ed. and trans. by D. H. Farmer, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 1998; repr. 2004), pp. 41–104 (p. 43).

customary miracles and conventions of a saint's life, it is the story of a life in a way *Elene* and *Andreas* are not. These poetic saints' lives do not cover the whole of the life of the subject saint, are not biographies of a local figure, and make freer use of poetic licence and technique. They are works of different narrative art. However, though ostensibly a history, Bede's life of Cuthbert does not offer any dates for the events concerned. There is no opening date and no closing date, and no years given for any of the intervening events. Occasionally, a symbolic time of life may be mentioned, as when the first major incident in Cuthbert's life comes in 'his eighth year, the end of infancy and the threshold of boyhood',⁴² or a symbolic time of day like fasting on a Friday until the ninth hour.⁴³ Even the mentions of Cuthbert in the *HE* have few dates attached. Precise dates are generally not expected in the saint's life genre, so it is all the more unusual that *Elene* begins with one.

It is helpful to consider what sources may have been available to Cynewulf. Catharine Regan argues, based on his Latin sources and references to doctrine, that Cynewulf was a cleric,⁴⁴ and therefore would have had a reasonable education in Christian theology. Of Bede's works, Constantine is mentioned in both the *HE* and his chronicles in *DT* and *DTR*. *DTR* is the more lengthy, marking Constantine's rule, conversion, and select deeds under *annus mundi* 4290: '*Constantine, the son of Constantius by his concubine Helena, was made emperor in*

⁴² Bede, 'Bede: Life of Cuthbert', trans. by Webb, p. 45.

⁴³ Bede, 'Bede: Life of Cuthbert', trans. by Webb, p. 51.

⁴⁴ Regan, Catharine, 'Evangelicism as the Informing Principle of Cynewulf's *Elene*', in *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1869; *Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England*, 4 (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 251–80 (p. 251). Regan also finds several parallels between *Elene* and the letters of St Paul, and argues that Cynewulf was also influenced by Augustine (see p. 252).

*Britain, and ruled for 30 years and 10 months. [...] Constantine turned from a persecutor into a Christian. [...] He built a basilica [...] where he deposited some of the wood of the Lord's Cross.*⁴⁵ This chronicle dates the Incarnation to AM 3952,⁴⁶ and so AM 4290 is AD 338: Bede writes of Constantine's life at the *end* of it. It is the nature of the *DT* and *DTR* chronicles that they cover multiple events within one year without giving individual dates. Thus the entry for AM 4290 marks, in the year of his death, all of Constantine's major accomplishments – the end of his persecution, his conversion, and the churches and cities he built – and the next entry is for AM 4314 (AD 362), and begins with the rule of Constantine's heirs. Bede's chronicle summary in chapter V.24 of the *HE* does not include Constantine at all, though he is mentioned elsewhere in the history; if Cynewulf had access to the *HE* and not *DTR* he might not have noted the difference. Still, if Cynewulf had access to even a reasonably stocked library, then he probably realised that the date of 233 was wide of the mark. He describes himself in *Elene* as someone who consulted books (1254) and 'geþanc reodode, | nihtes nearwe' ('sifted thought closely by night', 1238b-39a), and his works give us every reason to believe him. Cynewulf's desire not to change his sources on the date may point to a reverence for the written word, a respect that is exemplified in the tension between literacy and orality that has been detected in *Elene*;⁴⁷ however, as discussed above, Cynewulf does not hesitate to alter his sources as he sees fit. Why, then, does he adhere to this date?

⁴⁵ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Faith Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians, 29 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), ch. 66, pp. 212–13.

⁴⁶ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Faith Wallis, p. 195.

⁴⁷ For different approaches to this theme, see Zacher, 'Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality', and Angela Abdou, 'Speech and Power in Old English Conversion Narratives', *Florilegium*, 17 (2000), 195–212.

The figure 233 may have some kind of significance in number symbolism, not as a whole, but broken down into its component parts. Number symbolism, as Vincent Hopper pointed out in his 1938 study, spans many fields, making it difficult to investigate fully.⁴⁸ Though the Old Testament is rich with number symbolism, Hopper argues that in the New Testament ‘the choice of numbers is symbolic only in the sense of continuing a known and accepted idiom’.⁴⁹ However, this idiom proved popular, as Augustine ‘gave the final stamp of approval to number symbolism’.⁵⁰ Number symbolism became a tool of exegesis, as Jones writes: ‘The Word forms numbers, and through numbers can the Word be comprehended.’⁵¹ Early Christian writers ‘added new meanings to the received number symbols and, dropping many of the pagan connotations, surrounded the whole science with a specifically Christian atmosphere’.⁵² Peter Hunter Blair argues that it was a vital part of monastic life: ‘In addition to grammar and psalmody, monastic life and the study of the Bible to which it was devoted, depended greatly on at least an elementary knowledge of number.’⁵³ Christopher Butler places number symbolism in a broader worldwide context than the medieval. He characterises medieval number symbolism as influenced by Greek thought but gaining a new literary emphasis, in which ‘numbers are thought of in an entirely symbolic fashion, not as parts of an austere, truth-telling

⁴⁸ Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression*, Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature, 132 (New York: Cooper Square, 1938), p. xi. Though not recent, Hopper’s work is still a solid introduction to medieval number symbolism and its origins in ancient civilisations and the Bible.

⁴⁹ Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, p. 71.

⁵⁰ Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, p. 78.

⁵¹ Jones, ‘Some Introductory Remarks’, p. 167.

⁵² Jones, ‘Some Introductory Remarks’, p. 82.

⁵³ Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970), p. 259.

language [...] but as a static structure upon which scraps of knowledge of all sorts could be hung'.⁵⁴

The end result was an understanding of 'a finite and ordered universe so thoroughly coordinated that both spiritual and material truth were included in a single rigid cosmic plan'.⁵⁵ It is unclear how seriously number symbolism was taken, or how much influence it had beyond the learned authority of exegetical texts and the folk wisdom of prognostications. Peter Blair is right when he says, 'facing the seemingly random ways of ordinary life, men of learning found a means of escape from total confusion in the discipline of numbers.'⁵⁶ The comfort of numbers was that everything could be measured. The numbers from one to ten were most important, and larger numbers were reduced to their component parts, with each integer having its own arithmological properties. So when a computist such as Bede or Byrhtferth discusses the various numbers that divide a time period, or when a number is attached to a unit of time, particularly in literature, there is almost always an extra layer of meaning invited, and often articulated.

Though a relatively late text (early eleventh century), Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* is a helpful guide to aspects of Anglo-Saxon number symbolism as it may be understood in *Elene*'s cryptic date of 233. Given his personal interest in the subject and the library at Ramsey, it is probable that Byrhtferth collated all that was known about numbers at the time into this book.

⁵⁴ Christopher Butler, *Number Symbolism, Ideas and Forms in English Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 43.

⁵⁵ Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, p. 94.

⁵⁶ Peter Hunter Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede* (London: Gollancz, 1976), p. 70.

According to this system, ten is perfect.⁵⁷ It is made up of seven and three, or four and six, each of which has its own meanings. Three represents the Trinity,⁵⁸ and ‘just as the entire world reflects the glory of the holy Trinity, so in due course there arose three ages’.⁵⁹ These three ages, rather than the six of Bede, are the time before the law, the time of the prophets, and the age of Christ: the third age. Bryhtferth also refers to the three gifts of ‘fidei, spei et caritatis’ (faith, hope, and love),⁶⁰ but it is the third age which may have significance here as the time of Christ’s Incarnation. Thirty, as the ‘thirtyfold fruit’ of Matthew 13.8, relates to marriage and chaste love.⁶¹ It ‘pertains to the faith of the holy Trinity; augmented by the sixtyfold fruit, it awaits the reward for good works’.⁶² Meanwhile, the number 100 is perfect and ‘the hundredfold fruit pertains to virgins’.⁶³ Two is a perfect number,⁶⁴ and represents the Son, ‘born of the Father’.⁶⁵

As two is the number of the Son, the two times one hundred in *Elene* and its source may be intended to reference Christ’s birth. It could also relate to Constantine as the son of the protagonist Elene. Three tens plus three emphasises the third age in which Christ entered the world, bringing three gifts and the completion of the Trinity. Thirty-three was also commonly regarded as Jesus’s age at the Crucifixion, so AD 233 is exactly two hundred years after his

⁵⁷ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, EETS, s.s. 15 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for EETS, 1995), IV.1.218.

⁵⁸ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge, IV.1.15.

⁵⁹ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge, IV.1.23–24.

⁶⁰ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge, IV.1.27.

⁶¹ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge, IV.1.310–12.

⁶² *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge, IV.1.314–16.

⁶³ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge, IV.1.319–20.

⁶⁴ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge, IV.1.34.

⁶⁵ *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Baker and Lapidge, IV.1.14.

death and resurrection. Two hundred as a number has a pleasing roundness, and offers a plausible but not impossible gap between the Crucifixion and the finding of the Cross. It also makes Judas's lengthy familial memory slightly less ludicrous, as two hundred years could amount to just a few generations. 233 years after the Crucifixion, however, as in the *Acta Quiriaci*, does not carry the same symbolism: the AD date would be 266, a very different number.

All these associations may seem arbitrary to the modern reader, but number symbolism worked in this way in early medieval literate culture.⁶⁶ Individual numbers accrued meanings over time, in both pagan and Christian contexts, which could then be called upon for selective use. It is certainly possible that the number 233 in the Latin source was retained by Cynewulf in *Elene* but moved to date from Christ's birth because it places the date of the narrative at exactly two hundred years after the Crucifixion, as is appropriate for a story about the finding of the True Cross, the tool of that crucifixion; the number 200 hardly seems an accident. There may be other meanings implied in the number, but it is probable that it was understood to be meaningful in some way by Cynewulf, and that he reasonably expected it to resonate with his audience. If the point of including the *anno Domini* number was historical accuracy alone, then it is not unreasonable to assume that he would have found such a date in Bede, or another similar source.

The term *þinggemearc* (line 3) in the opening lines points to another important aspect of historical time in the location of the narrative. The word *þinggemearc* only appears twice in the Old English corpus, here and in *Andreas*, both times in the genitive singular form. Literally the 'thing-mark' or 'time-mark', the meaning of the compound is not clear from its two uses. The

⁶⁶ See Butler, *Number Symbolism, Ideas and Forms*, and Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*.

þing could mean an object or occurrence or an end, and the *mearc* a boundary, a limit, or an end again. Therefore a *þinggemearc* could be both a point in time or a period of time, and the two instances in which it is used support either meaning. Here in *Elene* it denotes a period of time, the time that has passed since Christ's birth, but it could also be the point at which the story begins. The context of its use in *Andreas* is Matthew's time in prison waiting to be killed and eaten by the Mermedonians at the end of their strict thirty-day waiting period:

Ða wæs first agan frumrædenne
þinggemearces butan þrim nihtum,
swa hit wælwulfas awriten hæfdon. (147–49)

Then was the period of time appointed by previous arrangement passed except for three nights, as the warriors had written it.

The period of time is the thirty days that the 'wælwulfas awriten hæfdon' (literally 'the wolves of slaughter had written'), but *þinggemearc* could also mean the single mark of time at which the thirty days will have passed and Matthew's time will be up. In *Andreas* the *þinggemearc* has been appointed by the *wælwulfas*, the cannibalistic Mermedonians who go mad in their hunger for human flesh but are civilised enough to employ a writing system. The use of the word *þinggemearc* in *Elene* similarly implies that someone, i.e. God, must have decided the date of the *inventio crucis*. The 'incorrect' *anno Domini* date is immaterial from this perspective, because the time is a *þinggemearc*, appointed and immovable.

Judas's lineage is chronologically problematic. His family consists of his father Simon, his grandfather Zacheus, and his brother Stephen. While Simon and Zacheus call to mind biblical precedents, Stephen is explicitly identified as the saint and protomartyr persecuted by Saul before he converted and became Paul. St Stephen lived within Christ's lifetime, and had no known brothers. Robert DiNapoli summarises the problems here:

Both Cynewulf's poem and its Latin source are flagrantly precise in their introductions about the exact amount of time that has elapsed: clearly this extraordinary detail is no mere slip of arithmetic. It is impossible, however, to tell whether these terms of family relation are to be taken literally, thus imputing preternatural longevity to these sole Jewish witnesses to the historical reality of Christ's crucifixion, or whether they are figurative flourishes, suggesting merely the venerable character of Zacheus' tale and the close (if not literally fraternal) bond that ties this Judas with Christendom's first martyr.⁶⁷

Thomas Hill, however, argues that Cynewulf was 'aware of the fact that Judas could hardly be the brother of Stephen the protomartyr', but he 'violates history in this instance in order to emphasise Judas' figural, as against his historical significance'.⁶⁸ His argument hinges on the claims that Cynewulf thought of Elene and Judas as 'real historical figures as well as personages bearing figural significance'.⁶⁹ However, Cynewulf's willingness to use an incorrect date suggests that he values both historical and symbolic meanings. Furthermore, Judas's quoted first-person speech of his father seems to intimate that he (Judas's father) was present at the

Crucifixion:

Næfre ic þa geþeahhte þe þeos þeod ongan
 secan wolde ac ic symle mec
 asced þara scyld, nales sceame worhte
 gaste minum; ic him georne oft
 þæs unrihtes andsæc fremede
 þonne uðweotan æht bisæton,
 on sefan sohton hu hie sunu meotudes
 ahengon, helm wera, hlaford eallra
 engla ond elda, aþelust bearna. (468–76)

I never wished to tell the knowledge which this nation began but I always held myself aloof from guilt, by no means caused shame to my spirit; I often eagerly expressed opposition to the wrongs when wise men held counsel and sought in mind how they would crucify the son of God, defender of men, Lord of all angels and men, most noble of men.

⁶⁷ DiNapoli, 'Poesis and Authority', p. 261.

⁶⁸ Hill, 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative', p. 208.

⁶⁹ Hill, 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative', p. 214.

This speech exonerates the men of Judas's family of any blame for denying Christ. Though the use of the first person is perhaps an indication that the message has been passed down intact as it was said by the first father to the first son, it emphasises the immediacy of the oral medium and adds a sense of cultural continuity.

Other markers of chronology are found in *Elene*, although the Latin source mentions even more than are included by Cynewulf. In the Latin version, Helena enters Jerusalem precisely 'on the twenty-eighth day of the second month',⁷⁰ but all Cynewulf writes is that Elene came to Jerusalem 'ymb lytel fæc' ('after a little space of time', 272a). When faced with Elene's questioning, Judas reckons the years that have passed since the Crucifixion as 'tu hund oððe ma' ('two hundred or more', 634a), and in the Latin he gives the same figure.⁷¹ As Johnson notes, the time of the ninth hour (3.00pm) is mentioned twice in *Elene* (*nigoð tid*, 869, 873) but only once in its source, and there is evidence that the Easter Vigil in the eighth century was held at the ninth hour,⁷² adding liturgical resonance to the events of the poem. The context in *Elene* is the raising of the dead in the presence of the True Cross, so the dead are raised at the same time of day as Jesus died on the Cross. Towards the end of the narrative the Latin source names two important dates, although not years: Helen died 'on the seventeenth day before the Kalends of May', 15 April, and urged everyone to commemorate the finding of the Cross on 'the fifth day before the Nones of May',⁷³ or 3 May. *Elene* does not include the queen's death-date but only

⁷⁰ 'The Acts of Saint Cyriacus', trans. by Allen and Calder, p. 61.

⁷¹ 'Judas said, "How can I attest to something which happened two hundred years ago, more or less?"', 'The Acts of Saint Cyriacus', trans. by Allen and Calder, p. 64.

⁷² Johnson, 'Hagiographical Demon or Liturgical Devil?', p. 21.

⁷³ 'The Acts of Saint Cyriacus', trans. by Allen and Calder, p. 68.

the date of the *inventio*: ‘wæs þa lencten agan | butan syx nihtum ær sumeres cyme | on Maias monað’ (‘Then was spring departed except for six nights before summer’s arrival in the month of May’, 1226b-28a). At this line the manuscript does not actually read *monað* but has an abbreviation for *kalend*, which can be either a month or the first days of the moon cycle. *Kalend* for month would make most sense as the date of the finding of the Cross would be 3 May, in accordance with the Latin source and the date of the feast in the church calendar. However, Gradon notes that ‘The kalends of May fall in the second half of April and the reading *kalendas* is, therefore, appropriate neither for the festival of the Invention on May 3, nor for the beginning of summer on May 9.’⁷⁴ It is interesting that the manuscript signals *kalend* when the Latin uses *nonas* for this date, and *kalends* for Helena’s death-date, and that Cynewulf chooses to note only the feast of the *inventio*, which had been part of the Anglo-Saxon church calendar since the early eighth century,⁷⁵ and does not mention the date of Helena’s death. His practice here signals his lack of interest in Helena as a saint, and his focus on the meaning of the Cross itself.

While the year AD 233 fixes a point in historical time at which the story takes place, the May feast-date provides the sense of a cycle and thus the cyclical return of the liturgical calendar. As with all events in the church calendar, the meaning of the date is eternal, even though the actual act, in this case the finding of the Cross, only happened once. Earl R. Anderson describes *Elene* as a ‘metaphorical movement from a winter of darkness and unbelief to a summer of spiritual light’;⁷⁶ however, though the end of the poem takes place just before

⁷⁴ Cynewulf’s ‘*Elene*’, ed. by Gradon, p. 70, 1228n.

⁷⁵ Harbus, *Helena of Britain in Medieval Legend*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ Anderson, ‘Cynewulf’s *Elene*: Manuscript Divisions and Structural Symmetry’, p. 115.

summer,⁷⁷ winter is not described in any detail or even mentioned when Elene sets out on her journey. There is not a strong sense of time passing in the narrative, and it does not specify how long Elene was in Jerusalem or the duration of her meetings with the Jewish people. While there are short, vague time markers such as ‘ymb lytel fæc’ (‘a short space of time’, 272, 383a, etc.), the only period marked with any precision is the seven-day torture of Judas, when he is placed ‘in drygne seað’ to starve (‘in a dry pit’, 693a). Unlike *Andreas*, *Elene* does not depend on numbers of days for significance, and here seven probably just represents a lengthy amount of time. The episode itself does have some typological and figural significance, as Thomas Hill and others have discussed, particularly as a type of Christ in the tomb.⁷⁸

The performative historicity of the poem is clear from the very beginning, despite its historically inaccurate date. The poet consciously imitates the books to which he ascribes such power in the text, and the poem sets up a dichotomy of written sources versus oral knowledge. The theme is established early, as the newly converted Constantine seeks knowledge from other men, not from books, and gathers those of his subjects ‘þa þe snyttro cræft | þurh fyrngewrito gefrigen hæfdon’ (‘who had learned the craft of wisdom from ancient writings’, 154b-55). Similarly, when she arrives in Jerusalem Elene summons the *snoterestum*, the ‘wisest’ (277), to consult. Schaefer sees the theme as the oral and heathen in opposition to the written and

⁷⁷ ‘Wæs þa lencten agan | butan syx nihtum ær sumeres cyme | on Mai[u]s monað’ (1226b–28a). ‘Spring was then departed except for six nights before summer’s arrival.’ See above for a discussion of *monað* versus *kalend* in the manuscript.

⁷⁸ See Thomas D. Hill, ‘Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative’, p. 218, and the response by E. Gordon Whatley, ‘Bread and Stone: Cynewulf’s *Elene* 611–18’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 76 (1975), 550–60, then Hill’s subsequent reply, ‘Bread and Stone Again: *Elene* 611–18’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 81 (1980), 252–57. See also Daniel G. Calder, ‘Strife, Revelation, and Conversion’, p. 206.

Christian,⁷⁹ but Elene and Constantine seek oral confirmation of what has been written, as if one type of knowledge is not valid without the other. Elene later tells Judas that what she knows was initially learned from Scripture, but she needs him to enlarge upon the text further:

Hwæt we ðæt hyrdon þurh halige bec
 hæleðum cyðan þæt ahangen wæs
 on Caluarie cyninges freobearn
 godes gastsunu; Þu scealt geagninga
 wisdom onwreon swa gewritu secgaþ
 æfter stedewange, hwær seo stow sie. (670–75)⁸⁰

Indeed, we heard from the holy books revealed to warriors that the king's true son, God's spiritual son, was hanged on Calvary; you must completely disclose the wisdom which Scripture tells about where the place is.

This formula, 'we ðæt hyrdon þurh halige bec', is used three times in the poem, all by Elene (364, 670, 852), and the *fyrngewrit*, 'ancient writings', appear four times (155, 373, 431, 560). However, in Elene's case, she has not read the books herself, but encountered them through the medium of wise men; it is entirely appropriate for her to say that she heard her knowledge from holy books. The information she has is no less literate for being conveyed through speech.

In contrast to Elene, Judas's knowledge is not literary, but wholly ancestral and oral.

When he protests, 'Hu mæg ic þæt findan þæt swa fyrn gewearð | wintra gangum?' ('How can I find that which becomes so long ago with the passing of years?' 631–32b),⁸¹ Elene 'challenges

⁷⁹ Schaefer, 'Hearing from Books', p. 130.

⁸⁰ The first line here is nearly identical to 364 of *Elene* and 63 of *The Fates of the Apostles*: 'Hwæt, we þæt gehyrdon þurg halige bec'. Perhaps it is a favoured formula of Cynewulf. The use of verbs for hearing to describe the act of reading perhaps points to the act of reading aloud, even when alone.

⁸¹ It is interesting that the passing of time is what makes something ancient; it is not old simply because it happened long ago, but because of the intervening time that has passed.

the Jews' textual memory'⁸² when she reminds him that his people 'swa monigfeald on gemynd witon' ('know so many things in memory', 644). The example she uses is the Trojan War. But the Trojan War exists in written records, while Judas has 'wisdom onwreon' ('secret knowledge', 674). This secret knowledge exists outside of books and is shared with a select few. Thus we have what Robert DiNapoli describes as a 'stalemate between Judas representing an antique authority, esoteric, oral, and poetic, and Elene standing for a new authority, exoteric, written, and documentary'.⁸³ For Zollinger, it is a contrast between two literate religions: 'this lost history emphasizes the breach between the two faiths, and the Jewish people are presented as wholly unaware of the divergent narrative of Christian history'.⁸⁴ The breach will be healed by Judas, 'and by reuniting the history of the Christian faith with its origins he opens the door to the rediscovery of the Cross in the world.'⁸⁵ The importance of understanding history is thus emphasised in *Elene*, and in turn, the Anglo-Saxon Christian reader is implicitly encouraged to understand the history of his faith and the written Word.

The poem begins with the conversion of Constantine and ends with the conversion of the Jewish nation, an ambitious and ahistorical prospect. However, Elene's conversion is unrecorded, if indeed she had one, and the conversion of Judas at the same moment as the

⁸² Martin Irvine, 'Anglo-Saxon Literary Theory Exemplified in Old English Poems: Interpreting the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*', in *Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings*, ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1432, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England, 3 (New York: Garland, 1994), pp. 31–63 (p. 49); orig. pub. *Style*, 20 (1986), 157–81.

⁸³ DiNapoli, 'Poesis and Authority', p. 626.

⁸⁴ Cynthia Wittman Zollinger, 'Cynewulf's *Elene* and the Patterns of the Past', *JEGP*, 103 (2004), 180–96 (p. 187).

⁸⁵ Zollinger, 'Cynewulf's *Elene* and the Patterns of the Past', p. 188.

discovery of the Cross is given the greatest narrative weight, as it demonstrates the power of the Cross as a Christian symbol. The themes of conversion, history, and memory are crystallized in the image of the Cross which is central to the poem. Zollinger writes, ‘the physical relic of the Crucifixion validates the Christian understanding of the past, and it reunites the historical narrative joining the Hebrew Scriptures to the New Testament.’⁸⁶ According to Harbus, the Cross ‘will continue to be an efficacious symbol only if one actively remembers what it signifies’,⁸⁷ and *Elene* as a poem is designed to help the reader remember the Cross’s significance: ‘*Elene*, like the image of the Cross in Constantine’s vision, has itself become God’s sign, and in this work acquires a meditational function. It provides readers with the means of discovering salvation through the Cross, which is something they must pursue actively.’⁸⁸ *Elene* takes the Cross from symbol, as seen in Constantine’s vision, to historical artifact, and back to symbol. The Cross is a temporal symbol that marks the continuity between the beginning and the present life of the Church. It is both the literal instrument by which Christ suffered and redeemed mankind, and the metaphoric symbol by which Christians must seek salvation.

Cynewulf too has meditated on the Cross, as he describes in the epilogue: ‘swa ic on bocum fand | wyrda gangum, on gewritum cyðan | be ðam sigebeacne’ (‘as I found in books, in

⁸⁶ Zollinger, ‘Cynewulf’s *Elene* and the Patterns of the Past’, p. 187.

⁸⁷ Harbus, ‘Text as Revelation’, p. 650.

⁸⁸ Harbus, ‘Text as Revelation’, p. 651. Indeed, Martin Irvine argues that *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene* ought to be read in the context of each other: ‘they are not only thematically related: they depend upon the same methods of reading Latin texts and of interpreting Christian signs. Furthermore, they share the same intertextual frame: the vision of the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* is understood to be a moment within the larger narrative of the discovery and interpretation of the Cross as represented in *Elene*.’ Irvine, ‘Anglo-Saxon Literary Theory Exemplified in Old English Poems’, p. 42.

the course of events, concerning the sign of victory’, 1254b-56a). He supplemented his reading with prayer and contemplation until the Lord ‘breostlocan onwand’ (‘unlocked his heart’, 1249b). Cynewulf thus educates himself from written sources alone, and not oral. The *inventio crucis* legend provides a paper trail of written versions, and *Elene* has not come down by oral tradition. Instead, Cynewulf distilled the story from his own readings and writings for a solitary reader, possibly to read aloud. The written word prevails in *Elene*. Even Cynewulf’s cryptic signature is a product of writing – his signatures ‘contained the runes whose phonemic values spelt out his name and whose syllabic values allowed them to be read logically in context’.⁸⁹ *Elene* is a poem written, not spoken, using literate sources, with an opening that emulates historical accounts, not legends.⁹⁰ Wise men consult books, and the only piece of information to exist purely in oral communication – the location of the True Cross – ceases to be secret once it is shared and written down. The poem itself is a monument to the permanence of the written word and, accidentally or intentionally, it exemplifies the process by which errors creep into manuscripts, to be copied and disseminated as truth.

There exists only one source of information that can be placed higher than the written word: God himself. In *Elene* the ‘halige bec’ contain the Word of the Lord, and when Judas’ memory fails him, and Cynewulf’s mind clouds, God shows them each the way. As Daniel

⁸⁹ Jeff Opland, ‘From Horseback to Monastic Cell: The Impact on English Literature of the Introduction of Writing’, in *Old English Literature in Context: Ten Essays*, ed. by John D. Niles (Cambridge: Brewer, 1980), pp. 30–43 (p. 33).

⁹⁰ Joyce Lionarons in ‘Cultural Syncretism and the Construction of Gender’ casts literacy and orality in gendered terms, noting that *Elene* is performatively masculine in the poem (p. 55), but is also a ‘mother-muse’ to Cynewulf (p. 66). The normally masculine task of writing is coded feminine by Cynewulf’s use of a weaving metaphor (p. 67), but he then becomes the ‘father’ of the story (p. 68).

Calder describes, ‘the wisdom of men is limited, and its deliberate contrast in the poem to the wisdom achieved from God’s bright revelation points up the monolithic stature of the one Christian truth.’⁹¹ All religious poetry naturally holds God as the one ultimately in charge, the creator of characters and controller of the narrative in poetry as in life. *Elene* uses historical time to emphasise the timelessness of the liturgical calendar and acts of conversion: these things repeat. As Harbus writes, ‘Mnemonic diligence is a forerunner to salvation. Power is ascribed to the mind in the text, and revelation is an act of remembrance.’⁹²

The poem’s temporality is still somewhat flawed in places. The figure of Judas is temporally problematic, especially as regards his historical antecedents and the logistics of his patriline. Judas and his family carry typological meaning rather than literal truth.⁹³ His name, of course, immediately calls to mind Judas Iscariot and the comparison is not unfounded, as this Judas also acts in secret and does wrong in hiding the location of the True Cross. The devil later appears and explicitly compares Judas Cyriacus with Judas Iscariot:

‘Ic þurh Iudas ær
hyhtful gewearð ond nu gehyned eom,
goda geasne þurh Iudas eft
fah ond freondleas.’

‘I previously through a Judas became hopeful and now am humbled, lacking goods through a Judas again, guilty and friendless.’ (921b-24a)⁹⁴

⁹¹ Calder, ‘Strife, Revelation, and Conversion’, p. 203.

⁹² Harbus, ‘Text as Revelation’, p. 650.

⁹³ Zollinger, ‘Cynewulf’s *Elene* and the Patterns of the Past’, p. 187, citing the typological readings of Thomas Hill and other scholars.

⁹⁴ For more on the figure of the devil here, see Johnson, ‘Hagiographical Demon or Liturgical Devil?’ As Johnson notes, with ‘the appearance of Satan at this juncture in the narrative, the historically chronological framework of the literal account of the legend gives way to the “timeless” aspect of the

However instead of betraying others this Judas is betrayed by his fellow Jews when they hand him over to Elene, identifying him with Christ, and in turn he betrays the devil in turning to God. His name is closely related etymologically to the Jewish nation and so, as Thomas Hill argues, he functions by synecdoche for the Hebrew people in an allegory of their eventual conversion at the end of time.⁹⁵ For Zollinger, the conversion of the Jews in *Elene* is analogous to the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, ‘symbolically reconciling the Anglo-Saxons’ own pagan past with their Christian present’.⁹⁶ The poem ends with Cynewulf’s contemplation on conversion and his own faith.

Like *Andreas*, *Elene*’s structure is functionally linear while typologically appealing, but it does not present the typological density of *Andreas*. The end of the poem, in the words of Catharine Regan, signifies that ‘the Old Law has found its fulfilment in the New as temporal time draws to an end with the eschatological events described in the epilogue.’⁹⁷ The end of time in the form of Apocalypse is ultimately developed in Cynewulf’s closing meditation and lines such as ‘swa þeos wor[u]ld | eall gewiteð’ (‘thus all this world will depart’, 1276b-77a), which draws together the timeframes of the legend, the poet’s act of writing, and the reader’s act of reading.

baptismal liturgy’ (p. 12). Bjork argues that the devil ‘exists primarily to validate Judas’s new voice by offering a contrast to it much like the contrast provided by Judas’s now-discarded personal style.’ Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints’ Lives*, p. 86.

⁹⁵ See Thomas D. Hill, ‘Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative’, p. 222.

⁹⁶ Zollinger, ‘Cynewulf’s *Elene* and the Patterns of the Past’, pp. 189, 190.

⁹⁷ Regan, ‘Evangelicism as the Informing Principle’, p. 256.

Typology and Number Symbolism in Andreas

Andreas spans fols 29^v–52^v of the Vercelli book, with a leaf missing after fol. 42, resulting in some loss of text. The poem is divided into unnumbered sections that are introduced in the manuscript by a large initial.⁹⁸ The poem opens with a brief description of the mission of St Matthew to Mermedonia, the land of the cannibals (1–143).⁹⁹ The native inhabitants immediately throw the saint in prison. When Matthew prays to God, the Lord reassures him that he will only be in prison for twenty-seven days, and then God will send Andrew to rescue him. Later, the Lord tells Andrew that he must go to Mermedonia and free Matthew within three days. Naturally Andrew is incredulous of the timeframe demanded, hinting in fact that God’s intervention would make the journey easier:

‘Hu mæg ic, dryhten min, ofer deop gelad
fore gefremman on feorne weg
swa hrædlice, heofona scyppend,
wuldres waldend, swa ðu worde becwist?
Ðæt mæg engel þin eað geferan.’ (190–94)

‘How can I, my Lord, undertake a journey over the deep sea on the distant way as quickly, Creator of Heaven, Ruler of heavenly glory, as you command by word? Your angel can do that more easily.’

⁹⁸ Of the two recent single editions of the poem, George Krapp’s keeps the manuscript fitts and numbers them, while Kenneth Brooks’ edition ignores them. *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. by George Philip Krapp (Boston: Ginn, 1906); *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. by Kenneth N. Brooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). All quotations from *Andreas* are from Brooks’ edition; translations are my own.

⁹⁹ See Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*, The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), esp. chapter 1 on *Andreas*, pp. 15–33. As Blurton notes, ‘to introduce cannibalism into a literary text is to bring to bear an entire set of associations that includes both cannibalism’s literary history and its metaphor range’, p. 9. Her analysis of *Andreas* argues for the Mermedonians’ cannibalism as a metaphor for conquest, p. 15.

God reminds Andrew that He is ‘eallwealdan’ (‘omnipotent’, 205) and therefore can do anything, if Andrew will trust Him.¹⁰⁰ The next day Andrew and his followers meet a ship upon the beach, crewed by the Lord himself and his angels (235),¹⁰¹ and the journey to Mermedonia climaxes in Andrew and his companions being transported by angels while asleep (822–838), and deposited in Mermedonia outside the city walls (839–50). Once the prison is breached, Matthew and his fellow prisoners are freed, and they leave the city and exit the action of the poem (1044–57). The Mermedonians, naturally enough, are dismayed to find their intended prey gone (1067–1134), and eventually the devil appears among them and urges them to punish Andrew (1168–1200). This they do, torturing him for three days (1219–1400), as God had warned him he must endure, but then he is miraculously healed (1446–1477). Andrew brings forth a flood from a stone to engulf Mermedonia (1522–1587), and its terrified citizens repent their sins and place their trust in Andrew and God: they convert to Christianity (1602–44). Andrew tries to leave the city almost immediately, but is called back by God and told to remain another seven days while the church is built (1664–74). He stays for the seven days, and the poem ends with his departure over the sea (1695–1722).

The non-canonical adventures of St Andrew were a popular subject across the Christian world, and several versions of his apocryphal adventures circulated. The version of St Andrew’s life presented in *Andreas* is found in various languages, notably Latin and Greek. There are two

¹⁰⁰ ‘gif ðu wel þencest | wið þinne waldend wære gehealdan, | treowe tacen’ (‘If you intend well to keep a covenant with your Lord, a true pledge’, 212b–14a).

¹⁰¹ Though not key to the argument of this chapter, Robert Bjork notes that ‘an actual appearance by Christ in the Old English saints’ lives is unique to *Andreas*, and should not be dismissed so lightly’, Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints’ Lives*, p. 111.

Latin versions that closely parallel elements of the Old English poem, while still being different enough to demonstrate that were probably not a direct source: these are the *Recensio Casanatensis* and the *Recensio Vaticana*. The scholarly consensus is that the most immediate source for the Old English *Andreas* would have been a Latin intermediary between the extant Latin and Greek versions, as neither share enough similarities to be the direct source, and the very limited knowledge of Greek in Anglo-Saxon England makes a Greek source unlikely.¹⁰² Two Old English prose versions also survive, in Blickling Homily XIX, and in Ælfric's more conventional life of the saint, which omits the Mermedonia episode.¹⁰³ The various sources of these texts have been detailed by Claes Schaar.¹⁰⁴ The (most likely) differences between the sources and *Andreas* are considered here only insofar as they relate to the Anglo-Saxon poet's

¹⁰² Robert Boenig notes, 'since knowledge of Greek was rare in the medieval West, it is usual to posit a hypothetical Latin intermediary as the direct source of the Old English poem', *Saint and Hero: Andreas and Medieval Doctrine* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1991), p. 23.

¹⁰³ Robert Boenig has published translations of the Greek *Praxeis*, the *Recensio Casanatensis*, the so-called Bonnet Fragment, the Blickling Homily and *Andreas* itself in *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals: Translations from the Greek, Latin, and Old English*, ed. and trans. by Robert Boenig, The Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 70 (New York: Garland, 1991). Quotations from these sources are from Boenig's translation, except for *Andreas* which I translate myself. Boenig omits the *Recensio Vaticanus* and Ælfric's homily as being too unlike *Andreas*, but notes that the legend appears in even more literatures, including Old French, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Arabic ('Introduction', in *The Acts of Andrew*, pp. i–xxxvi (p. iii)). The *Casanatensis* is also translated in *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation*, ed. and trans. by Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel Gillmore Calder (Cambridge: Brewer, 1976), pp. 15–34. Ælfric's version is 'Natale Sancti Andreei', in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. by Peter Clemoes, EETS, s.s. 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for EETS, 1997), pp. 507–519.

¹⁰⁴ Claes Schaar, *Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group*, Lund Studies in English, 17 (Lund: Gleerup, 1949), pp. 12–24.

innovative treatment of time and temporality in his narrative. The *Andreas*-poet appears to make one deliberate choice to depart from his sources in order to construct a specific timeframe for the poem.

Andreas does not aspire to the historical authenticity of *Elene*, but rather, sets its narrative in the heroic time of *fyrndagas*, earlier days (1). The poet is nonetheless interested in time, because he is careful to give exact timeframes at all points in the narrative, with one — likely intentional — exception. The poem exemplifies the double vision typical of Old English poetry, in which the narrator hints at events that take place outside the timeline of the main story, but ultimately *Andreas* cedes control of time to the eternal God, who literally sets the timeframes. These timeframes overall add up to a symbolic number, suggesting both divine and authorial influence in the construct of time in *Andreas*.

The timeframes can be enumerated as follows. First, God tells the suffering Matthew that Andrew will soon be with him, and ‘is to þære tide tælmet hwile | emne mid soðe seofon ond twentig | nihtgerimes, þæt ðu of nede most’ (‘it will be to that time a measure of time, indeed in truth twenty-seven nights’ reckoning until you will be allowed out of suffering’, 113–115a).¹⁰⁵ *Andreas* shares this waiting period of twenty-seven days with the Latin *Casanatensis*, the Greek *Praxeis*, and the Blickling Homily.¹⁰⁶ We are told that the cannibals of Mermedonia ‘symble

¹⁰⁵ Note the two time words used here. The first, ‘tide’, is for a specific point in time while the second, ‘hwile’, indicates a length or period of time.

¹⁰⁶ Praxeis: “‘Remain here thirty days for the benefit of men’s souls, and after these things I will send Andrew to you’” (p. 2); ‘So it happened that when twenty-seven days were fulfilled since Mathias’ arrest, the Lord appeared in the country in which Andrew was teaching’ (p. 3).

ymb þritig þing gehedon | nihtgerimes’ (‘always held a meeting after thirty nights’, 157–58a) at which they eat the prisoners they have kept for thirty days; a few lines earlier we are told that Matthew’s ‘þingemearc’ (148) or appointed time has passed ‘butan þrim nihtum | swa hit wælwulfas awriten hæfdon’ (‘except for three nights, as the warriors had written it’, 148b).¹⁰⁷ The narrator supplies this information in *Andreas*, whereas the Greek and the Latin versions both have a scene where the Mermedonians note that Matthew has three days left out of his allotted thirty. In those versions the Mermedonians keep track of each prisoner’s waiting period by means of a slate on which they tally the passing days: time is marked until the allotted time arrives. *Andreas* mentions a system of sorts:

Hæfdon hie on rune ond on rimcræfte
awriten, wælgrædige, wera endestæf,
hwæn<n>e hie to mose meteþearfendum
on þære werþeode weorðan sceoldon. (134–37)

They had written, greedy for slaughter, in secret writing and in written figures, the appointed end of men, when they must become food for the hungry ones in the nation.

However, the *run* and the *rimcræft* are not mentioned again. By choosing not to depict the Mermedonians counting the days, the *Andreas*-poet distracts the reader from the passage of time, so that it is unclear how much time Matthew has left when Andrew arrives.

Casanatensis: ““After you complete the twenty-seven days, I will send you your brother the Apostle Andrew to release you”” (p. 29).

Blickling Homily: ““But stay here twenty-seven nights; after that I will send to you your brother Andrew”” (p. 58). All quotations from *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals*, ed. and trans. by Boenig.

¹⁰⁷ The ‘þingemearc’ is a word that appears only here and in *Elene*, and is discussed above. It means literally ‘the mark of the thing’, where ‘thing’ in this instance has the more likely meaning of ‘meeting’. See above.

Only when time is running out does God tell Andrew:

‘nu bið fore þreo niht, þæt he on þære þeode sceal
fore hæðenra handgewinne
þurh gares gripe gast onsendan
ellorfusne, butan ðu ær cyme.’ (185–88)

‘Now there are three nights, until he among those people must in the face of heathen violence through the attack of spears send up his spirit to another world unless you come earlier.’

In all versions, time during Andrew’s subsequent journey would seem to pass out of proportion with time on earth. Constance Heatt casts the sea-journey as a pilgrimage, or even a symbolic death and rebirth,¹⁰⁸ in which time functions differently to ordinary life. In the Latin and the Old English prose, Matthew still has three days left when Andrew arrives, and so his journey apparently took no time at all, but *Andreas* does not specify how much time has passed. Instead the narration gives the impression that Andrew arrived in the nick of time because, soon after, the Mermedonians leave to have their meeting to kill the prisoners: ‘þa gesamnedon side herigeas, folces frumgaras’ (‘then assembled at the wide heathen temple, the leaders of the people’, 1067–68b). The missing scene here, where the pages are damaged, may have depicted Andrew reading the tally on Matthew’s slate, as he does in the *Casanatensis*, in which case it would be clear how much time Matthew has left and thus how much time Andrew’s journey took. However, I would argue that the *Andreas*-poet, so precise elsewhere when enumerating his timeframe, is being deliberately vague in this scene. He does so because he is departing from his sources in order to stretch the timeframe for a greater purpose. The angelic journey through heaven is key to this time scheme.

¹⁰⁸ Constance B. Heatt, ‘The Harrowing of Mermedonia: Typological Patterns in the Old English *Andreas*’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 77 (1976), 49–62 (p. 58).

There is no logical reason given for the Mermedonians to wait thirty days before killing and eating their prisoners, aside from the narrative convenience of allowing time for Matthew's rescuer to arrive, a convenience that is unnecessary because Andrew could rescue Matthew at any time provided he had the Lord's help. As James Earl says, 'where the poem makes no sense on the literal level, we are justified in seeking for consistent meaning on some other level.'¹⁰⁹ The level we must look to is that of the poetics of time: not bound by a realist temporal logic, and lacking *Elene's* desire to perform history, the *Andreas*-poet exercises a freedom in his use of timeframes for symbolic and metaphoric effect. This has been noted from another perspective by David Hamilton, who notes that the poet's 'allegorical intentions' 'justify his indifference to ordinary realism'.¹¹⁰ The impossibility of Andrew's three-day voyage to Mermedonia is acknowledged, but accomplished nonetheless through an act of divine intervention that succeeds within the established timeframe. It is realistically impossible to reach Mermedonia from Achaia within three days, but Andrew and his men do, thanks to the divine transport of Christ and the angels (822–38). The poet does not narrate the journey directly, but later has Andrew's men recount what they saw. Whereas in the other versions the voyage to Mermedonia sees Andrew lose no time, here it takes up an amount of time indeterminate to Andrew and his disciples, but which seems to equate to three days on earth.

Andrew and his followers pass through heaven on the journey. Andrew's men see him in this glimpse at eternity, but Andrew himself does not. They tell him:

Þa common earnas ofer yða wylm
on flyhte <faran> feðerum hremige;

¹⁰⁹ Earl, 'The Typological Structure of *Andreas*', p. 67.

¹¹⁰ David Hamilton, 'The Diet and Digestion of Allegory in *Andreas*', *ASE*, 1 (1972), 147–58 (p. 152).

us of slæpendum sawle abrugdon,
 mid gefean feredon flyhte on lyfte (863–66)
 [...]
 We ðær heahfæderas halige oncneowon,
 ond martyra mægen unlytel;
 sungon sigedryhtne soðfæstlic lof,
 dugoð domgeorne. Þær wæs Daid mid,
 eadig oretta, Essages sunu,
 for Crist cumen, cining Israhela.
 Swylce we gesegon for suna meotudes,
 æðelum ecne eowic standan,
 twelfe getealde, tireadige hæleð;
 eow þegnodon þrymsittende
 halige heahenglas. (875–85a)

Then eagles came over surge of waves, (went) in flight by wings exultant, removed us from sleeping by soul, with joy we went, flight in air.

[...]

We recognised the holy patriarchs there, and great martyrs of might; they sang of the mighty lord with sincere joy, a zealous host. There was David as well, the blessed champion, Jesse's son, king of Israel, came before Christ. Likewise we saw you stand before the Creator's son with mighty virtues, with twelve counted, glorious men; the holy archangels served you, dwelling in majesty.

This passage is the key as to why no time has passed. It serves as a focal point for the poem's discourse on time, as well as illustrating the narrative freedom exercised in framing time. In the first part we find not only temporal dislocation, but apparently also disembodiment, as the souls of the men are carried by eagles, either simultaneously with their bodies or separate from them, away from the temporally bound earth into the heavens, or more precisely still, a version of the Christian heaven. Andrew and his men have travelled from time and into what can only be understood as an eternal dimension. In eternity, Augustine wrote, 'the whole is present.'¹¹¹ The placement of Andrew among the other disciples, next to Christ and the patriarchs, confirms his assured place in heaven. It suggests that while he walks on earth and performs God's deeds, his soul is already, simultaneously, enjoying eternal life in a realm where past, present, and future

¹¹¹ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by Maria Boulding (New York: New City, 1997), XI.11, 13.

cannot be distinguished. Bjork notes, ‘saints can achieve the unchangeable state while still on earth because they already form part of Christ’;¹¹² the vision of Andrew’s men confirms Andrew’s identification with Christ and his communion with the saints. Andrew does not see himself, but remains asleep during the journey, an anticipation of the sleep of death, itself ironic given the vision of his eternal life with Christ in heaven.

After Matthew is set free, Andrew is tortured for three days and then remains in Mermedonia for another seven days post-conversion (1664–74), a time span shared by the Old English poem with all other versions. Thus the time span of *Andreas* as a whole is forty days: Matthew’s thirty days in prison, plus Andrew’s three days of torture, plus seven days remaining in the city. This represents a deliberate choice on the part of the poet. In comparison, the Latin *Rescensio Casanatensis*, the Greek *Praxeis* and the Blickling Homily span only thirty-seven days. The *Andreas*-poet inherits from his sources the thirty-day period that the Mermedonians mark before killing their prisoners and the twenty-seven days for Matthew to wait, as well as the three days of Andrew’s suffering, and the seven days of building the church. The crucial difference between *Andreas* and the other versions is that the poet stretches the time before Andrew’s arrival to thirty days, so creating a narrative frame of forty days; this explains his treatment of the length of time taken for the voyage to Mermedonia. The poet has taken the opportunity to make the inherited, specific timeframes of the sources more meaningful by avoiding specifying the time span of the journey. This new narrative time span of forty days incorporates a wealth of meaning, from associations with biblical typology to the incorporations of this typology into the Anglo-Saxon liturgy.

¹¹² Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints’ Lives*, p. 20.

Forty days recurs across the Bible, and its symbolic significance cannot be overstated and would have been available to any educated Anglo-Saxon reader. Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights while with the Lord and writing the tables of the covenant (Exodus 34.28), a fact reiterated throughout the Bible and which sets the precedent for later acts of fasting including Elijah's (3 Kings 19.8) and Christ's. Forty days therefore seems an appropriate timeframe for a story about a starved nation. Jesus spent forty days and forty nights fasting in the desert before beginning his ministry (Matthew 4, Mark 1, Luke 4), and was tempted by the devil three times. Similarly, the Mermedonians are in a figurative desert or spiritual wilderness, as well as perhaps a physical wilderness or at least an isolated place.¹¹³ They are starved both physically and spiritually, and the devil works among them.¹¹⁴ According to Thomas Hill, Christ's time in the desert is a liminal period 'between his private role and his public identity as the preacher of the kingdom of God', and this moment is 'associated with other liminal moments in Christian history, specifically the harrowing in which Christ is between death and resurrection, and baptism, which is the threshold, the *limen* between the death of the old and the birth of the

¹¹³ See Oliver Grosz, 'The Island of Exiles: A Note on *Andreas* 15', *English Language Notes*, 7 (1970), 241–42. He writes, 'The island symbolically parallels Matthew's physical incarceration as well as his spiritual isolation from the sinful, heathen world' (p. 242). More recently, Alexandra Bolintineanu has described Mermedonia as an otherworldly place in 'The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*', *Neophilologus*, 93 (2009), 149–64.

¹¹⁴ On the theme of food and sustenance in *Andreas* see Hamilton, 'The Diet and Digestion of Allegory in *Andreas*', as well as John Casteen, '*Andreas*: Mermedonian Cannibalism and Figural Narration', *Neophilologische Mitteilungen*, 75 (1974), 74–78; and again, Heather Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*.

new.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Jesus's fasting in the desert is immediately followed by his calling Simon and Andrew to be his disciples and 'fishers of men' (Mark 1.17; Matthew 4.19). Andrew is present at the beginning of Jesus's ministry, and his deeds in *Andreas* are the continuation of that ministry at the same time as they are the beginning of a new faith and church for Mermedonia. The Mermedonians are saved by the coming of Andrew who brings light to their spiritual darkness, as Christ brings light to the people in darkness (Matthew 4.16).

The numerical typology of the poem reinforces the idea that Andrew is a Christ-type.¹¹⁶ The three days of Andrew's passion parallel the three days of Easter, of Christ's death and resurrection, with the obvious exception that Andrew does not die – at least, not within this poem. Biggs notes that the *Andreas*-poet follows the three-day sequence used by his sources 'but he explicitly develops the idea, which is latent in his source, that Andreas's suffering is an imitation of Christ's passion';¹¹⁷ the poet manipulates the timeframes to reinforce that idea. As well as similarities between Christ's passion and Andrew's torture, Constance Hieatt argues that Mermedonia is hell, and the conditions of Andrew's time in prison 'symbolize the grave and/or hell'.¹¹⁸ Rather than dying and rising again, Andrew's body is broken but healed by God, and

¹¹⁵ Hill, 'Bread and Stone Again', p. 255. Though this particular article is about *Elene*, obviously Hill's remarks on typology can be applied to all poems with figural significance.

¹¹⁶ See Hieatt, 'The Harrowing of Mermedonia'; F. M. Biggs, 'The Passion of Andreas: *Andreas* 1398–1491', *Studies in Philology*, 85 (1988), 413–27; Earl, 'The Typological Structure of *Andreas*'.

¹¹⁷ Biggs, 'The Passion of Andreas', p. 414.

¹¹⁸ Hieatt, 'The Harrowing of Mermedonia', p. 53. See also p. 52 for a detailed comparison of Andrew's torture with the passion of Christ. The release of the prisoners is compared to Christ's Harrowing of Hell, after which Matthew leads the prisoners to heaven, p. 56. Penn R. Szittyia earlier made this comparison to the Harrowing, by examining the narrative episode of Christ ordering a stone to raise the patriarchs. 'The

flowers grow from his blood. As Biggs describes it, ‘by this metonymy for the passion, God reveals to Andreas his identity at this moment with Christ. [...] The saint does not merely obey God, but rather continues Christ’s work by suffering for Him.’¹¹⁹ Andrew’s time in Mermedonia echoes Jesus’s time in the desert undergoing temptation and encountering the devil. Andrew’s three-day torture imitates Christ’s passion and redeems the Mermedonians, although his passion is incomplete. His crucifixion is merely deferred until later in Achaia; an event outside the time and space of *Andreas* but of which both author and reader are aware, as recognised in the final lines where Andrew goes to his death: ‘oðre siðe | sylfa gesecan, ðær he sawulgedal, | beaducwelm gebad’ (‘to seek for himself another journey, where he would await violent death, the separation of his soul’, 1700b-1802a).¹²⁰ The actual St Andrew (as opposed to this fictionalised version) was martyred in Achaia by crucifixion on the diagonal cross now known as St Andrew’s cross. Though *Andreas* is merely a poem that retells an apocryphal story and does not cover the saint’s time in Achaia, the writer and every medieval reader would have known his future.¹²¹ Though his crucifixion exists outside the narrative time of the poem, it is foreshadowed in the torture of Andrew by the Mermedonians. This suffering marks the beginning of a sacrifice

Living Stone and the Patriarchs: Typological Imagery in *Andreas*, Lines 706–810’, *JEGP*, 72 (1973), 167–74 (p. 174).

¹¹⁹ Biggs, ‘The Passion of Andreas’, p. 422.

¹²⁰ Note the typical Germanic warrior diction in which the relatively passive act of crucifixion is recast as a battle, as it is in *The Dream of the Rood*. Andy Orchard discusses ‘the tissue of overlapping phrasing’ between *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, and *Fates*, concluding that ‘the incongruity of such martial and heroic diction in a hagiographical context strongly suggests that it is Cynewulf and the *Andreas*-poet who are borrowing here’. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, p. 166.

¹²¹ See Marie Michelle Walsh, ‘St. Andrew in Anglo-Saxon England: The Evolution of the Apocryphal Hero’, *Annuaire Mediaevale*, 20 (1981), 97–122.

that can only be fulfilled outside of the story. Similarly, the sudden exit of St Matthew from the narrative time and space may be representative of his real-life fate, because it is not known exactly how he died.

The number forty is also often associated with biblical punishment. In Numbers 14.33, the Israelites are punished so that many of the elders die, and the children wander for forty years, while in Ezekiel 4.6 the house of Judah will suffer forty days for forty years of sin, in an exchange of a day for a year. Jonah prophesies to Nineveh that it will be destroyed in forty days (Jonah 3.4) and, as Daniel Anlezark has noted, Andrew is at first a reluctant prophet like Jonah, and his three days in prison correspond to Jonah's three days inside the whale.¹²² The children of Israel ate manna for forty years until they came to Canaan (Exodus 16.35). Israel remained in the desert for forty years as a punishment – a detail repeated often across the Bible (e.g. Numbers 32.13, Judges 13.1, Amos 2.10, Acts 7.36, Hebrews 3.17). Therefore, there may be a loose association with the number forty and punishment at work in *Andreas*, for the Mermedonians suffer in their life as cannibals, and have sinned for a long time before they are saved.

The rain that caused the flood in Genesis lasts forty days and forty nights, and the flood that Andrew calls out of the stone matches it in purpose, though not in duration. Thomas Hill, Marie Michelle Walsh, and Daniel Anlezark have written on the significance of the flood in *Andreas* in typological terms.¹²³ It is a complex episode, packed with meaning. Not only is there water to represent Noah's flood and baptism, but fire, referencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit

¹²² Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, p. 212.

¹²³ Thomas D. Hill, 'Figural Narrative in *Andreas*: The Conversion of the Mermedonians', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 70 (1969), 261–73; Walsh, 'The Baptismal Flood in the Old English *Andreas*'; Anlezark, *Water and Fire*.

and the fires of the Last Judgement. Hill argues that the flood and fire ‘is best understood within the poem as a figural representation of the mystery of Christian baptism’.¹²⁴ Fourteen of the most wicked men are drowned in the end, but then raised by Andrew and formally baptised (1625–32a), prefiguring the raising of the dead at the Last Judgement.¹²⁵ Anlezark notes that ‘their baptism is foreshadowed by the typological symbol of the flood, as they die to sin and rise to a new life; their death and resurrection in the conflagration develops the apocalyptic symbolism of the flood, anticipating the Last Judgement when baptized believers will rise to everlasting life.’¹²⁶ The event is simultaneously Noah’s flood, baptism, and apocalypse. Furthermore, as Abdou writes, the death of the wicked is part of the conversion process of the Mermedonians as a whole: ‘to achieve absolute unity, death must occur both metaphorically within the self and actually within the state—in order to permit the rebirth of a Christian nation.’¹²⁷ Andrew, too, is healed after his torture so that it is as if his injuries never were, a sort of turning back of time or erasure of the past comparable to the later resuscitation of the dead. Andrew can still remember the torture, and it still happened, but the physical evidence is gone, as if he had never been harmed.

As the poet has gone to great lengths to construct his forty-day timeframe, it is also possible, if not likely, that the shorter timeframes set up in *Andreas* also have some numerical or typological significance. The seven days that Andrew spends with the Mermedonians as they

¹²⁴ Hill, ‘Figural Narrative in *Andreas*’, p. 265.

¹²⁵ Hill sees this episode as a type of baptism-as-judgement, echoing the drowning of the wicked in Noah’s flood, because death and rebirth are implicit in baptism. ‘Figural Narrative in *Andreas*’, p. 269.

¹²⁶ Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, p. 229.

¹²⁷ Abdou, ‘Speech and Power’, p. 202.

build their new church may allude to the seven days of Creation in Genesis. The new creation which the Church represents would strengthen the association. In Christian tradition Christ's resurrection embodies this new creation; imagery focused on this abounds in the poem. The symbolic Harrowing of Hell as represented by the liberation of the prisoners happens before Andrew's torture, and the baptism of the Mermedonians happens after Andrew's passion in which he did not die. The building of this new temple is also significant. In the Book of Apocalypse, the Last Judgement is followed by a new, changed heaven and earth, and a new Jerusalem, in which God Himself is the temple (Apocalypse 21.22). If the flood and fire at the end of *Andreas* typologically represent the Last Judgement, then the building of the church represents the new world order at the end of time. Additionally, the speed at which it is built, and the focus on the large and newly converted congregation rather than the physical structure signifies its status as the living church. The interrelationship between typological imagery of the Harrowing of Hell, baptism, and the Last Judgement in *Andreas* is summarised by Earl:

'tropologically, [the Harrowing of Hell] brought about the release of mankind from the bonds of sin and death, re-enacted in each person's baptism; and ultimately, it made possible the salvation of man at the end of time, when Satan will be bound again, the Jews will be converted, and Christ will lead the blessed to their heavenly reward.'¹²⁸ The time Andrew spends with the Mermedonians also echoes the forty-day period Christ spent on earth with his disciples between his Resurrection and Ascension.

¹²⁸ Earl, 'The Typological Structure of *Andreas*', p. 72. It must be noted that the Harrowing of Hell tradition, though somewhat prevalent in medieval literature, is of apocryphal and not biblical origins.

Medieval authors such as the *Andreas*-poet could evoke the traditions of biblical history to enrich their works by taking motifs from the Old or New Testament and investing them with symbolism so that the resulting work presents more than one level of meaning. They were untroubled by the dislocation of time that such a viewpoint requires, not bound by Aristotelian rules of emplotment or conventions of realistic narrative. *Andreas* is on the surface level the story of St Andrew rescuing St Matthew from the cannibals of Mermedonia, and then converting them, but on the level of typology it is a story inscribed into an atemporal narrative of Christ and His passion, as well as Noah's flood and baptism, which also prefigures the Last Judgement and the end of time.¹²⁹ In so doing, it reinforces the meaning of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist through the matter of water and blood. The *Andreas*-poet engages with typology by editing and adding to his material so that the poem has a closer relationship with the Bible. Hill's comment that 'the poet may have felt that he was writing history – events ordained by God which providentially fall into a typologically significant pattern' slightly misses the mark.¹³⁰ The typology of the poem does not simply 'fall into a [...] pattern', but rather the poet works hard to develop and strengthen the typological patterning of his sources. Key to this is the poet's clarification of the forty-day frame, by which the *Andreas*-poet skilfully reworks the story to bring out extra layers of meaning in a poetic of time, and also develop his own discourse on the relationship between time and eternity.

¹²⁹ The comparison of Mermedonians to the Jewish people is made by James W. Earl, who argues that it is central to an understanding of the poem, despite not being made explicit by the poet. See 'The Typological Structure of *Andreas*', p. 73. See also Thomas D. Hill, 'Hebrews, Israelites, and Wicked Jews: An Onomastic Crux in "Andreas" 161–67', *Traditio*, 32 (1976), 358–61, an examination of medieval attitudes towards Jews and the linguistic nuances employed by the *Andreas*-poet.

¹³⁰ Hill, 'Figural Narrative in *Andreas*', p. 272.

The resonances of the time patterning in *Andreas* also incorporate the more immediate experience of the liturgical cycle within which the Anglo-Saxon Christian lived and marked the passing of time. Walsh has noted that *Andreas* employs at least two kinds of typology:

One is a kind of echoic triangular relationship: Andrew's story is made to parallel incidents in the lives of certain patriarchal types of Christ; these Old Testament reminiscences in turn form a link between Christ and Andrew. The second typological approach is related to a different traditional form: events signifying a sacrament of the church. [...] The sacraments have both a present and a future reality.¹³¹

Forty days is the length of Lent, which imitates Jesus's sojourn in the desert, a parallel which would probably have been foremost in the mind of the medieval reader of *Andreas*. The forty days of Lent were not always fixed so, and in tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England (the date of the Vercelli copy of *Andreas*) it was a fairly recent innovation.¹³² Bradford Bedingfield writes that 'the period had its origins in the preparations of the catechumens for baptism, although Christ's period in the wilderness, as well as the examples of Moses and Elias, was surely a conscious part of the background in deciding that a forty-day fast was appropriate.'¹³³ A factor in the *Andreas*-poet's decision to stretch the narrative to forty days could well have been the ironic association of the Mermedonians' starvation with the Christian fasting demanded by Lent, and their conversion and baptism with the Lenten preparations of new initiates to the church. The season of abstinence and spiritual examination is certainly appropriate for a poem about spiritual hunger and the coming of a saviour. Some critics, such as John Casteen, explore further the possible relationship between the cannibalism of the Mermedonians and the Christian

¹³¹ Walsh, 'The Baptismal Flood in the Old English *Andreas*', p. 138.

¹³² M. Bradford Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), p. 74.

¹³³ Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 74.

Eucharist.¹³⁴ As Earl writes, ‘within the context of the commonplace vocabulary of spiritual nourishment, cannibalism clearly represents a displaced reliance upon man himself for spiritual sustenance.’¹³⁵ The Mermedonians encapsulate on a larger scale the examination of conscience that a Christian is expected to undergo during Lent, along with fasting, self-denial, and turning away from sin. They also represent the fallen state of man before Christ’s coming, this time in the figure of Andrew.

Lent begins with an acknowledgement of man’s fall, as articulated in Ælfric’s homilies, which ‘see the period before Easter as a time of alienation from God, a dismissal from God’s divine presence, and a time of mourning and penance. [...] This context prepares the participants for associations with Adam cast out of Paradise and prefigures the conflated expectations of both the Resurrection and the Second Coming at Easter.’¹³⁶ So over the course of Lent, ‘the rituals and preaching of the church together allow the faithful to relive the progress of Adam from sin-based ejection from God’s presence to the reconciliation made possible by Christ’s sacrifice and Christian penance, providing them a way into God’s heavenly kingdom (symbolized by the church), making them again citizens of heaven.’¹³⁷ *Andreas* manages, in its range of biblical references and use of typology, to encompass many of the major events in Christian history. The

¹³⁴ Casteen, ‘*Andreas*: Mermedonian Cannibalism and Figural Narration’. See also Robert E. Boenig, ‘*Andreas*, the Eucharist, and Vercelli’, *JEGP*, 79 (1980), 313–31, which links the poem with the First Eucharistic Controversy of the ninth century. Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*, touches upon the relevance of the 831 publication of Paschasius Radbertus’s *De corpora et sanguine domini*, p. 28.

¹³⁵ Earl, ‘The Typological Structure of *Andreas*’, p. 77.

¹³⁶ Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 75.

¹³⁷ Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 73.

Mermedonians are faithless and mired in sin, the devil works among them and God is absent. It has been shown that Matthew's leading the prisoners away and out of the city mirrors Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt.¹³⁸ Andrew, as noted, is also a Christ-type who brings redemption and faith to the Mermedonians through his suffering, as well as through their suffering in the flood and fire. This suffering has an eschatological focus, as did Anglo-Saxon Lent: 'Whatever moral is being put forth in Anglo-Saxon Lenten sermons, the concern is not so much for this life, or even for a heavenly life that will be reached eventually, but rather for a Doomsday that is frighteningly imminent',¹³⁹ hence the apocalyptic overtones to *Andreas*.

Consider St Paul's words on baptism as relevant to *Andreas*:

Know you not that all we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in his death? For we are buried together with him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.¹⁴⁰

The Mermedonians who die in the flood are also baptised in the flood, and rise again after their death to receive a formal baptism. The baptismal symbolism of the flood mingles with the resurrection symbolism of the resuscitation of the dead. The Mermedonians are baptised after Andrew's torture, which symbolises and re-enacts Christ's passion. The paradox of life in death and the Easter mystery are at the heart of *Andreas*: though the Mermedonians live by eating the flesh of others they are mere sinning cannibals, dead to the knowledge of their eternal souls. Andrew's sacrifice of his own body and blood for them and for their would-be victims redeems

¹³⁸ Hill, 'Figural Narrative in *Andreas*', p. 268.

¹³⁹ Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 77.

¹⁴⁰ Romans 6.3–5.

them and renews them; the baptism of the flood and the formal baptism post-flood complete the process. Where once they lived a living death, now they live in the light and life of Christ.

The liturgical symbolism of *Andreas* is strengthened by the medieval belief in the microcosm and macrocosm. According to Elizabeth Sears, a ‘pervasive’ concept in the medieval period was that ‘man was a small world and the world, a great man’.¹⁴¹ Thus the time of a man’s life could be correlated with the time of the world, a concept that found its greatest expression in the various Ages of Man schemes that will be discussed in chapter three. J. A. Burrow notes that many parallels were drawn between the life of man and ‘divisions in diurnal, annual, and historical time’.¹⁴² It was natural to draw comparisons between humans and the world they inhabited, such as comparing the day with the course of human life,¹⁴³ for example in the transit of the sun across the sky,¹⁴⁴ the canonical hours,¹⁴⁵ and the hours named in the Parable of the Vineyard.¹⁴⁶ The liturgical calendar, too, has its significant moments, such as the seventy dates between Septuagesima Sunday and Easter Saturday, that symbolise the seventy years that the Israelites spent in captivity,¹⁴⁷ or the four Ember Days, which were linked to the four ages of man.¹⁴⁸ As Burrow writes, ‘in ways such as these, the faithful were invited to see in the Church’s

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 18.

¹⁴² J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 55.

¹⁴³ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁴ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 57.

¹⁴⁵ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁶ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁷ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 75.

¹⁴⁸ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 76.

year as well as in the Church's day, a continually repeated image of their own individual course through life.¹⁴⁹ In *Andreas* the reader witnesses the entirety of Christian history in the microcosmic world of the poem, the land of Mermedonia, as well as the cycle of the liturgical year, concentrated in the three days of Easter.

It is impossible to know how the Anglo-Saxon reader or listener would have responded to a poem so dense with meaning and brimming with biblical references. The poet demands hard work from the reader, who must comprehend a great deal in the poem. This might provide a clue to its audience, who would have had to possess a range of learning and cultural understanding to be able to comprehend its many layers of meaning. But it is not too much to imagine that even an informed lay person could make a connection between the three days' torture of a saint and the passion of Christ, or the length of forty days and Lent. Andrew's lesson is to submit to God's will and have faith in His ways, a lesson that he stumbles through imperfectly, wanting to place his own will ahead of God's by leaving Mermedonia before he has been directed to do so. As a devotional text, *Andreas* may prompt meditation on the mysteries of the sacraments and in particular baptism; on Christ's passion and Andrew's imitation of it; on the day of Judgement and the end of the world; on the eternal nature of heaven, and the saints and angels who dwell there; on the prophets and the patriarchs and the Old Testament's relation to the New; on the vast scope of God's plan and the largeness of Christian history and time, and the fact that it can never be revealed to humans in full; and on the meaning of the forty-day period of Lent. Like St Andrew, the reader is reminded that God is the beginning and the end, and in control of all, especially as regards time.

¹⁴⁹ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 76.

If God is the arbiter of all time, then *Andreas* would seem to warn against an over-reliance on secular time. This is what the Mermedonians do, with their slavish adherence to a thirty-day cycle of imprisonment before murder.¹⁵⁰ Thirty days has no biblical or theological significance, but equates to a month of the secular calendar, or slightly more than one lunar cycle. Instead of the seasons of nature or the church calendar, the Mermedonians abide by a self-imposed and self-created bureaucracy, and a timeframe that makes little sense – after all, why keep victims in jail so long and give them a chance to lose weight?¹⁵¹ The contrivance highlights the absurdity of their practices without God to direct them and give their actions meaning. The Mermedonians are tied to earthly time until Andrew alerts them to the presence of divine time.

Similarly, Andrew himself must learn to transcend earthly time. He initially gives it primacy, as demonstrated by his incredulous reaction to the timeframe for the task appointed to him by God. Andrew has to learn to submit to God’s divine will and power. The ocean voyage is a journey set apart from earthly time, with supernatural elements. It begins with the mysterious and unlooked-for ship on the shore, helmed by ‘drihten sylf, dugeða wealdend, | ece ælmihtig,

¹⁵⁰ Blurton describes the society as a bureaucratic one: ‘Without exception, when the Mermedonians act as a society, they are preoccupied with the maintenance of their alimentary practices. For example, their method of eating prisoners is governed by a well-functioning bureaucracy. The Mermedonians hold monthly meetings to apportion the meat among the people. They have a mechanism for doing this: they have written down each prisoner’s appointed hour of death so that they know whom to eat first. The process is fair: the meat is shared equally among “duguðe ond geogoðe” (152b; 115). This characterization of the internal operation of the Mermedonian cannibal system is a secular—a bureaucratic—one.’ *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*, p. 21.

¹⁵¹ Although, as David Hamilton notes, ‘the Mermedonians are little more than a vehicle for the idea of spiritual hunger; their deprivation is unnaturally strained and can be understood only by recourse to an imposed, allegorical meaning’. Hamilton, ‘The Diet and Digestion of Allegory in *Andreas*’, p. 151. Their timeframes need not make logical sense while the poet is able to create allegorical meaning.

mid his englum twam' ('the Lord himself, ruler of warriors, with his two angels', 248–49).

Andrew asks passage and receives the first test of his faith when the captain warns him that those who venture to Mermedonia 'cwealm þrowiað' ('suffer death', 281b). He has to bargain for passage as he carries no gold by decree of the Lord. Irony underlies the voyage for its duration because Andrew does not know to whom he speaks. By stepping aboard the ship Andrew is giving himself over to God's care and direction, though he does not realise it. A storm arises, which may signal a transition from one realm to another, such as from earthly time to divine time. Andrew's followers are afraid but will not leave him, echoing the episode in Mark 4 in which Jesus and his disciples are on a boat in the midst of a storm, a similar test of faith. Andrew relates this story to his followers, beginning the story with 'swa gesælde iu' ('so it happened long ago', 438).¹⁵² In line 468 he uses the word 'gryrehwile', a 'time of terror'.¹⁵³ Eventually Andrew sleeps, his men having fallen asleep before him, and they are carried over the sea to Mermedonia where they wake in the liminal space of the shores of Mermedonia, outside the city gates, perhaps still caught between times, until they enter the city and return to earthly time.

During his discussion with the disguised Christ on board the ship, Andrew blithely tells stories of the glorious deeds he witnessed Christ perform on earth, failing to connect that power with God's power here. They discuss events in the very recent past for Andrew, who is near the beginning of his ministry after Christ's ascension. However, these events are discussed as if

¹⁵² An interesting phrase, as it is indeed long ago for both poet and reader, but presumably only a few years at most for Andrew himself. However, if Andrew's soul is in heaven while he still walks the earth, then time has little meaning for him anyway.

¹⁵³ This is the only occurrence of this compound in the Old English corpus, although other *gryre-* compounds are not unknown, and some occur in *Beowulf*.

ancient history. Andrew only becomes fully humble and willing to submit to God once he and his disciples have been placed on the shores of Mermedonia, and he realises who was the pilot of the boat. Once more he has an exchange with God, this time asking forgiveness for his sins. His greatest sin, according to God, was his disbelief that he could make the journey: ‘no ðu swa swiðe synne gefremedest | swa ðu in Achaia ondsæc dydest’ (‘you committed not so great a sin as when you refused in Achaia’, 926–27). Part of Andrew’s humility stems from the testimony of his followers that they saw him enthroned in heaven with Christ and the other disciples (881–84b). The plural temporality inherent to typology means that Andrew on the beach is Andrew meeting Christ for the first time and not knowing it is Christ, just as he and Simon Peter met Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and did not know yet that Jesus was the Messiah. The proximity of St Andrew’s feast day on November 30 to Advent invites a liturgical association of the saint with the second coming of Christ, just as he was involved with the first coming. Heavenly or divine time is eternal, while earthly time is cyclical, and patterns repeat. The people in darkness see a great light: the coming of Christ. Matthew and the prisoners in darkness see the light of Andrew; the Mermedonians in their spiritual darkness receive this light too. Andrew, Christ’s disciple, acts in his name, and re-enacts some of Christ’s deeds. He calms his followers as Jesus once calmed his own followers on a boat during a storm. Having been assured of the eternal nature of his soul after the vision of his disciples, Andrew realises that time on earth is irrelevant or has little to do with divine time, and he trusts himself fully to God. He is enthroned in heaven for eternity even while he walks on earth, accomplishing the works that will gain him sainthood. As Nathan Breen describes, ‘the mimetic and linear narrative of Andrew’s journey is transformed into a cognitive, non-linear journey that loops back upon itself but has

enlightenment as its goal.’¹⁵⁴ The poem is not a ‘thoroughgoing chronological narrative quite unlike that of *Beowulf*’, as described by Robert Stevick,¹⁵⁵ but a story as chronologically complex as *Beowulf*. Knowing that he has made the journey according to God’s will and with God’s help, Andrew can have no doubt that God is in control of the narrative, of his life, and of the world.

In *Andreas* God measures the time for Andrew and Matthew. He predicts the future, directs their activities and controls the ocean voyage. Adjectives used for God include ‘ece’ (‘eternal, everlasting’, used several times in *Andreas*), ‘ealwalda’ (‘omnipotent’, 205, 751, 925, 1620) and ‘fruma ond ende’ (‘the beginning and the end’, or ‘Alpha and Omega’, 556). He continually warns Andrew of what will happen to him and counsels him to endure. God’s divine time is then set in opposition to the earthly time that Andrew initially clings to, and that the Mermedonians are slaves to.

One of the critical complaints against *Andreas* is its blending of Germanic diction with Latin,¹⁵⁶ which starts at the beginning of the poem, with the line ‘hwæt, we gefrunan on fyrndagum’ (‘listen, we have heard in days of old’, 1). Such diction is a convention of (secular)

¹⁵⁴ Nathan A. Breen, “‘What a Long, Strange Trip It’s Been’”: Narration, Movement and Revelation in the Old English *Andreas*’, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 25 (2008), 71–9 (p. 71).

¹⁵⁵ Robert Stevick, ‘Arithmetical Design of the Old English *Andreas*’, in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. by Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 99–115 (p. 113).

¹⁵⁶ For a spirited defence of *Andreas* in this regard see Daniel G. Calder, ‘Figurative Language and Its Contexts in *Andreas*: A Study in Medieval Expressionism’, in *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature: Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. by Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton and Fred C. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 115–36.

heroic poetry, and the line most obviously echoes the opening of *Beowulf* in its use of *hwæt*, the ‘we have heard’ formula, and a reference to earlier days.¹⁵⁷ The difference between the temporal settings of *Andreas* and *Beowulf* is that the former can be known and the latter only guessed at: the acts of St Andrew, though apocryphal in this case, can only date to biblical times after the death of Christ, while *Beowulf* takes place in a murky time between myth and history; even if we can date the known historical figures of *Beowulf*, we cannot pin down a lifetime for the hero himself. Of course, neither poem is concerned with any form of historical accuracy. For Brian Shaw, the opening of *Andreas* is an ‘insistence on the oral transmission of truth’,¹⁵⁸ but I disagree; it is part of the poet’s use of heroic diction.

However, it might seem odd for a saint’s life to begin in this manner at all. Rudolph Willard in his review of Brooks’ edition of *Andreas* notes that the closest extant Latin version of the story begins ‘in illo tempore’ (‘in that time’), a formula used ‘in the liturgy to introduce a gospel pericope when the opening words afford no indication of time, place, or occasion’.¹⁵⁹ ‘In that time’ is even more vague than ‘in former days’, but these formulas are used because the temporal setting of the story is unimportant; it is enough for both poet and audience to know that the story occurs in days gone by, at a time that is not now. The use of *fyrndagas* provides a

¹⁵⁷ *Beowulf* of course opens with the phrase *in geardagum*, and a few lines later also uses a form of *gefrinan*.

¹⁵⁸ Brian A. Shaw, ‘Translation and Transformation in *Andreas*’, in *Prosody and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of C. B. Hieatt*, ed. by M. J. Toswell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 164–79 (p. 165).

¹⁵⁹ Rudolph Willard, ‘*Andreas* and the *Fates of the Apostles*’, *Modern Philology*, 62 (1964), 45–51 (p. 45).

context for the audience and signals that what will follow is a heroic tale, unlike the opening of *Elene* which expresses its historic intentions.

Conclusion

Typology is the province of a learned audience. I agree with Éamonn Ó Carragáin that Cynewulf was writing for literate and probably monastic readers, and indeed that the use of runes in the epilogue implies the visual experience of reading rather than listening.¹⁶⁰ He defines Cynewulf's goal as 'to achieve a proper understanding of the spiritual significance of his sources, so as to awaken in his readers that devotion which God would reward by the gift of His grace'.¹⁶¹ Similarly, Stacy Klein suggests that 'the penitent, eschatologically minded narrator at the end of the poem may indeed model Cynewulf's own ideal imagined reader of *Elene*' and that 'the narrator's sorrow for his sins of the past and increased reverence for the hereafter reveal a newfound spiritual awareness that he has arrived at only through previous engagement with the meanings of the Cross in his own earthly life, meanings which the poem insists will vary from person to person.'¹⁶² The same can be said for *Andreas*, that it was written to prompt

¹⁶⁰ Éamonn Ó Carragáin, 'Cynewulf's Epilogue to *Elene* and the Tastes of the Vercelli Compiler: A Paradigm of Meditative Reading', in *Lexis and Texts in Early English: Studies Presented to Jane Roberts*, ed. by Christian J. Kay and Louise M. Sylvester (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 187–201 (p. 187–88). Samantha Zacher agrees that the runes are evidence of reading ('Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality', p. 347), as does Jeff Opland, who writes that Cynewulf's signatures contained 'the runes whose phonemic values spelt out his name and whose syllabic values allowed them to be read logically in context' ('From Horseback to Monastic Cell', p. 33).

¹⁶¹ Carragáin, 'Cynewulf's Epilogue to *Elene* and the Tastes of the Vercelli Compiler', p. 191.

¹⁶² Klein, 'Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*', p. 55.

contemplation among literate religious; Catharine Regan, for one, argues that all saints' lives were used for monastic meditation and reflection.¹⁶³ It is probable that Cynewulf and the *Andreas*-poet were monks themselves, with access to well-stocked libraries.¹⁶⁴

As saints' lives, the ostensible goal of *Elene* and *Andreas* is to model saintly behaviour and retell the stories of their subject saints. As religious poetry, they educate the reader on Christian history. Through typology, *Andreas* ranges across Christian history, from Creation to Resurrection to Apocalypse, not linearly but figurally. St Andrew is a Christ-type, and through him and his Passion readers experience and understand anew Christ's suffering. Through typology, *Elene* prefigures the conversion of the Jews, a conversion that also stands in for that of the Anglo-Saxons. As Robert Bjork writes, 'though the Old English verse saints' lives do not always reach the highest literary plateaus, I assume that they are always carefully crafted because of their status as religious artifacts.'¹⁶⁵ We know how carefully Cynewulf crafted *Elene* because he tells us so, and the *Andreas*-poet, though aspiring to write perhaps beyond his talents, also affects humility.¹⁶⁶ Both of these poems have been written for a purpose; both have a message to communicate which they do by using typology, but in different manners.

¹⁶³ Regan, 'Evangelicism as the Informing Principle', p. 252.

¹⁶⁴ Hill's argument on this topic hinges on the distinction the *Andreas*-poet makes between the pejorative term 'Jews' and neutral terms 'Israelite' and 'Hebrew', a distinction not found in the extant sources. See Hill, 'Hebrews, Israelites, and Wicked Jews'.

¹⁶⁵ Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, p. ix.

¹⁶⁶ In the poet's interjection at lines 1478–91 he writes, 'Ofer min gemet mycel is to secganne, | langsum leornung, þæt he in life adreag, | eall æfter orde' ('It is far above my ability to relate, in a long-lasting work of study, what he suffered in life entirely after the beginning', 1481–83a). On this passage see John Miles Foley, 'The Poet's Self-Interruption in *Andreas*', in *Prosody and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages*:

As discussed in chapter one, themes of conversion loom large in the culture of a nation so recently converted itself. Conversion occupied Anglo-Saxon authors because it was not a finite process but continuous;¹⁶⁷ it was ongoing in Bede's lifetime, and his works formed part of the process. However, Cynewulf and the *Andreas*-poet were in all likelihood born into the faith. They might no more identify with their pagan ancestors than with the fictional Mermedonians or the ahistorical Jews of *Elene*. Nonetheless, the conversion narratives of *Andreas* and *Elene* confirm for both author and audience the value of their religion. Abdou proposes the use of macro and micro conversions, on the scale of the community and the self,¹⁶⁸ and in that context the poet and reader each undergo their own micro-conversions in the process of writing and reading. Similarly, the conversion of the Mermedonians stands for both the recent conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, and the anticipated conversion of the Jews towards the end of time.

Andreas occurs in a time scheme that is entirely symbolic and *on fyrndagum*. Its main mode is the typological: events and characters are figures of the New Testament; Andrew is a Christ-type; Mermedonia and its converted citizens face the Harrowing of Hell, the coming of Christ, the Creation, the Flood, and the Last Judgement, all in the space of forty days. The poet manipulates time in the poem so that it adds up to that biblically and typologically significant number. Andrew and his men literally travel through time when they make an impossible journey in less than three days, while detouring to heaven where they witness Andrew's eternal soul enshrined among Christ, the patriarchs, and the saints. The poem's temporal significance is

Essays in Honour of C. B. Heatt, ed. by M. J. Toswell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 42–59.

¹⁶⁷ Abdou, drawing on Karl Morrison, notes that conversion is a process. 'Speech and Power', p. 195.

¹⁶⁸ Abdou, 'Speech and Power', p. 195.

biblical, liturgical, and sacramental. For the learned Anglo-Saxon reader, *Andreas* illustrates the Easter mystery, the self-denial of Lent, and the resurrection of the dead at the Day of Judgement. Its message is to accept the control of God and submit to His divine time.

Elene begins by positioning its narrative in relation to the incarnation of Christ. The focus on the True Cross takes the poem geographically and temporally to the Crucifixion and Resurrection, at which the human Jesus became the divine Christ and fulfilled the promise of salvation for mankind. *Elene*, far from happening in *fyrndagum*, aspires to authenticity with a concrete date, which positions its narrative relative to the incarnation of Christ. The focus on the True Cross takes the poem geographically and temporally to the Crucifixion and Resurrection, at which the human Jesus became the divine Christ and fulfilled the promise of salvation for mankind. The fact that AD 233 is incorrect from a historical perspective is overshadowed by the temporal significance of the *inventio crucis* narrative. The poem forms a relationship with liturgical time by subtly referencing the Easter Vigil, and uses typology to depict eschatological elements. *Elene* portrays the singular progression of Christian history in a way that *Andreas* does not and cannot because its time is generalised and its converts are symbolic. Figurally, *Elene* transcends time with the complete conversion of the Jews, an event ‘historically implausible, and which bears in this context eschatological implications’.¹⁶⁹ While the conversion of the Jews in *Elene* is anachronistic, it prefigures their anticipated conversion during the Last Days. *Elene* thus deals with both the beginning and the end of the Christian era, through the oral memories of the Crucifixion passed down through Judas’s family, to the discovery of the True Cross, and to the mass conversion of the Last Judgement. In *Elene*, ‘the Cross, instrument of death, becomes the

¹⁶⁹ Hill, ‘Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative’, p. 222.

instrument of life, and the dead youth demonstrates in a new way the paradox of the Crucifixion.¹⁷⁰ The raising of the dead in *Andreas* similarly illustrates the paradox of the Resurrection; and the raising of the dead at the Last Judgement.

Elene and *Andreas* offer particular constructs of time, each relevant to the poem's content and themes. They engage in a complex poetics of time in which the historical, biblical, and typological mingle. Such sophistication from the poet calls for careful attention from the reader, suggesting a highly literate milieu in which Cynewulf could modify his sources for his own purposes, ignoring historic reality in favour of the symbolic while imitating works of history, and in which the *Andreas*-poet could create a forty-day timeframe to add another layer of meaning to material found in his sources. The placement of these poems in the Vercelli Book perhaps signals that the whole manuscript was intended for a skilled reader, literate in typology and other forms of temporal symbolism. Such temporal complexity and ways of 'playing with time' continue in the narrative poem *Beowulf*.

¹⁷⁰ Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations' p. 243.

Chapter Three: *Beowulf*

Introduction

A persistent and enduring theme in *Beowulf* scholarship is the desire to locate the poem in time. Much of the range of scholarship debating the date of the poem carries the implication that if we could just fix the date, then we could understand almost everything about the poem that has hitherto proved elusive.¹ The date of *Beowulf* is often held to be the key to its difficult poetry, to its enigmatic attitude towards the Danes, its depiction of kingship, attitudes to women, and the role of religion. However, the date of *Beowulf* is unknown and, as long as the poem itself provides the only dating evidence available, probably unknowable. The resistance of the text to dating is related to, and to a degree the product of, a poetic narrative that itself deliberately frames the present and the past in certain ways, and so resists a fixed place in historical chronology; the poem's own timeline presents a degree of indeterminacy which reveals a thematic interest in time and history. In *Beowulf*, the fixed and finite periods of the poem's shifting present are often used metaphorically, while for the reader the whole remains simply *in geardagum*.

¹ See, for example, the collected essays in Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of 'Beowulf'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). Chapter 1 of George Clark's *Beowulf*, Twayne's English Authors Series, 477 (Boston: Twayne, 1990), 'Beowulf to Our Time' (pp. 1–25) offers a good account of the known history of the manuscript, as well as its recovery and subsequent study.

The poem's defiance of historicity is signalled at its beginning, when Scyld Scefing is introduced as a character from *geardagum* (1).² The formula *in geardagum* is used twice more in *Beowulf*, and at each occurrence it signals great antiquity (1354, 2233). However, the poem's veneer of extreme pastness as implied in its first line is soon problematised. The poem's resistance of a clear historical setting of the kind that might be provided by clear dates or comparable historicising markers continues from the *in geardagum* of the opening lines to the unmarked time of the second part of the poem, which enters the elegiac mode by removing names and specificities, generalising its subject and expressing communal anxieties.

The narrative discourse of *Beowulf* moves back and forth through time, with anachronies both homodiegetic and heterodiegetic (to use Genette's terminology).³ As John Leyerle observes, the two parts of the poem present linear narratives of only short duration, while the 'main narrative is constantly intersected by episodes which present these deeds from a different perspective'.⁴ The complexities of *Beowulf*'s structure have long been recognised by critics, and Leyerle's interlace model remains a useful way of conceptualising the structure. Leyerle explains the effect of the interlace structure as follows:

To the *Beowulf*-poet, as to many other writers, the relations between events are more significant than their temporal sequence and he used a structure that gave him great

² All references to and quotations from *Beowulf* are from Klaeber's *'Beowulf' and 'The Fight at Finnsburg'*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, 4th edn, Toronto Old English Series, 21 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). All translations are my own.

³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980). See the introduction to this thesis for a discussion of these terms.

⁴ John Leyerle, 'The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*', in *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, trans. by Seamus Heaney, ed. by Daniel Donoghue (New York: Norton, 2002), pp. 130–152 (p. 146), orig. publ. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 37 (1967), 1–17.

freedom to manipulate time and concentrate on the complex interconnections of events. Although the poem has to be lingered over and gives up its secrets slowly, the principle of its interlace structure helps to reveal the interwoven coherence of the episodes as well as the total design of the poem in all its complex resonances and reverberations of meaning.⁵

However complex it is, the manipulation of temporal order and frequency in *Beowulf* seems unproblematic for the poet to negotiate, and while challenging, was presumably not unexpected by the audience. The poem's narrative discourse exemplifies the *distentio animi* which Augustine described as the fundamental property of time. Significant here is Augustine's discussion of poetic recitation:

Suppose I have to recite a poem I know by heart. Before I begin, my expectation is directed to the whole poem, but once I have begun, whatever I have plucked away from the domain of expectation and tossed behind me to the past becomes the business of my memory, and the vital energy of what I am doing is in tension between the two of them: it strains toward my memory because of the part I have already recited, and to my expectation on account of the part I still have to speak. But my attention is present all the while, for the future is being channeled through it to become the past. As the poem goes on and on, expectation is curtailed and memory prolonged, until expectation is entirely used up, when the whole completed action has passed into memory.

What is true of the poem as a whole is true equally of its individual stanzas and syllables. The same is true of the whole long performance, in which this poem may be a single item. The same thing happens in the entirety of a person's life, of which all his actions are parts; and the same in the entire sweep of human history, the parts of which are individual lives.⁶

Augustine's model of reciting a poem applies equally to those listening, reading, or even writing a poem. *Beowulf* ranges through expectation, attention, and memory, thus asking the reader to also expect, attend, and remember. This stretching of the mind is not supposed to be painful, though it might be confusing at times – requiring the slow reading described by John Leyerle to fully appreciate the nuances.

⁵ Leyerle, 'The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*', p. 150.

⁶ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by Maria Boulding (New York: New City, 1997), XI.38.

This chapter examines narrative time in *Beowulf* and how the poem defies historicity and resists temporal precision, especially in the second part of the poem. The poem presents the reader with more than one way of constructing time, but one of the most fundamental is the two-part division: Beowulf in Heorot (1–1887), and Beowulf and the dragon (2200–3180), with a transition describing Beowulf’s return to Geatland and his eventual accession (1888–2199). This two-part structure echoes other dualities found in the poem, the most noteworthy being the poetic contrast between night and day. The second half engages with the elegiac mode, and its unfixed time is part of this. The workings of nostalgia in the poem will be considered, especially nostalgia as a communal process. The ‘sense of an ending’ and the poem’s apocalypticism are also explored, as well as seasonal imagery and the use of time markers and times of day, especially night and day, for symbolic effect.

On balance, the timeline of *Beowulf* cannot be plotted with any accuracy. Some periods of time are undefined or unclear, while others are quantified but may still be merely symbolic and not governed by a desire for narrative realism. While Hygelac’s Frisian raid has a historical date,⁷ the defining timeframe for the poem is still *in geardagum*, signalling to the audience that

⁷ George Clark offers a timeline in his monograph, without a great deal of explanation. He places Beowulf’s birth in AD 495, and his death in 582, at the age of 87 (George Clark, *Beowulf*, Twayne’s English Authors Series, 477 (Boston: Twayne, 1990), ‘Chronologies’, pp. xv–xvi). There is one recognisably historical and so dateable moment in the poem: Hygelac’s Frisian raid. Clark notes N. F. S. Grundtvig was the first to recognise and attempt to use the date range of the raid, between 515 and 530, to date the poem (p. 44). However, as Harris notes, ‘although such repeated references to the one event in the poem that can be dated through external sources suggest an audience keenly historical, such an assumption is by no means necessary’, for all one needs to know about Hygelac in the world of the poem is given within the poem (Anne Leslie Harris, ‘The Vatic Mode in *Beowulf*’, *Neophilologus*, 74 (1990), 591–600, p. 594).

this is a poem not just about the past, but the distant past, although for all its distance it still has a bearing on the poet's present and on the possible future. The second part of the poem dwells on the transient and uncertain nature of life, as Beowulf's death leaves the Geats without a leader.

Beowulf exists in a single, damaged manuscript,⁸ with no identified sources, and its scholarship is wide-ranging. At a turning point in the history of criticism on the poem, J. R. R. Tolkien famously remarked in 1936 that *Beowulf* 'is poor in criticism, criticism that is directed to the understanding of a poem as a poem [...] *Beowulf* has been used as a quarry of fact and fancy far more assiduously than it has been studied as a work of art.'⁹ Studies of the art of the poem have since proliferated,¹⁰ as well as criticism from many other perspectives. The theme of time in *Beowulf* has certainly not been overlooked, from the employment of narratological theory¹¹ to

⁸ London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv.

⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, by J. R. R. Tolkien and ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 4–48 (p. 5).

¹⁰ Including, for example, Arthur G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959) in response to Tolkien. See also Eric G. Stanley, 'The Narrative Art of *Beowulf*', in *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen, and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1980), pp. 58–81, and John D. Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹¹ Narratology and general time: For example, Leyerle, 'The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*'; A. P. Campbell, 'The Time Element of Interlace Structure in *Beowulf*', *Neophilologische Mitteilungen*, 70 (1969), 425–35; Paul Dean, 'Beowulf and the Passing of Time', *English Studies*, 75 (1994), 193–209; Morton W. Bloomfield, "'Interlace" as a Medieval Narrative Technique, with Special Reference to *Beowulf*', in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honour of Robert Earl Kaske*, ed. by Arthur Groos (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), pp. 49–59; Robert Boenig, 'Time Markers and Treachery: The Crux at *Beowulf* 1130', *English Language Notes*, 24 (1987), 1–9; Phyllis R. Brown, 'Cycles and Change in *Beowulf*', in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. by Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University

nostalgia studies,¹² historical perspectives,¹³ the role of biblical typology,¹⁴ and apocalypticism.¹⁵

In this chapter I combine these approaches with this thesis's framework of the historical and exegetical methods refined by Bede to explore the construct and poetics of time in *Beowulf*.

Presses, 2000), pp. 171–192; John M. Hill, 'Beowulf, Value, and the Frame of Time', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 40 (1979), 3–16; Clare Kinney, 'The Needs of the Moment: Poetic Foregrounding as a Narrative Device in *Beowulf*', *Studies in Philology*, 82 (1985), 295–314; Dean Loganbill, 'Time and Monsters in *Beowulf*', *In Geardagum*, 3 (1979), 26–35; Robert Lawrence Schichler, 'As Whiteness Fades to Fallow: Riding into Time in *Beowulf*', *In Geardagum*, 14 (1993), 13–25; Raymond P. Tripp, jr, 'The Homiletic Sense of Time in *Beowulf*', *In Geardagum*, 21 (2000), 23–40

¹² Nostalgia: For example, Mary Catherine Davidson, 'Speaking of Nostalgia in *Beowulf*', *Modern Philology*, 103 (2005), 143–55; Susan M. Kim, "'As I Once Did with Grendel": Boasting and Nostalgia in *Beowulf*', *Modern Philology*, 103 (2005), 4–27; Renée R. Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series, 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

¹³ Historical perspectives: Roberta Frank, 'The *Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History', in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honour of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. by Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1982), pp. 53–65; Adelaide Hardy, 'Historical Perspective and the *Beowulf*-Poet', *English Studies*, 53 (1979), 430–46; Jeffrey Helterman, '*Beowulf*: The Archetype Enters History', *English Literary History*, 35 (1968), 1–20; Leonard Tennenhouse, '*Beowulf* and the Sense of History', *Bucknell Review*, 19 (1971), 137–46.

¹⁴ Typology: Daniel Anlezark, *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England*, Manchester Medieval Literature and Culture (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Vaughan Black and Brian Bethune, '*Beowulf* and the Rites of Holy Week', *Scintilla*, 1 (1984), 5–23; Keizo Ohba, 'A Study of Human and Divine Time in *Beowulf*', in *Annual Reports of Studies* (Kyoto: Doshisha Women's Coll., 1970) (note I have not been able to access this resource, found in the MLA database); David Williams, *Cain and Beowulf: A Study in Secular Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). See also Paul Cavill, 'Christianity and Theology in *Beowulf*', in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching*, ed. by Paul Cavill (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 15–40.

¹⁵ Apocalypse: James W. Earl, 'Apocalypticism and Mourning in *Beowulf*', *Thought*, 57 (1982), 362–70; Martin Green, 'Man, Time and Apocalypse in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*', *Journal of*

The problems of the narrative structure of the poem have drawn the attention of many scholars over the years since Tolkien's British Academy lecture, and as Clare Kinney notes, 'it appears possible to find in the poem whatever kind of narrative structure one is looking for.'¹⁶ Jeffrey Helterman's approach to the poem examines Beowulf as an archetypal figure in archetypal time, who becomes less archetypal and more 'historical' as the poem progresses and Beowulf moves into history.¹⁷ Of the final battle, Helterman suggests 'although the hero suffers ultimate defeat literally, he triumphs symbolically. This symbolic extension transforms deeds which are performed in history and are, therefore, limited, into archetypal acts which occur outside of history and are, therefore, timeless.'¹⁸ Helterman probably overstates the historicity of the narrative, which even in its latter section avoids historical specificity in various ways. Dean Loganbill follows on from Helterman, but it is difficult to agree with Loganbill in his assessment that 'the *Beowulf* poet lived much closer to an age when time was of a different shape, one rather more cyclical than linear: when an encounter with linear time was a new and piquant possibility in the face of freshly emerging epochal contrasts.'¹⁹ As has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters, in the temporal rhetoric and poetic of the Anglo-Saxons, post-conversion time incorporates both linear and cyclical aspects. In fact, though the poem evokes cyclicity in various ways, such as beginning and ending with the death of national heroes, *Beowulf* emerges much more as a linear poem, largely plotting out the trajectory of its hero's life.

English and Germanic Philology, 74 (1975), 502–18; Edward L. Ridsen, *Beasts of Time: Apocalyptic Beowulf*, *Studies in the Humanities*, 8 (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

¹⁶ Kinney, 'The Needs of the Moment', p. 297.

¹⁷ Helterman, 'Beowulf: The Archetype Enters History'.

¹⁸ Helterman, 'Beowulf: The Archetype Enters History', p. 3.

¹⁹ Loganbill, 'Time and Monsters in *Beowulf*', p. 27.

Nostalgia and Community

The first part of *Beowulf* demonstrates the importance of the hall in the community. Heorot is the site of celebrations and communality, boasts and feasts, but it is also the site of bloodshed and danger from Grendel, before, the poem intimates, being destroyed in a disagreement between kin in a future outside the timeframe of the poem (81b–85). Thus Heorot stands as both the emblem of heroic community and loyalty to a lord, as well as the disruption of that community. It is an idealised society, as Michael Cherniss notes.²⁰ Its activities, the ‘joys of the hall’ — eating, drinking, gift-giving, the scop’s songs, and oath-swearing — are all peacetime activities.²¹ The second part of the poem, in contrast, portrays no ideals, only disruption.

It is in this contrast between joy and the absence of joy that the poem engages with the aesthetics of nostalgia as defined by Renee Trilling.²² In her conception nostalgia is a collective activity:

Nostalgia, which paradoxically affirms the past (and very often a fictional past at that) by reconstituting the story of its passing, is primarily concerned with the present [...]
Literary nostalgia is thus, as Fredric Jameson has noted, principally an aesthetic project that makes use of pre-existing forms (Jameson call them stereotypes) in order to distance the reader from the present. From this perspective, Old English historical poetry, with its aesthetics of nostalgia, becomes a medium in which Anglo-Saxon England works out its collective relationship to the present through the poetic representation of a heroic past.²³

²⁰ Michael D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), p. 55.

²¹ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 57.

²² Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*.

²³ Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, p. 4.

Trilling argues that the world of *Beowulf* may never ‘really’ have existed, but instead functions as an origin myth to provide ‘a solid ideological foundation for the construction of present unity’.²⁴ The absence of the past brings about nostalgia, regardless of whether such a past ever truly existed: ‘Anglo-Saxon vernacular literature is thus haunted by the spectre of a heroic past that is always absent, a tradition that has been created by the poets and that is continually mourned by the poetry.’²⁵

Beowulf mourns this imagined past in two ways. In the first part of the poem we see all the joy of Heorot, the problems caused by Grendel’s appearance, and the restoration of the true function of the hall through Beowulf’s actions. The heroic life depicted is past for both poet and audience; the significant opening use of the expression *in geardagum* confirms this. The second part of *Beowulf*, however, portrays the breakdown of heroic life, and suggests that the Geats will be unable to overcome the loss of Beowulf. As Tolkien writes, ‘the worth of defeated valour in this world is deeply felt. As the poet looks back into the past, surveying the history of kings and warriors in the old traditions, he sees that all glory (or as we might say “culture” or “civilization”) ends in night.’²⁶ The structure of *Beowulf* can thus be broadly characterised as a movement from day to night.

²⁴ Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, p. 5.

²⁵ Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, p. 6.

²⁶ Tolkien, ‘*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics’, p. 23.

‘When Morning Came’: Night and Day

While *Beowulf* offers a complex of timeframes and symbolism, it also makes use of a simple two-part system of night and day. The dichotomy of night and day, and with it light and darkness, is repeated throughout *Beowulf*, an echo of its two-part structure as described by Tolkien: ‘In its simplest terms it [*Beowulf*] is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death.’²⁷ Clare Kinney develops the point: ‘Counterpointing these formal patterns are the thematic dualities and symbolic oppositions focused in particular by the repeated contrast between companionable joy in the well-lit hall and lonely battles in the dark against alien foes.’²⁸ The nocturnal/diurnal rhythm is highly evocative, and the night-day duality is familiar and experienced by all, as the most basic structure of time that can be observed.

The poetic meanings of night and day are reconfigured and subverted throughout the text. No times of day are referenced in the initial part about Scyld Scefing and his lineage. But when Heorot is built, the *scop* sings of the first day:

Sægde se þe cuþe
frumsceaft fira feorran reccan,
cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga eorðan worh(te),
wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð,
gesette sigehreþig sunnan ond monan
leoman to leohte landbuendum. (90b-95)

He said that which he knew how to narrate the origin of humankind from far back, said how the almighty made the earth, the beautiful land, as surrounded by water, he established the triumphant sun and moon, luminaries as light for earth-dwellers.

²⁷ Tolkien, ‘*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics’, p. 28.

²⁸ Kinney, ‘The Needs of the Moment’, p. 297.

This account of creation provides a temporal connection with Grendel and his mother, as they will soon be linked to Cain, one of the first humans. Furthermore, though the sun and moon were created to give light to men, the luminaries cannot protect the Danes from Grendel's attacks under cover of darkness.

Juxtaposed with the imagery of light for land-dwellers is Grendel, 'se þe in þystrum bad' ('one who waited in darkness', 87b), and who attacks 'syþðan niht becom' ('when night came', 115b), while the Danes are 'swefan æfter symble' ('asleep after the feast', 119). As Hugh Magennis demonstrates, in this juxtaposition 'life is seen as the feast, as the brightness of revelry in the hall, surrounded by the darkness of death'.²⁹ This recalls the use of the image of the hall through which the sparrow flies, enjoying brief warmth between intervals of darkness, described by Bede, and discussed in chapter one. For the Danes, as for the sparrow, brightness and warmth are short-lived.

Though in the evening Heorot glows with human revelry, until interrupted, the extent of Grendel's assault is made apparent only with the coming of the light of morning:

Ða wæs on uhtan mid ærdæge
 Grendles guðcræft gumum undyrne;
 þa wæs æfter wiste wop up ahafen,
 micel morgensweg. (126–29a)

Then it was at dawn, with daybreak, Grendel's war-craft was revealed to men; then after feasting weeping was raised, a great morning sound.

Implicit in this passage is that only the light of day shows the carnage in full. *Uhta* is a word that recurs in the Old English elegies, and its significance and ambivalence as a time marker will be

²⁹ Hugh Magennis, 'Beowulf, 1008a: *Swefeth Aefter Symle*', *Notes and Queries*, 29 (1982), 391–92 (p. 391).

discussed in further detail in chapter four. It generally signifies the hour before dawn,³⁰ and *uhtsang* was the canonical hour of vigils.³¹ *Morgensweg* is a word unique to *Beowulf*, although several *morgen* compounds are attested in the corpus.³² *Sweg* alone is a noun and a verb (*swegan*), with meanings of both ‘noise’ and ‘sound’ and the possibility of ‘song’. The *morgensweg* of these lines of *Beowulf* might be seen as an ironic inversion of *uhtsang*, where religious songs of praise are replaced with the din of weeping and grief.

The association of Grendel with darkness continues throughout the poem. He ‘sinnihte heold’, or ‘held continual night’ (161). He keeps the Danish people in darkness, both metaphorically in a ‘mælceare’ or ‘time of sorrow’ (189), and literally because he comes ‘swartum nihtum’ (167) and ‘deorcum nihtum’ (275), in the dark nights, and causes ‘nihtbealwa’, night-misery (193). Heorot, once a place of noise and festivity, is now ‘idel ond unnyt, siððan æfenleoht | under heofenes haðor beholen weorþeð’ (‘idle and useless, when the evening light becomes hidden under heaven’s confinement’, 413–14). The poetic compound *æfenleoht*, occurring nowhere else in the corpus of Old English, combines the noun of *leoht* with *æfen*, which usually signals the evening, although Tupper finds evidence that it is one hour before the sun sets.³³ Only when the sun is fully set can Grendel come out, and his threat renders Heorot unfit for purpose after dark.

³⁰ Frederick Tupper, Jr, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, *PMLA*, 10 (1895), 111–241 (p. 147).

³¹ Tupper, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, p. 145.

³² E.g. *morgenceald*, *morgengifu*, *morningleoht*, *morgensteorra*, *morgentid*. See Bosworth-Toller: *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. by T. Northcote Toller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898).

³³ Tupper, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, p. 179.

Daylight provides no solace from night-time fear, but only reveals what night has brought. Hrothgar tells Beowulf of the horror made visible each morning after feasts and boasting:

Ðonne wæs þeos medoheal on morgentid,
 drihtsele dreorfah þonne dæg lixte,
 eal bencþelu blode bestymed,
 heall heorudreore. (484–87a)

But then this meadhall in the morning, the splendid hall, was stained with gore when day shone, all the bench-planks wet with blood, the hall [wet] with battle blood.

These lines conjure a macabre scene of blood and gore glittering in sunshine, to emphasise the perversion of normal hall life which is the horror of Grendel's reign. Where Heorot ideally should be a place of feasting and gaiety, it is instead one of battle and bloodshed. While night provides the cover for Grendel's attacks, daylight leaves the Danes vulnerable still, not to further attack, but in the sight of carnage to the onset of grief. Instead of greeting the day with joy, they mourn their dead.

Beowulf's swimming contest with Breca, narrated soon after his arrival in Heorot, offers a reverse, in which the night is no impediment to Beowulf's battle, and in the morning it is the sea-monsters who are left injured and dying:

ac on mergenne mecum wunde
 be yðlafe uppe lægon,
 sweo[r]dum aswefede.[...]
 Leoht eastan com. (565–69b)

But in the morning, wounded by swords, they lay above beside the shore, killed by swords [...] Light came from the east.

Beowulf the night victor thus emerges as an appropriate foil for Grendel, as one capable of fighting the monster of the night. He also implicitly belittles the dangers inherent in fighting Grendel when he boasts of his swim:

No ic on niht gefrægn
 under heofones hwealf heardran feohtan,
 ne on egstreamum earmran mannon. (675b–77)

I have not heard of a harder fight at night under heaven's arch, nor a more distressed man on the seas.³⁴

Beowulf's bold prediction is that after this night, daylight will be safe once more:

Gæþ eft se þe mot
 to medo modig, sibþan morgenleoht
 ofer ylða bearn oþres dogores,
 sunne sweglwered suþan scineð. (603b–06)

Afterwards he who may will go to mead with courage, when the morning-light will shine over the children of men of the following day, the sun clothed with radiance (will shine) from the south.

Beowulf's promise here is nothing less than to restore natural order in the diurnal cycle which Grendel has interrupted. But is it significant that Beowulf says the sun will shine from the south, when roughly forty lines before he said it rose from the east during his swimming contest?

The sun should rise exactly from the east at the equinoxes, as Bede writes of the first sunrise: 'Not until the fourth morning [of Creation] did the Sun, rising from the midpoint of the east, with the hours running through their lines by the shadow, inaugurate the equinox, which has been maintained every year.'³⁵ However, for the rest of the year the sun rises north or south of

³⁴ Later he again boasts that he is a match for Grendel: 'No ic me an herewæsmun hnagran talige | guþgeweorca þonne Grendel hine' ('I do not consider myself more lowly in battle-vigour or warlike deeds than Grendel himself', 677–78).

³⁵ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 6, p. 24.

true east depending on the season. The sun's furthest rising from the south comes in mid-winter, so that between the autumn and spring equinoxes it can also be said to be 'in the south'. We find another incidence of the sun described as coming from the south, at Beowulf's return to Geatland, suggesting that the season is being noted not hypothetically, but with some precision: 'woruldandel scan, | sigel suðan fus' ('the world-candle shone, eager sun from the south', 1965b–66a). These are the only sunrises given cardinal directions in *Beowulf*, and imply that Beowulf's adventure in Denmark took place in early spring, more likely than either autumn or winter, when such travel would be unlikely. His swimming contest with Breca is represented as happening at a different time of year, when days were longer and nights shorter. In the Finn episode it is clear that sailing should not be undertaken in winter:³⁶

h[e] unhlitme eard gemunde,
 þeah þe ne meahte on mere drifan
 hringedstefnan — holm storme weol,
 won wið winde, winter yþe beleac
 isgebinde — oþ ðæt oþer com
 gear in geardas, swa nu gyt deð,
 þa ðe syngales sele bewitiað,
 wuldortorhtan weder. Ða wæs winter scacen. (1129–36)

He eagerly remembered home, though that ring-prowed ship could not drive on the sea — sea surged by storm, fight against wind, winter locked up the waves with an icy bond — until the following year came to the settlements, as it does now, when gloriously bright weather always attends the proper time. Then winter was gone.

The implication in the descriptions of the direction of sunrise is that Beowulf and his men have sailed to Denmark in spring, but probably early spring. If so, his contest with Breca can be

³⁶ On winter in the Finn episode and *Beowulf* as a whole, see Nils E. Enkvist, *The Seasons of the Year: Chapters on a Motif from Beowulf to the Shepherd's Calendar* (Helsinki: Centraltryckeriet, 1957), and Earl R. Anderson, 'The Seasons of the Year in Old English', *ASE*, 26 (1997), 231–63.

imagined to have taken place some time earlier, or close enough to an equinox so that the sun would rise due east.

These observations of the poem's embedded timeframe invite reflection on the reason the poet has located the Grendelkin episode near the spring equinox. The sun was created at the spring equinox, along with the moon and the stars — a fact, as we have seen, that the scop sings about in Heorot. As Bede wrote, Easter must follow the full moon after the equinox, 'for the sake of a certain symbolism, because the created Sun which lights up all the stars signifies the *true* and eternal *light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*.³⁷ Christ is also the light of the world, and parallels between Beowulf and Christ may well be implied by the poet.³⁸ The season also suggests metaphoric associations with Beowulf's youth: he is in the springtime of his life, as discussed further below.

To return to the poem's use of the diurnal cycle, Beowulf imagines that Grendel has been plotting all day:

wiste þæm ahlæcan
to þæm heahsele hilde geþinged,
siððan hie sunnan leoht geseon meahton
oþ ðe nipende niht ofer ealle,
scaduhelma gesceapu scriðan cwoman,
wan under wolcnum. (646b-51a)

He [Beowulf] knew the adversary intended battle at the high-hall, since they could see the sun's light until night over all, shapes of darkness came to stride, dark under clouds.

³⁷ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 25. I have preserved the italics of the editor, which indicate that Bede is quoting from another source, in this case John 1.9.

³⁸ See Black and Bethune, 'Beowulf and the Rites of Holy Week', though they do not go so far as to make Beowulf a Christ-type.

As predicted, Grendel moves out of night: ‘com on wanre niht | scriðan sceadugenga’ (‘the shadow-walker came to move in the dark night’, 702b-03a). Heorot is ‘fætum fahne’ (‘shining with gold’, 716a), the first mention of literal illumination or brightness of the hall’s exterior, while light also comes from Grendel’s eyes: ‘him of eagum stod | ligge gelicost leoht unfæger’ (‘eerie light emanated from his eyes, most like fire’, 726b-27). This light, because it is literally ‘un-fair’, emphasises Grendel’s animal side. ‘Ær þon dæg cwome’ (‘before the day comes’, 730b), he intends to attack.

Beowulf’s accomplishment in defeating Grendel is described as ‘night-work’: ‘nihtweorce gefeh, | ellenmærpum’ (‘he rejoiced in his night-work, his heroic deeds’, 827b-28a). When morning comes, what is visible is not carnage caused by Grendel but the trail of his own blood showing the way to his mere: already Beowulf has effected the reversal that he promised. The men enjoy the morning of victory, riding horses and telling stories while the light advances (‘ða wæs morgenleoht | scofen ond scynded’; ‘then the morning-light was pushed and quickly advanced’, 917b-18a). Now even Heorot is full of light, brightness shining from its tapestries (‘web’, 995), and presumably light entering through the broken doors (998). The scop sings in honour of Beowulf, the word *sweg* used at line 1063 in opposition to the *morgensweg* heard earlier, signalling that the inversion is over and where there was weeping there is now singing.

The scop’s story begins with Hildeburh’s grief, also experienced in the morning:

Nalles holinga Hoces dohtor
 meotodsceaft bemearn syþðan morgen com,
 ða heo under swegle geseon meahte
 morþorbealo maga, þær he[o] ær mæste heold
 worolde wynne. (1076–80a)

Not at all in vain Hoc's daughter bewailed over the death when morning came, when she could see under heaven the slaughter of her kinsmen, where she previously possessed the greatest of the world's joy.

Once again the morning light reveals the extent of an evening's battle, occasioning grief and sorrow. Hildeburh's mourning in the digression is both an echo of the troubles the Danes repeatedly experienced as each morning illuminated the results of Grendel's rampage, and a foreshadowing of the next morning to come in the poem, after the attack by Grendel's mother. For though as the 'æfen cwom' (1235) and all go to 'æfenræste' (1252), Grendel's mother attacks.

This time the Danes react to the attack immediately, instead of waiting until morning to see the results. The timing of the attack is unclear but Beowulf is quickly on the trail. The poet does not state clearly whether the sun has yet risen, but 'lastas wæron | æfter waldswaþum wide gesyne' ('there were tracks along the forest-paths far and wide', 1402b-03); the implication is that there is enough daylight to see the marks left by Grendel's mother. In and around the mere are various sea-monsters, including *nicras* (1427), which Beowulf fought previously (575) so they should present no danger to him now. These are morning animals: 'ða on undernmæl oft bewitigað | sorhfulne sið on segrade' ('who at morning-time often watch the dismal undertaking on the sail-road', 1428-29). There is no other time-marker, but given the poet's comment that the sea-monsters can be seen at *undernmæl*, then the implication is that hour is close. Tupper notes that 'undern meant to the Anglo-Saxon the time midway between Sunrise and Midday, and was to the morning what None was to the afternoon',³⁹ it means the third hour, i.e. 9.00am, but can also mean mid-morning more generally.⁴⁰ It was also the normal time for

³⁹ Tupper, 'Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl', p. 161.

⁴⁰ Tupper, 'Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl', p. 162.

morning mass, as well as the appointed time for breakfast.⁴¹ The significance of *undernmæl* here figures the various monsters as creatures visible during the day, though perhaps not given to attack as they *bewitian*, watch, instead. *Undern* also signifies the interruption in the natural order that is taking place: the men should be at home, taking their morning meal together, instead of waiting by the mere.

Beowulf dives into the mere, and ‘*ða wæs hwil dæg*es | *ær he þone grundwong ongytan mehte*’ (‘then it was the space of time of a day before he could perceive the bottom of the mere’, 1495b-96). The phrase *hwil dæg*es presents notorious interpretative difficulties, and as Mark Griffith notes, *hwil* is usually considered an indefinite length of time, while *dæg* has a clear definition of either daylight or 24 hours.⁴² The most literal translation would be something like ‘it was the period of a day’, but most critics suggest this is literally impossible, both in human reality and in the logic of the poem: it does not take the time of a day for Beowulf to return to the surface (1618–23).⁴³ Furthermore, as Griffith points out, when Beowulf strikes a blow on Grendel’s corpse the blood can be seen on the surface *sona* (‘immediately’, 1591), hardly possible if the mere were so deep that it took a day to reach the bottom.⁴⁴ R. M. Liuzza translates

⁴¹ Tupper, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, p. 163.

⁴² Mark Griffith, ‘*Beowulf* 1495: Hwil Dæges = Momentum Temporis?’ , *Notes and Queries*, 41 (1994), 144–46 (p. 144).

⁴³ For an argument against the supernatural abilities sometimes ascribed to Beowulf see Fred C. Robinson, ‘Elements of the Marvelous in the Characterization of Beowulf: A Reconsideration of the Textual Evidence’, in *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. by Robert B. Burlin and Edward B. Irving, Jr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 119–37; repr. in *The Tomb of Beowulf and Other Essays on Old English*, ed. by Fred C. Robinson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), pp. 23–4.

⁴⁴ Griffith, ‘*Beowulf* 1495: Hwil Dæges’, p. 144.

hwil dæges literally as ‘the space of a day’ but footnotes the most likely alternative translation of ‘it was daylight’.⁴⁵ Griffith notes that Fred Robinson also suggested the translation of ‘daylight’.⁴⁶ Griffith’s argument against these translations is the visibility of the monsters and tracks mentioned above; indeed, since it is *undernmæl* when they arrive then it is already day and light. Griffith argues that *dæg* can also mean a portion of time, referencing such usage in Middle English, and comparing with *morgenlangne dæg* in *Beowulf* 2894 (discussed below), which ‘must mean “time lasting as long as a morning”, that is, “the whole morning”’.⁴⁷ Griffith concludes that the *hwil dæges* equates to the Latin *momentum temporis*, as ‘a very brief space of time’.⁴⁸ James Earl similarly suggests that *hwil dæges* ‘could mean just “a little while”’, comparing it to *ær dæges hwile* (2320) and *dæghwil* (2726).⁴⁹

While it seems logical to accept that *hwil dæges* means a shorter amount of time than the space of a day, Griffith does not note another important time marker during this episode, that when ‘com non dæges’ (‘the ninth hour of day came’, 1600a), the Scyldings ‘gewat him ham þonon’ (‘went home from there’, 1601b). Only the Geats are left to wait nervously for Beowulf to surface, which he soon does. The ninth hour is precisely 3.00pm, or generally mid-afternoon,

⁴⁵ R. M. Liuzza, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview, 2000), p. 99.

⁴⁶ Robinson, ‘Elements of the Marvelous in the Characterization of Beowulf’, following a suggestion of S. O. Andrew, *Postscript on ‘Beowulf’* (Cambridge, 1948), 98–9, in Griffith, ‘*Beowulf* 1495: Hwil Dæges’, p. 144.

⁴⁷ Griffith, ‘*Beowulf* 1495: Hwil Dæges’, p. 145.

⁴⁸ Griffith, ‘*Beowulf* 1495: Hwil Dæges’, p. 145.

⁴⁹ James W. Earl, ‘Beowulf’s Rowing-Match’, *Neophilologus*, 63 (1979), 285–90 (p. 288). Earl’s principle argument is that the swimming contest with Breca did not involve swimming but rowing, and so of the mere he says, ‘whatever these words mean, it is not said in these lines that Beowulf is underwater; we know only that he was swimming and that it was a while before he could “ongytan” his destination’ (p. 288).

and if it was *undernmæl* or thereabouts when the men approached the mere then the poet is clearly saying that Beowulf spends approximately six hours underwater. This is still of course a long time, and certainly implies a marvellous feat; it also signifies that the normal relationships between time and nature have been disrupted. Black and Bethune, in their liturgical reading of the poem, note that the *hora nona* was the hour of the vigil of the faithful on Holy Saturday, and that ‘here the poet in fact conflates two separate incidents of the Easter cycle, for *hora nona* was also the very hour of Christ’s death on Good Friday’; it is also when the blood of Grendel’s mother rises to the surface,⁵⁰ mixed with water, as water and blood flowed from Christ’s side when He was pierced. So ‘at that moment the liturgical echo moves, symbolically, from Friday to Saturday as the Geats switch from a death watch [...] to a tomb vigil’.⁵¹ Black and Bethune’s reading, while fascinating, stops short of Easter Sunday and avoids the question of whether Beowulf is truly meant to be a Christ-figure; they openly admit they will not go so far as to suggest the whole poem is a Christian allegory.⁵² If the earlier references to the sun in the south signal the equinox, then a reference to spring or Easter in this part of the text is possible, as an engagement with the poetic of liturgical time.

On his return home to Geatland, Beowulf describes the timing of his fight with Grendel with the word *uhthlem*, 2007. The word means something like an ‘early-morning crash, uproar, or battle’; however, as already noted, *uhtha* is normally the dark hour before dawn. Beowulf and Grendel’s fight is probably not being described as having taken place at that exact hour; instead, the word again suggests that the fight took place at an inappropriate general time of day.

⁵⁰ Black and Bethune, ‘*Beowulf* and the Rites of Holy Week’, p. 18.

⁵¹ Black and Bethune, ‘*Beowulf* and the Rites of Holy Week’, p. 18.

⁵² Black and Bethune, ‘*Beowulf* and the Rites of Holy Week’, p. 5.

Beowulf also describes Grendel with the hapax legomenon *æfengrom* (2074), meaning ‘angry in the evening’ or, more specifically, ‘angry in the last hour before sunset’. The word emphasises that Grendel’s temporality is not shared with men. In the evenings men feast, drink, and talk; they do not attack or harbour anger.⁵³

As with the Grendelkin, the dragon of the second part of *Beowulf* is described in abnormal temporal terms. It is an ‘eald uhtsceaða’ (2271), an ancient pre-dawn enemy or robber. That the dragon is a creature of *uhta* is evidence of its inhumanity, and again a perversion of the usual activities appropriate to the hour of *uhta*.⁵⁴ However, the range of meaning for *uhta* as relates to the dragon may be less precise than the pre-dawn hour, given the many references to its evening activity, such as how it ‘nihtes fleogeð | fyre befangen’ (‘flies by night encircled with fire’ 2273b–74a). Once his hoard has been disturbed, the enraged dragon must wait for the evening before he can act, as Grendel and his mother also waited to attack at night:

Hordweard onbad
 earfoðlice oð ðæt æfen cwom;
 wæs ða gebolgen beorges hyrde,
 wolde se laða lige forgyldan
 drincfæt dyre. Ða wæs dæg sceacen
 wyrme on willan. (2302b-07a)

The hoard-guardian waited impatiently until evening came. The guardian of the barrow was then enraged, he wanted the enemy to pay for the precious drinking-vessel with flame. Then day was departed, to the dragon’s pleasure.

⁵³ Although see Theodore M. Andersson, ‘The Discovery of Darkness in Northern Literature’, in *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. by Robert B. Burlin and Edward B. Irvin, Jr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 1–14, for an alternative view, that the Germanic peoples were used to night fighting.

⁵⁴ See Tupper, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, and the discussion in the next chapter.

Having ravaged the Geats in revenge, the dragon returns home before daylight: ‘hord eft gesceat, | dryhtsele dyrnne, ær dæges hwile’ (2319b-20). The time that Beowulf receives news of the attack is signalled only by the noncommittal ‘þa’, but it is most likely morning; the dragon’s damage would have been made visible by the light in an echo of the Danes discovering Grendel’s carnage. Beowulf fights the dragon during the day, and there is no suggestion that the dragon is harmed by daylight; it is simply a creature of the night.

The final morning of the poem is Beowulf’s last. The unique expression *morgenlongne dæg* is used to articulate the anxiety of his men as they await the outcome of the dragon fight:

Heht ða þæt heaðoweorc to hagan biodan
 up ofer ecgclif, þær þæt eorlweorod
 morgenlongne dæg modgiomor sæt,
 bordhæbbende, bega on wenum,
 endedogores ond eftcymes
 leofes monnes. (2892–97a)

He commanded then that the battle-work be announced to the enclosure up over the steep cliff, where the band of warriors sat the morning-long day, shield-bearing, sad at heart, both in expectation, of the last day and of the return of the well-loved man.

Bosworth-Toller favour the metaphoric meaning for this expression of ‘having a long morning’,⁵⁵ and Eric Stanley agrees: ‘The words “morgenlong dæg” form an illogical combination that conveys with great economy how the lonely fear of early morning is extended into the day as the band of nobles sat, grieving in their hearts, waiting for news of Beowulf, his death or safe return.’⁵⁶ The morning not only feels long because the men wait in fear, but it is likely literally long, with time extending past midday and into the afternoon. Where the Danes

⁵⁵ Bosworth-Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.

⁵⁶ Eric Stanley, ‘Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Penitent’s Prayer*’, *Anglia*, 73 (1955), 413–66 (p. 435).

awoke to Grendel's slaughter, and the Geats to the dragon's ravages, Beowulf's men suffer fear long past the morning. Neither night nor day are safe for them now, and the passage makes this clear with the word *endedogores*. They expect the *endedæg* for Beowulf, and ultimately for themselves. For Beowulf, this is the last morning of his life, and it is *morgenlongne* in that it will last forever.

Ahistoricity and in Geardagum

Beowulf deliberately resists precise historical dating from its first line, with the phrase *in geardagum* setting the poem in an indeterminate, distant past. The compound *geardagum* is similar to the *fyrndagum* in the opening of *Andreas*; that poet, too, consciously placed his narrative in a time far removed from the present (though undoubtedly in the Apostolic era of the first century).⁵⁷ The word *geardagum* in *Beowulf* constructs a barrier between both the poem and the poet – he speaks of a time that is not his time – as well as the poem and its audience across time: we read of a time that is not our time, and in fact, was set far back in time even for those for whom it was originally made. Compared with the definitive date given at the start of *Elene*, the effect is one of anti-historicity, a deliberate push towards the murky past of myth, in which there are no numbered years. The poet's perspective, in Tolkien's words, is 'of antiquity with a greater and yet darker antiquity behind'.⁵⁸ The effect is cumulative: if Beowulf and his story belong to a misty past, then Scyld Scefing is almost lost in the mists of time.

⁵⁷ Whether he did so in imitation of *Beowulf* is another matter. See the discussion in chapter two.

⁵⁸ Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', p. 31.

However, the pastness of *geardagum* is soon balanced by the genealogical list of generations between Scyld Scefing and Hrothgar: Scyld, Beowulf Scylding, Healfdene, and then Hrothgar.⁵⁹ Four generations is hardly an ancient lineage. George Clark also concludes that *geardagum* refers to a time not as old as it might seem to modern readers:

From the opening lines the narrator places the action of *Beowulf* in another country and another, earlier, time, but an Anglo-Saxon audience learned in a vernacular poetic tradition could have deduced that the people and action of the poem belong to a familiar past, not deepest antiquity. The poem's action and actors seem to belong to an era of particular importance to the Anglo-Saxons, a period in which the legendary past and their almost definable history met.⁶⁰

However, that there are only four generations between Scyld Scefing and Hrothgar means that the Danes in the narrative present of *Beowulf* are *in geardagum* themselves. Like the incorrect *anno Domini* date that opens *Elene*, the effect is more important than the temporal truth. The frame of *in geardagum* signals that the ensuing narrative is over and past.

The *Beowulf*-poet continues to create an atmosphere of antiquity by using *geardagum* twice more. First, Hrothgar traces Grendel's existence to days of yore: 'þone on geardagum Grendel nemdon | foldbuende' ('who in days of yore earth-dwellers named Grendel', 1354–55a). Second, the dragon's treasure lies in the cave 'swa hy on geardagum gumena nathwylc | eormenlafa [...] þær gehydde' ('because in days of yore a certain man hid an immense legacy there', 2233–35). This is a *geardagas* of the *geardagum*, establishing greater temporal distances. The *geardagum* formula links Scyld Scefing, Grendel, and the Last Survivor as figures from a

⁵⁹ See Daniel Anlezark, 'Sceaf, Japheth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons', *ASE*, 31 (2002), 13–46 on royal genealogies of the period.

⁶⁰ Clark, *Beowulf*, p. 43.

time so long ago that it cannot be quantified. *Geardag* is the age of myth and legend, of Grendelkin and disappearing tribes.

Elsewhere in *Beowulf* the poet is more specific when constructing his timeframes, to the point where it is possible for us to construct a timeline of the events in *Beowulf*. These are the time periods given:

<i>in geardagum</i> :	Scyld Scefing's rule/funeral (1)
	Grendel known and named by locals (1354)
	Treasure buried by Last Survivor (2233)
1000 years:	Length of time treasure seems to have been buried (3050)
300 years:	Length of time dragon sat on hoard before being disturbed (2278)
50 years:	Length of time Grendel's mother was in the mere (1498)
50 years:	Length of time Hrothgar has ruled the Danes (1769)
50 years:	Length of time Beowulf rules Geats before death (2209, 2733)
12 years:	Length of time Grendel terrorizes the Danes (147)
7 years:	Beowulf's age when fostered to Hrethel (2428)

That aside from the smallest two, all of the numbers are large and round, suggests that they are not intended to be precise, but to indicate relatively large lengths of time in a scheme of numerical rhetoric. The modern reader is able to date Beowulf's arrival in Denmark to some time in the reign of the historical figure Hygelac, so to the early sixth century, though it is impossible to know if the poet or his readers were aware of this timeframe; the poet certainly makes no appeal to it.⁶¹ Beowulf's arrival in Denmark is the key event of the poem and anchored by the poet in the specific timeframes for events before and after. Beowulf's arrival at Heorot is x . Prior to x , Grendel has terrorised the Danes for twelve years. Beowulf was fostered to Hrethel when 7, and is presumably in his late teens at his arrival (see below), so these events are close together. 50 years before x , both Hrothgar and Grendel's mother assumed reign of their respective halls. Some time *in geardagum* before x , Scyld Scefing's funeral took place, and Grendel was known

⁶¹ The Frisian raid is described in Gregory of Tours's *History of the Franks*.

to local folk. The second part of the poem occurs at y , more than fifty years after x ; because we do not know how much time elapses before Beowulf takes the Geatish throne, only that he holds it for fifty years. 300 years before y , the dragon discovered the treasure, which appears to have been buried for one thousand years before y . My attempts to draw a literal timeline have been stymied by the lack of details, especially for the second part of the poem. Without knowing the number of years between x and y , the other events cannot be put in order. This does not mean that the timeframe does not have meaning. In number symbolism, these are all quite significant numbers, and it is not unreasonable to expect that they have been chosen for rhetorical and symbolic effect rather than a desire for chronological precision.

If the numbers are meant to be literally applied, they would appear to belie Grendel's supposed ancientness. Grendel's mother 'ða floda begong | heorogifre beheold hund missera' ('occupied the expanse of water, sword-greedy, for a hundred half-years', 1497–98). The exact phrase *hund missera* is also used of Hrothgar, who says: 'swa ic Hring-Dena hund missera | weold under wolcnum' ('so I ruled the Ring-Danes for a hundred half-years on earth', 1769–70a). *Missere* can mean either a half-year or a full year, or even a season, but as Hrothgar has clearly not reigned for one hundred full years, the half-year meaning is appropriate applied to him, and a different meaning should not be expected when describing Grendel's mother. Fifty years may be a poetic idiom for longevity and not intended literally. Biblically, fifty years is a time of jubilee in the Old Testament, in which slaves are freed, debts forgiven, and there is rejuvenation of life and worship.⁶² Fifty is certainly a key point in the lives of Hrothgar,

⁶² See 'fifty' in David Lyle Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).

Grendel's mother, and Beowulf: for the latter two it marks their death, and in the case of Hrothgar, presumably he does not live long beyond his fifty years on the throne.

The fact that Beowulf's reign is also described as one of fifty years also suggests that the period is simply meant in the poem to signify a good length of time, and that any historical length of the reigns of Hrothgar and Beowulf is not important. A literal fifty years for Hrothgar and Beowulf would leave them both very old at the ends of their reigns, as the text also implies in various ways, but it is not seen by the poet as important to say exactly *how* old. Beowulf's possible age measured in years at the end of the poem would depend on how old he and his fellow Geats are when he defeats Grendel. He is said to be 'se yldesta', the oldest (258) of the party of Geats, however, *yldesta* here may refer to higher social status rather than age. Beowulf's relative age matters because the poem crystallises his life into two great moments: the valiant act of his youth in slaying Grendel, and his last stand against the dragon in old age. As we shall see, Beowulf's elderly status at the end of the poem comes to symbolise the ageing of the world, and especially the heroic world he embodies, and the proximity of his death. The age of the dragon and the treasure, and the linking of Grendelkin with Cain, are also drawn into the temporal scheme of the poem in this movement towards the elegiac.

Beowulf and The Elegiac Mode

The passing of the Geatish kingdom to Beowulf's rule is described in just a few short lines, which both narrate his accession and introduce the dragon:

syððan Beowulfe br(a)de rice
 on hand gehwearf; he geheold tela
 fiftig wintr(a) — wæs ða frod cyning,

eald eþel(w)eard — oð ðæt (a)n ongan
 deorcum nihtum draca rics[i]an. (2207–11)

Then the broad kingdom passed to the hand of Beowulf. He ruled well for fifty winters — he was a wise king, an old guardian of the land — until a certain dragon began to rule the dark nights.

In this transition preference is given to the dragon. The action of the second part of *Beowulf* takes up less time than the events of part one; compared to the several days of part one part two takes place, Clare Kinney observes, in about twenty-four hours, so that ‘temporal and geographical scope are equally compressed’.⁶³ The digressions in the second part are also fewer than the first,⁶⁴ and less wide-ranging, as Leyerle notes:

In the second part of the poem Beowulf’s preparations to fight the dragon are constantly intersected by allusions to the Swedish wars, ominous warnings of the full consequences to the Geats of Beowulf’s dragon fight. In this way the poet undercuts Beowulf’s single-minded preoccupation with the dragon by interlacing a stream of more and more pointed episodes about the human threats to his people, a far more serious danger than the dragon poses.⁶⁵

While the first half of the poem made reference to great names of myth and legend, the focus of the second part narrows to the particular dangers that face the Geats. The poet leaves behind the specific names, numbers, and places of the first part, preferring instead the elegiac mode of anonymity and ambiguity. A vague shadowiness permeates the second half of *Beowulf*; this section lacks much historical detail, with the Geatish court having no name and Beowulf being an unattested king, as many have noted, including Christine Rauer.⁶⁶ A similar shortage of names and details is found in the Old English elegies, where this lack functions as a generalising force

⁶³ Kinney, ‘The Needs of the Moment’, p. 312.

⁶⁴ Kinney, ‘The Needs of the Moment’, p. 313.

⁶⁵ Leyerle, ‘The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*’, pp. 146–47.

⁶⁶ Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), p. 36.

to induce a sense of shared experience and the recognition that grief, loneliness, and transience are universal.⁶⁷

Two particularly elegiac passages are those commonly called the ‘The Lay of the Last Survivor’ (2247–66)⁶⁸ and ‘The Father’s Lament’ (2444–62a). These figures have no names in the text, although the ‘Father’ may be Hrethel; it is not clear which.⁶⁹ As Kinney writes, these passages ‘offer us speakers who create powerful alternative narrative focal points which temporarily take precedence over the sequential unfolding of the fiction, even if only through negation’.⁷⁰ The Last Survivor and the Father join other unnamed figures in the second part of *Beowulf*: the slave who steals the cup from the dragon, the cowardly men who accompany Beowulf to the fight,⁷¹ the messenger who delivers news of Beowulf’s death, and the Geatish woman who laments at Beowulf’s funeral. Only Beowulf and Wiglaf are named and featured. The absence of names for the other figures participating in the narrative action has a generalising effect. It is a reminder that when heroic society disintegrates, people fall into anonymity and are forgotten; this anonymity is the antithesis of heroic reputation and its poetic remembrance.

The ominous mood of this part of *Beowulf* is a commonplace of criticism. R. M. Liuzza describes ‘The Lay of the Last Survivor’ as ‘an elegy for all the bright world of the poem’s early

⁶⁷ For a general introduction to the elegiac see Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992).

⁶⁸ Technically not a lay or lai, but the title has persisted nonetheless.

⁶⁹ See A. R. Taylor, ‘Two Notes on *Beowulf*’, *Leeds Studies in English*, 7–8 (1952), 1–17, the first note of which is about the ‘father’s lament’ section of *Beowulf*. Taylor summarises the problems of the passage at the time of his writing, which have not been resolved today.

⁷⁰ Kinney, ‘The Needs of the Moment’, pp. 309–10.

⁷¹ Although this bears structural symmetry with Beowulf’s journey to Denmark, in which only his companion Hondscio (2076) is named; in the dragon fight, only Wiglaf is named.

sections, all the feasts, all the rewards, all the honor and fame, all now lost to the inevitability of decline and death'.⁷² This elaborates on and nuances Tolkien's assessment of *Beowulf* as a whole: 'if we must have a term, we should choose rather "elegy". It is an heroic-elegiac poem.'⁷³ The elegy is for Beowulf, the dead hero, and it is also for the world that has passed. For Eric Stanley,

because the poet looks back the tone is elegiac, full of retrospection tinged with regret, with many gloomy forebodings. It is not an exultation celebrating victories, for the joy that a victorious king brings about will soon yield to sorrow when old age, disease, or regicide overtakes him, and his death leads to a period of unstable lordlessness.⁷⁴

The Old English elegies are about loss and longing, individual suffering in the absence of community, and the inability of speakers to overcome their present. The second half of *Beowulf* constructs the conditions in which Old English elegies could occur: a community is left vulnerable and unprotected, individuals are isolated, and suffering becomes the norm.

⁷² R. M. Liuzza, 'Introduction', *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2000), pp. 11–48 (p. 38).

⁷³ Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', p. 31.

⁷⁴ Eric Stanley, 'Beowulf: Lordlessness in Ancient Times Is the Theme, as Much as the Glory of Kings, If Not More', *Notes and Queries*, 52 (2005), 267–81 (p. 268). As the title of his article suggests, Stanley argues that the main theme of the poem is the fear of lordlessness and thus the importance of smooth successions, though not necessarily a hereditary succession, for he argues that early Germanic tribes elected their kings from a royal house, not necessarily son to son, but 'the man who at the time seemed most likely to rule effectively' (p. 268). This emphasis in *Beowulf* on unsettling times 'is the result of the memory of such periods in the politics of the poet's own time or that of his parents or grandparents' (269). His claim 'if the poem was the product of a religious house the use of writing materials for a non-religious purpose, and containing nothing of such secular learning as might have been highly valued in monastic circles, it might nevertheless have commended itself to some extent by manifesting piety, and that it does at every turn' (p. 276) ignores the scientific learning present in the poem with respect to time, particularly natural and canonical time.

The Last Survivor's story explains the origin of the dragon's treasure. One man is left alive after the rest of his community dies, so he buries their now useless treasure, and then dies himself. What happened to everyone else is unclear; 'deað' (2236), 'guðdeað' ('death in battle', 2249), and 'bealocwalm' ('baleful death', 2265) are mentioned as causes, but no precise detail is given, no history told. *Deað* also brings about the end of the Last Survivor as well (2269). The introduction to his speech invokes the distant time period *in geardagum* for the third and final time in *Beowulf* (2233). Unlike the earlier two uses of *geardagas*, the Last Survivor is more definitively located in the uncountable days of yore. He and his tribe have no names because they have become lost in time; they are a myth now.

While the Last Survivor's story is set by the poet *in geardagum*, the poem implies some continuity with his present, because The Last Survivor's story is the inverse of the anticipated end of the Geats. He is one man mourning for a community, while the end of the poem sees the Geatish community mourning for one man. The Last Survivor is a man without a leader and a tribe, and the Geats are a tribe without a leader, seemingly leaving them vulnerable to the ultimate destruction of their race.⁷⁵ Wiglaf's speech to the other retainers at lines 2864–91 recalls aspects of the language used by the Last Survivor when he reminds them of their time in the hall, of helmets and mailcoats, and the end of joys (the shared vocabulary includes 'maðmas' ('treasures', 2865), 'helm' ('helmet', 2868) and 'byrnan' ('mail-coat', 2868), words found in the Lay at lines 2236, 2255 and 2260 respectively). Where the Last Survivor and his tribe had use of the treasure, and then bury it, unused, Wiglaf unearths the treasure, but he and the Geats receive no joy and no use from it and bury it again, interring it in Beowulf's barrow.

⁷⁵ See Stanley, '*Beowulf*: Lordlessness in Ancient Times Is the Theme', and Michael Drout, 'Blood and Deeds: The Inheritance Systems in *Beowulf*', *Studies in Philology*, 104 (2007), 199-226.

The Last Survivor is left to wander, ‘giomormod’ (‘sad of mind’, 2267), and he has only his memories for company — though he is unknown to the characters in the poem, and forgotten by them. In the construction of the past described in the Lay, heroic life was much as we saw it at Heorot: centred around the hall and its joys, the music and the drinking, the horses and hawks, the polishing of armour, and inevitable battles. But where the *Beowulf*-poet often reminds the audience that the joys of Heorot will come to an end, the joys of the hall the Last Survivor knew are already at an end, and while their material remains are uncovered, their memory is lost. They happened in the past, and have come to an end in oblivion. The continuity between past and present begun by these shared activities is also broken by the disruption of their history. The disrupted state of the Last Survivor is seen as unnatural — it embodies the conventional wisdom expressed in Maxims I, ‘earn biþ se þe sceal ana lifgan, | wineleas wunian hafap him wyrd geteod’⁷⁶ (‘he is wretched who has to live alone, fate has prepared him to remain friendless’) — and the Last Survivor cannot survive long in it. Similarly, we never see Beowulf’s hall and its joys firsthand: though Hygelac’s court appears in fitt XXVIII, Beowulf’s is only seen secondhand, in Wiglaf’s speech urging his companions to remember the promises they made in the hall at lines 2633–35a, and again at line 2865. Wiglaf the retainer retrospectively recalls his lord’s hall, just as the Last Survivor is a retainer remembering his joys in the hall — but the Last Survivor himself is forgotten. It is as if Beowulf’s hall and kingdom have already passed into the past, its joys lost. The significant difference is that the poem commemorates Beowulf, giving him a place in the heroic ‘days of yore’.

⁷⁶ ‘Maxims I:C’, in *Anglo-Saxon Verse Charms, Maxims and Heroic Legends*, ed. by Louis J. Rodrigues (Felinfach: Llanerch, 1993), pp. 120–23 (35–36).

Like the speakers of the Old English elegies, the Last Survivor no longer has any social context. He lacks a community to appreciate heroic deeds, and a ‘scop’ to sing his song. Thus his name does not survive, and the poet includes him, paradoxically, as a memory of what has been forgotten. Edward B. Irving notes that a nameless speaker is the antithesis of a hero, because he has no reputation, and ‘usually the nameless speaker finds himself in an irremediable situation, where he can do nothing but lament his helplessness and misery’.⁷⁷ Other unnamed characters in *Beowulf* can at least be defined by their place in the community, but the Last Survivor is without a community. His situation is unusual because if, as Michael Drout says, ‘there is no escape from the social system, because the system defines individual identity’,⁷⁸ then the Last Survivor is outside the system and his identity is lost. His situation illustrates what Drout calls the failure of inheritance, because ‘the great limitation of heroic civilization is that heroes and their lineages, children, great halls, and treasures will all pass from the earth’.⁷⁹ For a brief moment, the *Beowulf*-poet envisions the passage of the heroic world before it has fully happened within the poem, and demonstrates the impact on any who might be left behind. However, for the poet and his audience, that world is already long gone, and *Beowulf* is its last echo.

The failure of the pattern of inheritance and descent is also illustrated by The Father’s Lament, though it is at least implied that the Father has other sons, in whom he is not interested (2451b–53a). The lament is part of Beowulf’s speech as a prelude to his fight with the dragon, in which he recalls again the high points of his early life, his own history. As a whole, Beowulf’s speech reminds the reader of Beowulf’s loyalty and his skill in battle, but it also highlights the

⁷⁷ Edward B. Irving, *Introduction to ‘Beowulf’* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 76.

⁷⁸ Drout, ‘Blood and Deeds’, p. 226.

⁷⁹ Drout, ‘Blood and Deeds’, p. 225.

problems of heroic life in the tragic death of Herebeald at the hands of Hæðcyn, which leaves Hrethel unable to seek revenge for his loss. The Father's Lament is an extended simile which compares Hrethel's grief to that of an old man whose son has been hanged:

Swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle
to gebidanne, þæt his byre ride
giong on galgan. Þonne he gyd wrece,
sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað
hrefne to hroðre, ond he him helpe ne mæg,
eald ond infrod ænige gefremman,
symble bið gemyndgad morna gehwylce
eaforan ellorsið; oðres ne gymeð
to gebidanne burgum in innan
yrfewardas, þonne se an hafað
þurh deaðes nyd dæda gefondad.
Gesyhð sorhcearig on his suna bure
winsele westne, windge reste
reot[gle berofene; ridend swefað,
hæleð in hoðman; nis þær hearpan sweg,
gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu wæron.
Gewiteð þonne on sealman, sorhleod gæleð
an æfter anum; þuhte him eall to rum,
wongas ond wicstede. (2444–62a)

So it is sad for an old man to live to see his young son swing on the gallows. Then he utters a speech, a sad cry, since his son hangs for the benefit of the raven, and he cannot perform any help for him, though very old and wise. Always each morning the death of his son is called to mind; he does not care to wait for other heirs, within the homestead, when one of them has experienced distress through death's action. He looks sorrowfully on his son's room, the deserted winehall, the windy resting-place, dreary, deprived; the rider sleeps, men are in graves; there is no music of the harp, no entertainment in the yards, such as there previously was. Then he goes to the couch, sings a song of sorrow, one after another; the lands and home all seem to him too large.

Sweg recurs, the music or noise of the *hearpan*, although silent now. There should be joy and noise in the house, but there is none, because the man's son is dead. The temporal poetics of this section include: the reversal of the ordinary pattern, of parents dying before offspring; the man's morning sorrowfulness; the absence of joy of the past. In the oscillating time frame of the latter

part of the poem, the passage is another element in the elegiac mood of forgetful remembrance, and an anticipation of the misery that will descend upon the Geats at the loss of Beowulf.

In both *The Lay of the Last Survivor* and *The Father's Lament* communal tragedy is channelled through the subjective experience of lone figures. In their solitary state — the Father clearly feels alone in his grief, even if he has other heirs nearby — they express communal loss, although the Lay engages more fully in the aesthetics of nostalgia than the Father's Lament, as it concerns the loss of a whole community, rather than the loss of one person from it. The outlook for both figures is bleak, as it is for the speakers of the Old English elegies, who have each suffered some kind of loss that cannot be replaced. Their emotions cannot be repaired, and sorrow seems a permanent state. The weight of their emotions traps them, physically and mentally, and yet they are able to range over the past and contemplate the future, albeit often with a pessimistic outlook. The second part of *Beowulf* thus engages in the elegiac mode, especially through these two passages, to indicate the future of the Geats on both the communal and personal level. The bright hall that is at the centre of heroic life is now windswept and empty; the storm that raged outside in Bede's King Edwin episode has now come within. The one phenomenon capable of obliterating past and future is a present which forgets.

The Ages of Man and World

As has been seen, time operates differently in the second part of *Beowulf*. George Clark describes this change as follows:

The past in *Beowulf* could be described as layered (and inconsistent—as traditional history is) with Beowulf, Hrothgar, and Wiglaf standing at the margins of legend and almost in reach of the audience's ancestry. Scyld defines another margin; behind that ancient figure lies a deeper past. In part II the search for the origins of the dragon's treasure attains a glimpse of time's abyssal deep in which every name has drowned and

which challenges at least for a moment the poet's claim of a value not subject to the injury of time.⁸⁰

There are only a few significant markers of time in part two: Beowulf's fifty-year reign, the dragon's three hundred years with the treasure, and the treasure's age of one thousand years. These are all large numbers, and only fifty years is possibly encompassed within a human lifetime. The dragon's reign is described as follows: 'se ðeodsceaða þreohund wintra | heold on hrusan hordærna' ('the people's enemy held in earth the treasure-house for three hundred winters', 2278–79). Later, when both Beowulf and the dragon lie dead, the Geats look upon the treasure, 'omige þurhetone, swa hie wið eorðan fæðm | þusend wintra þær eardodon' ('rusty, eaten through, as if it had remained there in the earth's embrace for a thousand winters', 3049–50). The line is ambiguous: is the treasure rusted *like* it has been buried for a thousand years, or *because* it has been buried for a thousand years?

The line is deliberately evocative. The thousand years is also associated with the dragon, because both three hundred and one thousand are time spans beyond human experience. Whether the dragon was actually on the hoard for three hundred years, it has held the treasure outside and across human generations. As Edward Irving describes, such time spans express 'the alien nature of the dragon, and also of the dead hoard-world he covets'.⁸¹ I believe Irving misses the mark when he suggests that 'to those without the documents, measures and calculations that give us the illusion of some control over the immensities of space and time, three hundred years might as

⁸⁰ Clark, *Beowulf*, pp. 44–45.

⁸¹ Irving, Jr, Edward B., *Rereading 'Beowulf'* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p. 83.

well be three million',⁸² but he is correct that three hundred years is a very long time. It is not a human time, and emphasises the inhumanity of the dragon.

If the treasure is over one thousand years old, then it comes from a different age of the world altogether. The number one thousand may simply be used for a similar rhetorical effect to *in geardagum*, to denote a time so long ago that it is outside of living memory, but such precision, beside the vagueness of *in geardagum*, suggests the poet is making a different point about time. The previous chapters have discussed the Christian theory of the six ages of the world, each lasting approximately one thousand years. If the treasure is indeed so old, then it belongs to another age and another epoch of human history. More specifically, it belongs to the fifth age, the time before Christ. For Bede this age equates with 'maturity, if you will'.⁸³ It extends 'from the exile into Babylon until the coming of our Lord and Saviour in the flesh' and lasts 'fourteen generations and 589 years'.⁸⁴ He continues: 'in this Age the Hebrew people were weakened by many evils, as if wearied by heavy age',⁸⁵ so too are the Geats subject to suffering. The world ages correlate to the days of Creation, and on the fifth day God 'created swimming and flying creatures'.⁸⁶ The dragon could be a product of the fifth age, for there is no explicit mention of its age or origin in *Beowulf*. Although he does not present evidence for his view, Irving believes in the agelessness of dragons: they are 'implacably dedicated to the obliteration

⁸² Irving, *Rereading 'Beowulf'*, p. 83.

⁸³ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 158.

⁸⁴ Bede, it must be remembered, did not subscribe to thousand-year ages. He calculated the lengths of the previous ages from biblical evidence, as a direct counter-measure against expectations of the Day of Judgement in the year 1000.

⁸⁵ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 158.

⁸⁶ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 158.

of all history and of all meaningful conceptions of time'.⁸⁷ David Williams similarly claims that dragons symbolise passion, chaos, darkness, and death: 'before and after the middle ages he [the dragon] was a figure for time as related to death in time's aspect of consummation and destruction.'⁸⁸ In *Beowulf* the dragon and its longevity represent time outside of human experience.

The treasure, and perhaps the dragon also, are relics from another age. One survives, the other does not. The treasure persists, undestroyed, buried with Beowulf in his barrow, '(w)egliðendum wide gesyne' ('widely visible to seafarers', 3158), a beacon presumably for eternity. When the Geats bury the treasure, according to Hill, 'they reestablish a continuity momentarily broken, a continuity still with us.'⁸⁹ However, no one can use the treasure; it lies 'swa unnyt saw hyt (æro)r wæs' ('as useless as it previously was', 3168).⁹⁰ Of the treasure, Clare Kinney writes: 'the gold is thrust out of the narrative sequence into our world but its uselessness is stressed: it is buried out of reach of even the imagination.'⁹¹ The continuity between Beowulf's

⁸⁷ Irving, *Rereading 'Beowulf'*, pp. 100–01.

⁸⁸ Williams, *Cain and Beowulf*, p. 59. Williams then calls the dragon a form of Satan (p. 61), but this is because he is casting *Beowulf* as an allegory. In his historical and allegorical approach to the poem, he argues that '*Beowulf* as allegory says one thing about time as history and means many other things about time as transhistorical truth.' His perspective 'is that *Beowulf* is a poem about the human-social condition bounded by the tropes of time as history and time as "eschatophore"' (p. 5). 'The allegorical structure of *Beowulf* involves two sets of double schemes: on the one hand an historical narrative related to a fabulous narrative; on the other hand an extension of present event to the future through prophecy and a related extension of present event to the past through allusion' (p. 40). Cain is the key to this relationship in Williams' scheme.

⁸⁹ Hill, '*Beowulf*, Value, and the Frame of Time', p. 10.

⁹⁰ See Edward I. Condren, 'Unnyt Gold in *Beowulf* 3168', *Philological Quarterly*, 52 (1973), 296–99.

⁹¹ Kinney, 'The Needs of the Moment', p. 313.

world and the poet's and ours is interrupted by the *unnyt* nature of the gold at the same time as its existence in Beowulf's barrow confirms the continuity. If it is cursed,⁹² then it is a curse that will endure until the end of time, just as Beowulf's reputation will endure in physical monument and written poem.

The treasure serves as a bridge between ages, and functions similarly to typology, in which the end has its origins in the beginning, and the beginning is fulfilled in the end. The fate of Beowulf and the Geats was linked to the treasure long before he and his people existed. The

⁹² Lines 3051–57 and 3069–75, which seem to imply that a curse was placed on the treasure at burial, have long been contentious with critics. It is not beyond reason for the Last Survivor to have cursed the treasure, though he does not do so in his actual speech as reported, because it would not be the first time in the poem that the poet has introduced later details to an earlier scene (such as when Beowulf returns to the land of the Geats and tells Hygelac about the betrothal of Freawuru to Froda (2024b–25), when Freawuru was not mentioned by the poet during the hero's time at Heorot). If the treasure lay in the ground for literally a 'þūsēnd wintra' ('thousand winters', 3050), and if the Last Survivor's people found the treasure and did not create it themselves, then the treasure has a longer history than is initially reported, and a curse by earlier owners is within the realm of possibility. It may even be the reason that the Last Survivor and his people are killed. However, without further evidence I side with Edward B. Irving, who calls the curse a 'nonce-effect' that 'does not have to be related to other parts of the story, since it is intended for an immediate atmospheric effect in a narrow context' (*Rereading 'Beowulf'*, p. 122). The Last Survivor's burial of the treasure is simply abandonment with no other explicit intent, ill or otherwise. For further reading see Condren, 'Unnyt Gold in *Beowulf*'; J. F. Doig, 'Beowulf 3096b: Curse or Consequence?', *English Language Notes*, 19.1 (1981), 3–6; Raymond P. Tripp, Jr, 'Lifting the Curse on *Beowulf*', *English Language Notes*, 23.2 (1985), 1–8; Stephen Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old English Poetry*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 905; Albert Bates Lord *Studies in Oral Tradition*, 2 (New York: Garland, 1989); Paul Beekman Taylor, 'The Dragon's Treasure in *Beowulf*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 98 (1997), 229–40; Shunichi Noguchi, 'Beowulf and the (In)effectiveness of the Ancient Curse', in *Essays on Old, Middle, Modern English and Old Icelandic in Honour of Raymond P. Tripp, Jr.*, ed. by Loren C. Gruber (New York: Edwin Mellen, 2000), pp. 125–38; John Tanke, 'Beowulf, Gold-Luck, and God's Will', *Studies in Philology*, 99 (2002), 356–79.

treasure comes from an earlier age but re-emerges in the current age, just as Christ's birth heralded the sixth age but he fulfilled the destiny of the previous ages, all the way back to Creation and the Fall. The Grendelkin are also associated with an earlier age through their line of descent. The poet's choice to trace this descent from Cain, and so from the first age of the world, from Creation to the Flood, is significant. They survived the deluge when they ought to have perished, and are remnants from an earlier time, brought into the present through interactions with the Danes.⁹³ The beginning and end of the world of *Beowulf* are inextricably linked by the intrusion of not only the past, but its meaning and historical moment, into the present, towards a future of dissolution.

Tolkien's essential view of *Beowulf* is that of a poet balanced on the precipice of change, between pagan past and Christian future. He argues that the conversion did not change the basic struggle of man against the monsters, except that Christianity brought the concept of eternity, and so 'there appears a possibility of eternal victory (or eternal defeat), and the real battle is between the soul and its adversaries'.⁹⁴ The poet 'was still dealing with the great temporal tragedy',⁹⁵ which is the fact that we are all subject to time. The subjection of man to time was also encapsulated in medieval ideas of the human life cycle, which also made use of number symbolism. The most common scheme was to divide human life into several ages of man, and then correlate the divisions of life with 'divisions in diurnal, annual, and historical time'.⁹⁶ This

⁹³ For the Grendelkin in relation to the Flood and Cain see Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, esp. 'Beowulf and the Myth of the Flood', pp. 291–367.

⁹⁴ Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', p. 22

⁹⁵ Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', p. 23.

⁹⁶ J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 55.

was possible, J. A. Burrow writes, because of the belief in divine order: ‘the order of time, like the order of nature upon which it largely depends, issues from the hand of God; and God does nothing arbitrary or random.’⁹⁷ Peter Blair suggests that there was a comfort to be found in numbers: ‘it was perhaps the dependence upon the unfailingly regular behaviour of number that led men away from the rational and towards the schematised.’⁹⁸ Elizabeth Sears casts aging as ‘a mysterious process, if a fundamental feature of human existence after the Fall’, which ‘seemed to demand definition and explication’.⁹⁹ Given the desire to divide time and track its progress demonstrated so clearly by Bede, we should not be surprised that human life, like the course of the celestial bodies, was in need of measurement. Bede himself occasionally refers to the scheme, as in *DTR* ch. 35, where he notes the correlation of the seasons, elements, and humours, though he does not directly assign each to a stage of life, noting only which humour is said to be prevalent in children, youth, the middle-aged, and the elderly.¹⁰⁰ Bede also referred to the microcosmic theory: ‘man himself, who is called “microcosm” by the wise, that is, “a smaller universe”, has his body tempered in every respect by these same qualities; indeed each of its constituent humours imitates the manner of the season in which it prevails.’¹⁰¹ In the world chronicle at the end of *DTR*, Bede does compare each age of the world to a stage in human

⁹⁷ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 55.

⁹⁸ Peter Hunter Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede* (London: Gollancz, 1976), p. 71.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 35.

¹⁰¹ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 35, pp. 100–01.

life.¹⁰² The six world ages correspond to infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, maturity, and senility.

The ages of man concept has roots in antiquity,¹⁰³ and Christian origins in Augustine, who, ‘in comparing the human life to the linear course of the history of salvation, microcosm to macrocosm, named and described six ages of toil before death.’¹⁰⁴ He correlated the six ages of man with the six ages of the world and the six days of Creation, which altogether signify that ‘man must toil for six epochs but that in the seventh he will enjoy eternal repose in God’.¹⁰⁵ As Burrow writes, it was natural to draw comparisons between humans and the world they inhabited, such as comparing the day with the course of human life,¹⁰⁶ for example in the transit of the sun across the sky,¹⁰⁷ the canonical hours,¹⁰⁸ and the hours named in the Parable of the Vineyard.¹⁰⁹ The cycle of the week could be compared with the six ages of the world or a human, plus a day of rest,¹¹⁰ but life could also be seen as a *series* of weeks, or in sets of seven years.¹¹¹

¹⁰² *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 66. First age to sixth, in order: infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, maturity, senility.

¹⁰³ Sears says it has a Pythagorean origin (Sears, *The Ages of Man*, p. 55); Burrow also discusses classical precedents such as Aristotle (Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 8).

¹⁰⁴ Sears, *The Ages of Man*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵ Sears, *The Ages of Man*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁶ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁷ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁸ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁹ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 60.

¹¹⁰ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 72.

¹¹¹ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 73.

The number four was also popular in Christian thought in the four senses of biblical exegesis, sometimes aligned with the four doctors of the church and other groups of four.¹¹²

The scheme of four ages was probably the more popular, but others existed, including schemes of three and seven. Burrow argues that the four-age scheme was favoured by physiologists while biologists preferred three ages, and the astrologers, seven.¹¹³ However, the physiological theory of fours ‘can claim to have provided the most powerful and the most influential of all older attempts to explain scientifically the changes which human beings go through in the course of their life’.¹¹⁴ It is important to realise that, like most attitudes to time beyond the passage of the sun and moon, these schemes were not shared by all. Burrow supposes that most medieval people ‘knew little more about the formal doctrines of the *aetates hominum* than they might have learned from a sermon on Septuagesima Sunday or a wall-painting in a chamber. For them, and especially for the mass of peasantry, the divisions of life were determined not by learned authority, but by native language and custom.’¹¹⁵ Authors could make reference to codified systems of age and life should they choose to, but it was their choice that really gave meaning to otherwise arbitrary schemata.

¹¹² Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub, 1998), I: *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. by Mark Sebanc; orig. pub. as *Exégèse médiévale*, 1959–1964, I: *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. by Mark Sebanc, pp. 2–7. Lubac writes: ‘Whatever the case may be, and whatever judgment one might wish to bring to bear on this issue, this doctrine of the fourfold sense has long been classic and unquestioned. It has provided a framework of thought for numerous generations of Christians. It is a framework that is so solid and, at the same time, so common that it can be seen fleshed out, as it were, and pressed into service as a classification system for books’ (p. 12).

¹¹³ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 93.

Such schemes do not usually tell us what age was considered the boundary between each stage of life. The number four does not actually feature in the tetradic system as an age or multiple of years, and it is simply the number of components; the same goes for systems based on 3, 6, 7, etc. However, the number seven as a critical interval ‘was remarkably pervasive and exerted an influence on most of the systems of age division at some point’.¹¹⁶ As Sears points out, 21 years, or 3×7, is still a benchmark for adulthood in Western societies today.¹¹⁷ Byrhtferth’s diagram in St John’s College, Oxford, MS 17, initially uses multiples of 7: it lists the ages of boyhood and infancy as ending at 14 years of age, while adolescence lasts to 28, and *iuventus*, maturity, to 48, and *senectus* until 70 or 80.¹¹⁸ Isidore of Seville employs a six-age scheme: infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, maturity, and old age, or in Latin, *infantia*, *pueritia*, *adolescencia*, *iuventus*, *gravitas*, and *senectus*.¹¹⁹ Infancy is from birth until the age of seven, childhood until age fourteen, adolescence until 28, youth until 50, maturity until 70, and old age ends in death, with no set number of years.

Beowulf had an intemperate youth before he went to Denmark (described upon his return, 2183b–89). He has engaged in contests with Breca,¹²⁰ and set off to fight Grendel with the

¹¹⁶ Sears, *The Ages of Man*, p. 38.

¹¹⁷ Sears, *The Ages of Man*, p. 38.

¹¹⁸ Oxford, St John’s College, MS 17, fol 7^v. *The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford, St John’s College MS17*, McGill University Library, Digital Collections Program, 2007 <<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17>> [accessed 5 August 2013]. Burrow discusses the diagram on p. 18 and Sears on p. 35 of their respective volumes.

¹¹⁹ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. and ed. by Stephen A. Barney and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), XI.ii, p. 241.

¹²⁰ Beowulf seems to acknowledge the possibility that he behaved foolishly by saying upfront that he and Breca were ‘on geogoðfeore’, in a time of youth (537).

blessing of his lord — ‘þa me þæt gelærdon leode mine | þa selestan, snotere ceorlas’ (415–16) — but not, perhaps, with the expectation of success. It is not clear how many years pass between Beowulf’s return to the Geats and his accession to their throne. His age at the end of the poem could be represented by this equation: $50 + n + x$, where n is the number of years between killing Grendel and taking the throne, and x is Beowulf’s age when he arrives at Heorot. But neither x nor n are known, and as we have seen, the poet is not interested in such precision. Beowulf is considered at the point of x as in peak physical fitness and at the height of his powers: ‘se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest | on þæm dæge þysses lifes’ (‘he was the strongest of mankind in might in the day of this life’, 196–97).¹²¹ By his own admission he has ‘mærða fela | ongunnen on geogoþe’ (‘undertaken many glorious deeds in youth’, 408b–409a), although he may just be boasting. Realistically, we cannot expect him to be any more than twenty, if he is to live another fifty years. However it is not out of the question that he is to be imagined as younger, perhaps fifteen or sixteen; the poem rests on his early medieval audience’s assumptions about ages, rather than pins them down.

Just as the ages of man were the province of a literate community, they may also have been largely Latinate. Burrow believes so, and argues that *Beowulf* in particular lacks conventional Latinate age schemes and instead ‘exhibits a much less systematic vernacular usage, untouched, so far as I can see, by Latin scholarship’.¹²² He cites as an example the word

¹²¹ ‘On þæm dæge þysses lifes’ is an interesting phrase. It recurs at 790 and 806, the former again in the context of Beowulf’s strength; the latter refers to Grendel and his misery. Both imply that the *dæg* is a point or small period in time, after which a change may occur.

¹²² Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 124.

cniht, which is applied to Beowulf a few times in a compound adjective.¹²³ Burrow says that while Ælfric and Byrhtferth use *cniht* as a synonym for *adolescens*, earlier texts including *Beowulf* use the word with a wider range: ‘perhaps in the *Beowulf*-poet’s usage the word “cniht”, something like the modern English “lad”, covered the whole period between the end of infancy and the beginning of mature manhood.’¹²⁴ He compares Beowulf’s fostering to Hrethel at age seven with Bede’s entering the monastery also aged seven, both to be trained in their respective vocations.¹²⁵ The age of seven is, most likely, the end of *infantia* and the beginning of boyhood, if such a boundary is to be made, rather than simply *infantia* until *adolescens* at 14. In the first part of the poem, Beowulf is on the cusp of manhood or newly arrived into early adulthood, perhaps at an age between 15 and 21.¹²⁶

Beowulf’s numerical age at the end of the poem is probably less important than his stage of life, which is quite clearly the end stage. The aging process is not a preoccupation of the poet. Burrows notes that ‘Beowulf is shown young, and he is shown old; but he is not shown ceasing to be young or beginning to feel old’.¹²⁷ Despite a keen awareness of the passing of time, Anglo-Saxon authors were less inclined to explore its effects in human terms. As Tolkien wrote

¹²³ For example, when told of Beowulf’s arrival Hrothgar confirms his identity: ‘Ic hine cuðe cnihtwesende’ (‘I knew him when he was a boy’, 372).

¹²⁴ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, pp. 124–25.

¹²⁵ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 125.

¹²⁶ He is also part of the *geogoð*, the younger warriors, rather than the *duguð*, the elder group. This is a distinction made in *Andreas* as well, and Burrows suggests that the *geogoð* are distinguished not only by their youth but their unattached stations in life, and that transition to the *duguð* may be partially effected by ownership of land, giving particular significance to Hrethel’s gift to Beowulf on his return to Denmark. See Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 127.

¹²⁷ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 178.

(quoted above), *Beowulf* depicts two moments in one life. The setting and the rising of Beowulf's life are parallel to the night and day imagery.

Conclusion

Beowulf, as heroic epic, is not intended to be read as history, despite its reference to historic people and events. The poet is certainly interested in time, and especially the past, as an object of nostalgia, and the future, as essentially apocalyptic. The past of *Beowulf* is intended to seem ancient, but not completely separate from the present of the poet and audience. In Trilling's aesthetics of nostalgia the past 'is the repository of the values, beliefs, and ambitions by which Anglo-Saxon England defines itself as a heroic Christian nation with a present and a future as glorious as its past'.¹²⁸ This nostalgia is expressed in *Beowulf* through the digressive episodes, which cover a broad sweep of history and myth while the central narrative takes place over just a few days. Through the digressions the elegiac mode emerges, epitomised by the Last Survivor, unnamed and forgotten in the *geardagas* of *geardagas*. His treasure travels through time to the world of the Geats, linking them across centuries, and suggesting that the Geats will share the fate of his tribe.

This chapter has made several new contributions to the study of *Beowulf*. I have demonstrated that the *Beowulf*-poet makes use of particular times of day, namely *uhta* and *undern*, to provide clues as to how long Beowulf spends underwater in Grendel's mere and possibly even to link the hero to Christ through imagery including 3.00pm and the mixing of

¹²⁸ Trilling, *Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, p. 256.

blood and water at the mere's surface. That Beowulf arrives in Denmark close to the vernal equinox also suggests an association with Christ and Easter. By contrast to the broad timeframes of the digressions, the few days in Beowulf's life contain a tight focus on the diurnal-nocturnal cycle that marks Beowulf's fights with the monsters. Night and day structure *Beowulf* at both the macro and micro level: the two parts of the poem are broadly characterised as a day and a night in the hero's life, and morning light and evening darkness are continually contrasted through the attacks of the Grendelkin and the dragon, all of whom subvert the usual patterns of human time. The poem continually makes the morning a time of fear and anguish; while night is when the dragon flies and Grendel attacks, their full effects can only be seen by the light of day. The shape of the poem echoes the movement from morning to night, with the first half the rising of Beowulf's life and the second half its setting, as he and the age of the world head towards an end. Here the poem enters elegiac time.

Chapter Four: The Old English Elegies

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the group of Old English poems classified as elegies, found uniquely in the Exeter Book, where they are located beside and among saints' lives, wisdom poems, riddles, and religious verse. The chapter will examine aspects of a poetics of time in the elegies and argue that, despite some similarities, time operates differently and distinctively in the elegiac mode than in the other forms of Old English poetry discussed in this thesis. Most significantly, the construct of time emphasised in the elegies is personal rather than communal. While other texts investigated have accentuated the collective experience and marking of common pasts and futures, each of the elegies focuses on the present of an individual. The elegies feature lone speakers fenced in by their present, and dwell on mental processes. The speakers traverse past and future in their minds, but the process is generally one which causes unhappiness or distress; in contrast to the practice of the narrators embedded in longer heroic poetry or saints' lives, a *distentio animi* is not the desired norm in the elegies. The elements of the poetics of time in the elegiac mode include: seasonal imagery; a preoccupation with the early morning hour; the ages of man and the assumption of an implicit link between the human microcosm and the world as macrocosm; a complex sense of the past which intrudes upon the present; and a pessimistic expectation of the future, often apocalyptic. That the elegies are so attentive to time alone justifies their inclusion in this thesis. Ultimately the elegies suggest or evoke a sense of the instability of time on earth, and the possibility of its nothingness.

Augustine identified the *distentio animi*, the distension of the mind or soul, as the inherent quality of time,¹ and earlier discussion in this thesis has demonstrated how the flexible stretching of narrative time is a typical feature of some Old English narrative poetry. The narrators of the poetic saints' lives and *Beowulf* comfortably range back and forth over the timelines of their narratives, elongating and eliding moments in time for poetic effect. Temporal distension can be seen as a normal aspect of narrative. However, in the elegies, the narratives of which are for the most part fragmentary and allusive, the *distentio animi* appears with the full force described by Ricoeur: '*Distentio animi* no longer provides just the "solution" to the aporia of the measurement of time. It now expresses the way in which the soul, deprived of the stillness of the eternal present, is torn asunder.'² In the same vein, Carolyn Dinshaw notes that:

Time, Augustine determines, is the activity of the mind as it shifts in the present between those temporal modes of memory, attention, and expectation. It is itself *distentio animi*, the distention of the mind, what Ricoeur calls the "contrast between the three tensions" of memory, attention, and expectation. And it is woefully, existentially painful.³

The speakers of elegies are discomforted by their place in time. They are not narrators in the usual sense of tellers of stories; instead these poetic constructs communicate their personal experience, their thoughts and emotions. They are trapped, physically or emotionally, and while their minds can still roam through past and future, such stretching over time is painful, and only adds to their suffering.

¹ 'I have therefore come to the conclusion that time is nothing other than tension: but tension of what, I do not know, and I would be very surprised if it is not tension of consciousness itself,' Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by Maria Boulding (New York: New City, 1997), XI.26, 33.

² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), I, p. 27.

³ Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 14.

The recurrence of this theme in the elegies suggests that this distension was of interest to a range of poets. The force of temporal disruption is demonstrated by the repurposing of time-words, as Janet Bately has shown: ‘terms with precise time-reference, such as those for specific seasons or times of day, are used not to signpost the progress of the action but to give poetic and dramatic expression to discomfort or anguish.’⁴ Winter is often used as both an echo of personal sorrow and a metaphor for stasis among the elegies, and only in *The Seafarer* is there a hint of seasonal change. In *The Wife’s Lament*, however, it is summer that signals the unending nature of her misery. The elegies employ a timeframe normally conceived of and presented as cyclical — the alternating night and day, the turning of the seasons — but arrest the cycle, so heightening the speakers’ unchanging emotional state, physical isolation, and exile from everyday life. The ultimate solution to time’s distension is the stillness of eternity articulated in some of the elegies, which stasis echoes, but does not duplicate.

Modern experience might diagnose the pre-dawn wanderers of the elegies as insomniacs or melancholics, and indeed early morning waking can be a symptom of a major depressive disorder.⁵ It is not impossible that *The Wanderer* and *The Wife’s Lament* depict situational or clinical depression in the modern understanding of the disease. Further symptoms of clinical depression include changes in appetite and weight, lack of energy, poor concentration, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, inability to feel pleasure, and thoughts of death, almost all of which can be observed in the speakers of the elegies.

⁴ Janet Bately, ‘Time and the Passing of Time in ‘The Wanderer’ and Related OE Texts’, *Essays and Studies*, 37 (1984), 1–15 (p. 4).

⁵ ‘Major Depressive Episode’, American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edn *DSM-IV* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 1994).

This chapter focuses on four elegies: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, with occasional discussion of others. These are the most interesting from the temporal point of view, and within these four poems two sub-groups can be determined. *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* both link the central characters' suffering to decline in the world at large, and both focus on the experience of winter. *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* are shorter poems, and focus on personal suffering from a female point of view, with little interest in male heroic values. The discussion in this chapter begins with a consideration of definitions of the elegiac genre, then moves on to an investigation of the attitudes towards past, present, and future in each of these four poems. I briefly consider the recent interest in the idea of nostalgia in medieval literature; however, nostalgia is not the only way in which the elegies look to the experience of the past. Nostalgia is considered a socially productive exercise by most critics, but in the elegies nostalgia and reminiscence do nothing to relieve pain. The chapter then turns to attitudes towards the future in the elegies, in particular how seasonal imagery is deployed to imply the 'last age' of both the speakers and the world. This discussion incorporates both learned and more popular ideas about the ages of man, with reference to some of the textbooks written by Bede, which have already been discussed from other perspectives in chapter one. The time-marking term *uhta* is explored more closely, and finally, I will argue that in two of the elegies the idea of past time tends towards the philosophical, in the idea that such time might not have existed, 'as if it never were'.

Genre

The problem of generic boundaries cannot be ignored when examining the Old English elegies. I follow almost all critics in categorising these poems as ‘elegies’, despite the dissimilarity to other poems included by critics of other languages and periods within the classification.⁶ María José Mora’s article traces the history of the term: while the broad modern concept of the elegy is of a funeral lament, classical elegies in Greek and Latin were defined by form rather than content, in their elegiac metre. The nineteenth-century elegiac genre was different from both of these.⁷ The term ‘elegy’ has its own distinctive meaning in Old English literary studies. Martin Green concludes, ‘such is the force of tradition in scholarship that even though there is some agreement that the label of elegy is only approximate at best, the poems still are conventionally called by this name.’⁸ Such a vague consensus notwithstanding, Anne Klinck’s edition and study of the Old English elegies devotes considerable space to the question of what constitutes the elegiac genre, if indeed Anglo-Saxon poets can be considered to have understood their poems as distinguished in this way.⁹ Some scholars prefer instead the expression ‘elegiac mode’ to describe what Mora calls the ‘melancholy inherent to the Anglo-Saxons’.¹⁰ This term is

⁶ The first definition in the OED is ‘a song of lamentation, *esp.* a funeral song or lament for the dead’; the second, ‘vaguely used in wider sense, *app.* originally including all the species of poetry for which Greek and Latin poets adopted the elegiac metre’.

⁷ María José Mora, ‘The Invention of the Old English Elegy’, *English Studies*, 76 (1995), 129–39. Mora stylises the Romantic idea of elegy ‘as sentimental or personal poetry’ (p. 129).

⁸ Martin Green, ‘Introduction’, in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), pp. 11–28 (p. 17).

⁹ Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Mora, ‘The Invention of the Old English Elegy’, p. 136.

particularly useful for longer poems that are not wholly elegiac but include elegiac passages, such as *Beowulf*. This chapter's examination of the Old English elegies aims to investigate the temporal elements that constitute the elegiac mode.

An all-encompassing category is required (partly if not wholly by the assumptions of generations of scholars) because the poems designated as elegies, while similar, are not all alike. The poems vary in length, metre, form,¹¹ and content. One important connection is their inclusion by the compiler in the Exeter Book, a manuscript which also contains riddles, saints' lives, and other types of poetry.¹² The speakers of the elegies significantly all share a sense of loss and longing, but their situations differ: a displaced court-poet (*Deor*); an apparently detained or imprisoned woman (*The Wife's Lament*; *Wulf and Eadwacer*); a warrior separated from his troop (*The Wanderer*); an observer of a ruin who speaks only of what he sees, with no direct reference to his personal experience (*The Ruin*). Some scholars, such as Patrick Conner, consider the elegies to be linked as part of a wider project of social production.¹³ Christine Fell goes so far

¹¹ For example *Deor* has a clear refrain, and *Wulf and Eadwacer* a refrain of sorts.

¹² Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501, edited as *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936); all quotations in this chapter are from this edition, and all translations are my own. A more recent edition is *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, ed. by Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994). For the cultural context see Patrick W. Conner's study, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993).

¹³ Patrick W. Conner, 'The Old English Elegy: A Historicization', in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. by David F. Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 30–45 (p. 31). He contends 'that several of the elegies in the Exeter Book once functioned to perpetuate, to guarantee, and to strengthen the social relationships necessary to the production of a monastic economic hegemony', p. 34.

as to say that the elegies have ‘little in common except a preoccupation with loss, suffering and mortality’,¹⁴ but this shared preoccupation is nevertheless noteworthy, and reveals a shared interest in the experience of time, and a poetic expression of this experience. The focus of this chapter is on this construct and poetics of time across the elegies.

Klinck proposes that the concept of elegy provides a convenient ‘locus for particular themes: exile, loss of loved ones, scenes of desolation, the transience of worldly joy’.¹⁵ A particularly common element in the Old English elegies is separation, ‘a distance in time or space between someone and their desire’.¹⁶ That distance, especially in time, produces, as Klinck notes, a pervasive sense of longing.¹⁷ It is necessary, given the implied critical interest in time and its experience as a defining feature of the elegies, to examine whether temporality is expressed in the same ways across all the elegies. The elegiac mode, as has been described in the latter part of *Beowulf* (2200–3182, especially ‘The Last Survivor’ (2247–66) and ‘The Father’s Lament’ (2444–62a) passages), is one which lacks clearly defined time-markers, and rather emphasises time experienced as disrupted in some way.

Elements of the elegiac mode found in the Old English poems are already in evidence in the sparrow metaphor in the episode of King Edwin’s conversion in Bede’s *HE*.¹⁸ The problem

¹⁴ Christine Fell, ‘Perceptions of Transience’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 172–89 (p. 172).

¹⁵ Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 225.

¹⁷ Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 225.

¹⁸ *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), II.13, pp. 183–185; discussed in chapter one.

of uncertainty over time, which Christianity is believed here to solve, persists in the elegies. In the thegn's speech the communal warmth and feasting of the hall contrast with the winter storms outside. The elegies also focus on life outside the hall, often in the winter, at the mercy of the elements, alone without shelter or companions. The idea of life's transience, exemplified in the image of the sparrow's short flight, is a recurring feature of the Old English elegies. Some elegies evoke the comfort ostensibly offered by Christian faith, but the promise of salvation seems to do little to ameliorate the speaker's present suffering. In Bede's *HE* the new Christian religion creates a new communal institution. The personal aspects of Christianity as combined with a communal dimension, especially the sacrament of baptism, are featured in the narratives of *Andreas* and *Elene*. The elegies, by contrast, separate individuals out, so that they lack both communal and personal solace.

Following on from chapter three's investigation of the elegiac mode in *Beowulf*, I continue my argument that the elegiac mode requires a particular construct of time, one which is deliberately evocative rather than closely defined. The elegiac mode is neither atemporal nor timeless, but lacks clear markers of time. As a result the experience of time is represented as unstable and unfixed. This effect is particularly apparent in *The Wanderer*, which contains many time-words and time-markers, very few of which fix a time frame for the poem. *Oft* appears six times, *longe* twice, and *hwilum* once, altogether giving a sense of lengthy and repeated yet indeterminate time. Adverbs such as *geneahhe*, 'frequently' (56) and *færlice*, 'quickly' (61) add a sense of urgency belied by the lack of narrative action. *Ponne* is repeated at the beginning of sentences, to note 'then' or 'when', without further specificity:

Ponne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,
 sare æfter swæsne. Sorg bið geniwad,
 þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð. (49–51)

Then by this the heavy wounds of the heart are sore with longing for the beloved. Sorrow is renewed. Then the man's memory pervades the mind.

The repetitions of *þonne* only loosely imply a time-bound sequence of cause and effect: do memories overwhelm the man because his sense of sorrow is renewed, or is it simply the next thing that happens? The cumulative effect of the unspecific time-words is that the duration of the narrative is impossible to measure. We cannot tell when in time the poem takes place, aside from the personal present of the speaker. There is no insertion into communal time, and no connection with a shared history. The Wanderer of the poem is out of time, lacking contexts or witnesses, untethered from history or anything outside of his own present existence, and this, the poem implies, is an unfavourable state. The unanchored mind roams between memory, attention, and expectation.

Past, Present, and Future

The past, present, and future are intertwined in the elegies, to such an extent that Martin Green proposes that the elegies 'see an intimate relationship between what was, what is, and what shall be'.¹⁹ Visions of the past are not uniform, but take one of two forms: reflection upon personal memories of the speaker, as when the Wanderer thinks of his time with his lord; or engagement with the communal process of nostalgia, itself 'a felt complex of emotions', as Melanie Heyworth writes,²⁰ such as the *ubi sunt* section in *The Wanderer*. As we saw in the speech in the

¹⁹ Martin Green, 'Man, Time and Apocalypse in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*', *JEGP*, 74 (1975), 502–18 (p. 518).

²⁰ Melanie Heyworth, 'Nostalgic Evocation and Social Privilege in the Old English Elegies', *Studia Neophilologica*, 76 (2004), 3–11 (p. 4).

King Edwin episode, a thegn belongs with his king and fellow men in a warm hall, not travelling the paths of exile like the Wanderer ('wadan wræclastas').²¹ The absence of hall, king, and comitatus produces nostalgia. The nostalgic quality of Old English poetry is well noted — as Heyworth writes, 'the sense of temporal distance and separation that is fundamental to the Old English elegies is a nostalgic sense.'²² However, only recently have scholars begun serious investigation into nostalgia in Old English Literature, in line with a wider trend towards 'nostalgia studies' in general.²³ Carolyn Dinshaw assesses this trend: 'recent work on medievalism has undertaken to make nostalgia a subtle and complex instrument of historical and cultural analysis — rather than the punitive bludgeon that it has been — by demonstrating its complexities and not shying away from paradox or conceptual incoherence.'²⁴

Svetlana Boym, in her general study of nostalgia, defines it as 'a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy.'²⁵ Boym identifies two types of nostalgia, restorative and reflective: 'restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the

²¹ Literally 'traverse paths of exile', 5.

²² Heyworth, 'Nostalgic Evocation and Social Privilege', p. 3.

²³ Relevant recent works include Renée R. Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse*, Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series, 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Heyworth, 'Nostalgic Evocation and Social Privilege'; R. M. Liuzza, 'The Tower of Babel: *The Wanderer* and the Ruins of History', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 36 (2003), 1–35.

²⁴ Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, p. 35. Dinshaw's focus at this point is on nostalgia in medievalism, rather than medieval nostalgia, but her point about the complexities of nostalgia remains valid.

²⁵ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiii.

homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately.²⁶ In this framework, Old English elegy is far more reflective than restorative; it is certainly an unproductive force in the poetry.²⁷ The speakers do suffer losses which they wish to recover, though generally it is not possible, as in the case of *Wulf and Eadwacer* where ‘þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs, | uncer giedd geador’ (‘one easily severs what never was united, the song of we two together’, 18–19). Essentially, Heyworth writes, ‘nostalgia arises from a temporal dislocation and is a product of the dynamic created by a differentiation of past and present’;²⁸ it is therefore a social exercise: ‘societal expectations and interests propagate nostalgia, since societies dictate what appropriate and approved subjects of nostalgia are.’²⁹ Renee Trilling also understands nostalgia as a communal activity, but nostalgia in the Old English elegies is different to her conception of nostalgia in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry: ‘Old English historical poetry, with its aesthetics of nostalgia, becomes a medium in which Anglo-Saxon England works out its collective relationship to the present through the poetic representation of a heroic past.’³⁰ The elegies do not depict the communities of heroic poetry except as something that is past, and that is the problem: the speakers must deal with their problems alone, without community.

Nostalgia cannot be anything other than a temporal construct; as Liuzza shows, ‘nostalgia requires that one recognise that the past is passing; it exists only at the far end of a cultural divide

²⁶ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xviii.

²⁷ *The Ruin* may be the only poem that can be said to be restoratively nostalgic, with its talk of ‘meodoheall monig mondreama full, / oþþæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe’; ironic, given the modern title of the poem. Translation: ‘many meadhalls full of the joy of men, until fate the mighty changed that’, 23–24.

²⁸ Heyworth, ‘Nostalgic Evocation and Social Privilege’, p. 4.

²⁹ Heyworth, ‘Nostalgic Evocation and Social Privilege’, p. 6.

³⁰ Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, p. 4.

where a new perspective is made possible because one is no longer at home.³¹ The emphasis on ‘home’ shifts in the elegiac mode to an emphasis on the past, real or imagined, and while nostalgia does not necessarily imply a dissatisfaction with the present, such dissatisfaction is evident in the elegies. The desired object that is absent and always therefore in some way ‘past’ is impossible to regain or return to, and nostalgia laments this temporal impossibility as much as the loss of the object itself. Dinshaw writes of the temporal complexity of nostalgia: ‘the present is ineluctably linked to other times, people, situations, worlds. Thus anything we might as a matter of course call “nostalgic” is inevitably more temporally complex than the usual deployment of the term allows.’³² Dinshaw’s preferred terminology is ‘temporal desire’, and its form can vary: ‘temporal desire can be wry, ironic, both mournful and melancholic — melancholic in its enactment of ambivalence, mournful as the work of grief moves the griever forward into the future.’³³ The introduction of ‘grief work’ by Dinshaw as a product of temporal desire raises the question of what work, if any, the elegies perform. Collective nostalgia can be productive, but the personal, reflective nostalgia exhibited by many speakers of the elegies traps them in time, as discussed above, rather than moving them forward.

Collective nostalgia, or rather, a speaker’s nostalgia for lost collectivity, is well attested in *The Wanderer*. Initially the Wanderer laments the loss of his own lord and troops, but from

³¹ Liuzza, ‘The Tower of Babel’, p. 15.

³² Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, p. 36.

³³ Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, p. 37.

about line 73 there is a generalised depiction of destruction and decay, culminating in the so-called *ubi sunt* section.³⁴

‘Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom mapþumgyfa?
Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!
Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat,
genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære.’ (92–96)

‘Where has the horse gone? Where the youth? Where is the giver of treasure? Where have the seats of feasts gone? Where are the joys of the hall? Alas, bright goblet! Alas, mailed warrior! Alas, majesty of the lord! How the time went, grew dark under cover of night, as if it never were.’

This is a generalised scene, with no possessive connection, not a lamenting for *my* horse or *my* lord, but for *a* horse and *a* lord. The passage exemplifies nostalgia as discussed by Liuzza, Trilling, and Heyworth, nostalgia which illustrates the typical joys of heroic life and emphasises their absence. The absent objects are mainstays of heroic life, each evoking a range of associations that, taken together, produce a vibrant image of a thriving heroic community, culminating in the *seledreamas*, the joys of the hall.³⁵ The change from *hwær* to *eala* is also a temporal shift: *hwær cwom?* implies that the object may yet be found; but to mourn it using *eala* confirms its temporal absence. The *beorht* cup contrasts with the two dark-associated words, the verb and the noun, to illustrate how all the light implied by life in the hall has been extinguished by a night that is metaphorically permanent.

³⁴ For more on the *ubi sunt* motif in Old English see Nicholas Wallerstein, ‘The *Ubi Sunt* Problem in *Beowulf*’s Lay of the Last Survivor’, *In Geardagum*, 24 (2003), 41–55. On the poem more generally see John Seltzer, ‘The Wanderer and the Meditative Tradition’, *Studies in Philology*, 80 (1983), 227–37.

³⁵ The word is used in ‘The Lay of the Last Survivor’ in *Beowulf* (2252), to evoke the same effect.

The early part of *The Wanderer* is concerned with the more personal memories that overwhelm the speaker's present. M. J. Toswell notes that the act of mourning is always an act of the present: 'mourning is in the moment, with no sense of the future or of the past.'³⁶ Recall that Augustine describes memory as 'the present of past things'. Ricoeur then asks, 'now, what is it to remember? It is to have an image of the past. How is this possible? Because this image is an impression left by events, an impression that remains in the mind.'³⁷ Such mental impressions seem indelible in Old English elegiac poetry. Many of the speakers ponder their past and even fixate on elements in it as representing a happier time than the present of the poem. However, while the act of remembrance forms a temporary bridge between past and present, it ultimately intensifies the present sorrow. Time both distances and doubles the loss.

The events the Wanderer thinks on, the happier days of his past, happened 'geara iu', or long ago (22), and yet they are given immediacy by his contemplation. Twice in the text he has two dreams or visions of the past; it is unclear whether they are conscious dreams or memories as the text does not name them, although he does seem to be asleep.³⁸

ðonne sorg ond slæð somod ætgædre
 earmne anhogan oft gebindað.
 þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
 clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecge
 honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
 in geardagum giefstolas breac. (39–44)

³⁶ M. J. Toswell, 'Structures of Sorrow: The Lament Psalms in Medieval England', in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 19 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 21–44 (p. 43).

³⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, I, p. 10.

³⁸ See Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry*, Costerus New Series, 143 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), esp. chapter V: 'The Mind as the Seat of Emotions: The Elegiac Strain', pp. 127–60.

Then sorrow and sleep together often hold fast the wretched alone one. It seems to him in his mind that he embraces and kisses his liege-lord, and places hands and head at his knee, as he previously at times enjoyed the thrones, in days of yore.

In geardagum, as discussed in chapter three in relation to *Beowulf*, is a phrase intended to evoke antiquity. The three uses of the expression in *Beowulf* signal time far beyond the narrative present, at the shortest longer than the lifetime of the narrator and at the longest a thousand years, if the age of the Last Survivor's treasure is taken literally. In *The Wanderer*, of course, such extreme pastness is not possible: it is his own past he thinks on, not the events of legend, therefore *geardagum* is used emphatically to demonstrate that the past seems so far away to the speaker that it may as well belong to the mythic past. *Geara iu* is probably a similar exaggeration and not meant to be read literally, although Richardson's conclusion that the shortest amount of time the phrase can refer to is ten years may still be valid, as *geara iu* has more equivocal usages in the corpus than *in geardagum*.³⁹

The Wanderer's act of remembrance, far from being a healing act, only renews his grief. He wakes from his vision to find himself alone with the seabirds, and his mood is not improved: 'Ponne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne, | sare æfter swæsne. Sorg bið geniwad' ('Then by this the heavy wounds of the heart are sore with longing for the beloved. Sorrow is renewed,' 49–50). Any joy that he was able to experience in the context of memory is overshadowed by the sorrow generated by realising that the dream was not so real to the mind in the present, and instead remains firmly in the past. Similarly, after the vision of his companions who 'swimmað oft on weg' ('always swim away', 53), he finds that 'cearo bið geniwad' ('care is renewed', 55).

³⁹ See John Richardson, 'Two Notes on the Time Frame of *The Wanderer* (Lines 22 and 73–87)', *Neophilologus*, 73 (1989), 158–59, especially p. 158 for a comparison of this phrase in other Old English texts.

Because memory leaves a permanent impression on the mind, the associated emotions of memories also prove to be enduring.⁴⁰

The wife of *The Wife's Lament* also experiences mental paralysis in the present, suffering a longing that only intensifies as time passes. Her misery is ongoing and ever-present, experienced 'niwes oþþe ealdes no ma þonne nu' ('recently or long ago, no more than now', 4). It does not abate, and the act of telling her hardships does not seem to offer any relief or consolation: *always* she has suffered (*a*, 5). Nothing lessens her desire, not even the impossibility of attaining it, and there is nothing that will ameliorate or even end her suffering. There is no solution to her problem, only the misery of waiting. Nonetheless, the wife appears to long desperately for a change in her situation, without any suggestion of how that change might occur. 'Longing' is a key expression of the poem, being used three times: the speaker is *longade*, afflicted with longing (14); *oflongad*, seized with longing (29); and has acquired much *longapes* in her life (41). There is no satisfaction offered for her grief, no consolation or hope of change. The last sentence of the poem universalises the misery of the experience of longing: 'wa bið þam þe sceal | of langoþe leofes abidan' ('woe be to he who must await with longing for a beloved', 52b–53). The condition of waiting, of being subject to the passing of time, will always cause misery. She also lacks any expectation of a future, and 'seems irrevocably trapped in her present',⁴¹ thinking on her past.

⁴⁰ As Harbus notes, 'the painfulness of the reminiscence of many of the elegies brings a sense of willed force to mind', Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry*, p. 145.

⁴¹ Green, 'Time, Memory, and Elegy', p. 129.

The wife is also physically trapped, in a metaphoric alignment with her mental stasis. Though she does not say how long she has been in her ‘earthcave’, the dwelling is old and sets her at the mercy of nature:

Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe,
 under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.
 Eald is þes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad,
 sindon dena dimme, duna uphea,
 bitre burgtunas, brerum beweaxne,
 wic wynna leas. (27–32a)

I was ordered to dwell in a grove of trees, under an oak-tree in the earth-cave. Old is this earth-hall, I am entirely seized with longing, valleys are gloomy, hills tall, bitter protective hedges, with briars growing over, a dwelling without joys.

Stacy Klein sees in the briars growing over the idea that ‘the natural world appears to collude in [the wife’s] entrapment’.⁴² And while the wife is enclosed here, others are enjoying more comfortable lodgings: ‘frynd sind on eorþan, | leofe lifgende, leger weardiað’ (‘friends are on earth, dear ones living, occupying beds’, 33b–34). She is free to walk out at dawn, to sit and lament her misery (35–37), but not free enough to leave entirely the gloomy valleys and looming hills. The location of her exile, and the time of the year, put her at nature’s mercy and unable to participate in the appropriate activities for the season. As Martin Green writes, the fixed cave and position under the tree ‘are expressions of the unchanging, static quality of the speaker’s present

⁴² Stacy Klein, ‘Gender and the Nature of Exile in Old English Elegies’, in *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, ed. by Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 113–31 (p. 121).

that is defined elsewhere in this passage by the reference to the summer-long day (*sumorlangne dæg*, 37b) through which she must sit and weep'.⁴³

Like the Wife, the speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer* speaks in the midst of separation, with no clear sense of how her suffering might be brought to an end. While the poem is notoriously difficult to piece together, the speaker appears to predict future events for others, and not herself: 'willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð' (they will kill him, if he comes into the troop', 2 and 7), and 'uncerne earne hwelp | bireð Wulf to wuda' ('our quick whelp Wulf will bear to the wood', 16b–17a). She speaks of her own past in allusive details:

Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode;
þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt,
þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,
wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæpre eac lað. (9–12)

I suffered far-wandering hopes of my Wulf; when it was rainy weather and I sat tearful, when the bold-warrior encompassed me with his arms, it was joy to me then, however it was also hateful to me.

There are no clear time-markers here, only *þonne* and past tense verbs, and little detail as to what happened, when, or why. She describes her present in geographic terms: 'Wulf is on iegel, ic on oþerre' ('Wulf is on an island, I on another', 4); the physical separation aligns with temporal distance. The twice-repeated phrase 'ungelice is us' ('it is different for us', 3, 8) is also in the present tense. The final lines contain present indicative verbs, but are usually translated in the future tense:

⁴³ Martin Green, 'Time, Memory, and Elegy in *The Wife's Lament*', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), pp. 123–32 (p. 125). The *sumorlangne dæg* is discussed below.

Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer? Uncerne earne hwelp
 bireð Wulf to wuda.
 þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,
 uncer giedd geador. (16–19)

Do you hear, Eadwacer? Our quick whelp Wulf will bear to the wood. That one will easily sever what was never united, the song of we two together.

It is difficult to tell whether the tense is present or future. The present tense would read: ‘Wulf carries our quick whelp to the wood’; ‘that one easily severs what was never united’. The other repeated line, ‘willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð’ (‘they will kill him, if comes into the troop’, 2, 7), is more clearly future tense because it contains *willað* with the infinitive verb, and the conditional clause beginning with *gif*. The key is the last line, discussed below.

The expectations of the future are pessimistic and as for the past, the last two lines imply that the past can be undone, and that at the same time it has already been undone. The pair (probably the narrator and Eadwacer, although the text is as ambiguous at this point as at any other) were never united and so they can be severed, but to have been severed they had first to be united — and so the cleaving has already taken place and they are separated, as much as the woman and Wulf are separated by the fens between their islands. The adverb *næfre* carries the weight of the paradox here: they were never united, so there is no bond. But the negative is undone by ‘uncer giedd geador’ (19). There is no song or speech of them together if they never were together.

The Husband’s Message, by contrast, explicitly anticipates a happier future. The poem seems to be taking place at a specific moment in time, with reference both to the past and the future, and a present in which, as Klinck notes, ‘unhappiness is a thing of the past’.⁴⁴ *Nu* is

⁴⁴ Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 12.

repeated often, as a marker for the present time, and the line ‘þe git on ærdagum oft gespræcon’ is repeated twice (16, 53) as an anchor for the recall of the past: what they spoke of in earlier days is why the speaker asks the addressee to come now, so that they can be together as they were in the past. This evocation of a cyclical experience of time underpins the poem’s more optimistic treatment of the experience of time.⁴⁵

The Seafarer also offers a more cheerful vision of the future. Despite the travails suffered by ‘þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað’ (‘those who the lie farthest on the paths of exile’, 57), and which he has experienced in the past, the Seafarer wishes to experience them again:

min modsefa mid mereflode
 ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
 eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
 gifre ond grædig, gielleð anfloga,
 hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
 ofer holma gelagu. (59–64a)

My heart goes far and wide over homeland of whales with the sea-tide, over regions of the earth, comes back to me ravenous and greedy, the solitary flier cries out, whets heart on whale-way irresistibly over expanse of seas.

In this instance, the restriction of winter is used as a contrast with the coming change of seasons, a change that is discussed below. This journey of the heart seems much like the visions experienced by the Wanderer, with the difference that this journey is not past. The Seafarer is able to make it again, should he choose to, and by conjuring up a vision of what awaits his

⁴⁵ Some critics read the poem as an allegory of Christ and Church, including Robert E. Kaske, ‘A Poem of the Cross in the Exeter Book: *Riddle 60* and *The Husband’s Message*’, *Traditio*, 23 (1967), 41–71, and Margaret E. Goldsmith, ‘The Enigma of *The Husband’s Message*’, in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. by Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 242–63.

appetite for seafaring is whetted with greater intensity. His memory therefore creates anticipation for future experiences.⁴⁶

It is evident that the elegies discussed so far do not share with each other an identical construct of time. As Martin Green writes, time in *The Wife's Lament* is 'almost all pure subjectivity',⁴⁷ lacking reference to history and other timeframes; her time is all personal. Klinck sees *The Wife's Lament* as 'moving forward in time and outward from the self',⁴⁸ but this is an assessment more suited to *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, which move from the personal to the communal, from the specifics of their own situation to the general time of the world at large. The speakers of *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* focus almost entirely on their present, with an interest in the future limited only to their selves and, in the case of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the future of her child. Stacy Klein is right when she notes that, 'for both women, remembrance of times past is conditioned wholly by present miseries',⁴⁹ however the same could equally be said of the Seafarer and Wanderer. Klein suggests that for the women, 'their anticipation of things to come centers on taking revenge on the men deemed responsible for their suffering.'⁵⁰ However, it is hard to see any threat voiced in either poem, aside from the ambiguous prediction

⁴⁶ For more on mind, memory, and the travelling *modsefa* in *The Seafarer* see Malcolm Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 271–98, and Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry*.

⁴⁷ Green, 'Time, Memory, and Elegy', p. 129.

⁴⁸ Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 51.

⁴⁹ Klein, 'Gender and the Nature of Exile', p. 117.

⁵⁰ Klein, 'Gender and the Nature of Exile', p. 117.

at the end of *Wulf and Eadwacer*.⁵¹ Of the five poems discussed so far, the three with male speakers incorporate a wider construction of time than the poems with female speakers, although *The Husband's Message* is ambiguous on this point. This comparison does not provide sufficient evidence to distinguish a gendered construction of time in the Old English elegies.⁵² When Klein claims that the men of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are 'highly adept at temporal movement, their skills most visible in their capacity for travelling back into the past and dallying within the former bliss of heroic life',⁵³ while the females are 'notably unable to negotiate space',⁵⁴ she overstates the range of movement afforded to the men. While the Wanderer is an *eardstapa*, an 'earth-stepper' (6), he is not on any journey, and his exile is demonstrably not his choice; similarly, the Seafarer is not free to sail as he pleases. All the speakers, male and female, are trapped by their present situations, and are capable of the distension of the mind necessary to comprehend time. The difference is that the Wanderer and the Seafarer contemplate time on a wider scale, in which they envision futures for themselves (especially the Seafarer) that encompass the world.

⁵¹ See Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 177 for a summary of interpretations of this line.

⁵² Nor do the female speakers critique the heroic world, as both Klein and Bray argue. Bray situates *The Wife's Lament* as part of a discourse 'in which the court poets used the traditional female role of mourning to voice both a lament for, and a critique of, heroic society'. Dorothy Ann Bray, 'A Woman's Loss and Lamentation: Heledd's Song and *The Wife's Lament*', *Neophilologus*, 79 (1995), 147–54 (p. 150).

⁵³ Klein, 'Gender and the Nature of Exile', p. 120.

⁵⁴ Klein, 'Gender and the Nature of Exile', p. 116.

Both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* employ the philosophic theory of microcosm and macrocosm so that the speaker's present becomes the present of the world at large.⁵⁵ The vision of the future presented in *The Wanderer* is part then and part now: we are warned of the terrors to come 'þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð' ('when all the riches of this world stand deserted', 74), but told this is happening 'nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard' ('now in various places throughout this middle-earth', 75). The wind blows, 'weallas stondaþ, | hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas' ('snow-swept buildings stand, walls covered by frost', 75b–76). This depiction of transience is contradicted somewhat by the verb *standan*, which intimates permanence because the buildings stand or remain, despite the wind, snow, and frost. But frost is insidious, and over time it can crack stone.

The poet of the *The Wanderer* asserts that nothing can remain on earth because everything is *læne*, and ultimately 'eal þis eorþan gester idel weorpeð' ('all the foundation of this earth becomes vain', 110). There is no consolation offered for the sorrow of the Wanderer character, nor for the transience of life, except in the poem's final line: 'wel bið þam þe him are seceð, | frofre to Fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð' ('well be to him who seeks mercy, solace from Father in heaven, where for us all stability remains', 114b–115). *Fæstnung* is the only word in the whole poem indicating permanence. Heaven is eternal, and eternity is the antidote to temporal distension.

⁵⁵ For more on the concept see J. E. Cross, 'Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm in Old English Literature', in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. by Stanley B. Greenfield (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1963), pp. 1–22, and Green, 'Man, Time and Apocalypse'.

The Seafarer's meditation on the transience of life and the inevitability of death moves from the personal to the general:

Forþon me hatran sind
 dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
 læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
 þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað.
 Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
 ær his tid aga, to tweon weorþeð;
 adl oþþe ylde oþþe ecghete
 fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð. (64b–71)

Because for me the joys of the Lord are hotter than this dead life, temporary on land. I believe not that worldly prosperities stand eternally to him. Always one of three things each becomes an uncertainty, before his span of life: sickness or old age or violence, deprives life from those fated to pass away.

Time and eternity are opposed here. Eternity is the absence of time, as Augustine wrote: ‘in eternity nothing passes, for the whole is present, whereas time cannot be present all at once.’⁵⁶ If, as noted earlier, as Ricoeur argues, distension of the mind is an expression of the turmoil that results in the deprivation of eternity, then eternity is what the Seafarer and other speakers crave. ‘Eternity is “for ever still [semper stans]” in contrast to things that are “never still.”’⁵⁷ Instead of movement in time and space, the speakers long for the stability of eternity, for time to stop. The final lines of *The Seafarer* make this longing for a future clear:

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
 ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen,
 ond we þonne eac tilien, þæt we to moten
 in þa ecan eadignesse,
 þær is lif gelong in lufan dryhtnes,
 hyht in heofonum. (117–22a)

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.11, 13.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, I, p. 25, paraphrasing Augustine.

Let us think where we might have a home and then consider how we might come thither, and then we also strive, that we may have eternal bliss, where life is dependent on the lord's love, bliss in heaven.

The transience that is inherent to the seafaring life leads to a desire for *ham*, whether on the sea, land, or in heaven. The latter is the more stable option, specifically because it is *ece*, eternal; eternity guarantees permanence, the one thing that the Seafarer lacks.

Ruins occupy an ambiguous temporality, being both products of the past and a physical link to that past, but one that is continually diminished. As Trilling shows, in *The Ruin* 'the emphasis is on simultaneity rather than linearity; the past may be something separate and foreign, but it is something that constitutes a part of the present as well'.⁵⁸ A ruin is not an end-product of time, but an ongoing demonstration of time's ravages. Ruined buildings can seem to be in stasis, trapped for a moment in time, but they are in fact in flux: the result of their slow change is in evidence, as in *The Wanderer*, as their decay continues.

The speaker of *The Ruin* simultaneously looks at the present state of the building, thinks back to its past, and at the same time looks to a shared future implicit in the fate of the ruin and its inhabitants. The speaker imagines life in the ruin:

Beorht wæron burgræced, burnsele monige,
heah horngestreon, heresweg micel,
meodoheall monig mondreama full. (21–23)

Bright were the city buildings, many bathing halls, high abundance of gables, great noise of an army, many meadhalls full of the joy of men.

The conventional view of *The Ruin* is that the poet depicts a Roman scene and, 'in the typical manner of Old English verse he universalizes and Germanicizes it.'⁵⁹ Fell assesses the speaker's

⁵⁸ Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, p. 51.

⁵⁹ Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 62.

work as follows: ‘The poet tries to parallel the evident splendour of the former city with equal imagined splendour of life within it. And in evoking past splendour he necessarily evokes too the passing of time between his vision and present reality.’⁶⁰ As such it is a dream of an idealised society, wealthy and abundant, full of a great army replete with trophies of war, enjoying wine and conviviality. However, it is not simply a picture of an idealised society, but perhaps one shadowed by judgement on excess: Klinck suggests that the poet may intend a link with Gildas’s *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, ‘in which the destruction of a civilization is God’s punishment for sin.’⁶¹

The speaker makes the ruin part of his history by imbuing it with the attributes of the world he knows; he connects the supposed life of the inhabitants with his own life. If their past is his past, then their future, i.e. their destruction, could be his future too. This is the lesson for the reader also, that wealth and well-crafted masonry do not last forever. Ruins, particularly Roman ruins, were a real part of the Anglo-Saxon landscape, serving as reminders that they were not the first to conquer this land. ‘Whatever their everyday uses’, Liuzza says of these ruins, ‘for the purposes of poetry these Roman buildings were taken as the mysterious work of giants, *enta geweorc*, and their builders de-historicized from the Romanized Britains whom the Anglo-Saxons had dispossessed into the inhabitants of a generic heroic age.’⁶² Such fallen buildings were evidence that the Roman civilisation had not continued to flourish, and that the Anglo-Saxons might likewise be headed towards anonymity and decay. *The Ruin* can be read as a depiction of the final result of the end times: an imaginative speculation on what the world may

⁶⁰ Fell, ‘Perceptions of Transience’, p. 180.

⁶¹ Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 62.

⁶² Liuzza, ‘The Tower of Babel’, p. 5.

look like after The Last Judgement, when all souls have been taken from earth either to heaven or hell.

Much scholarship on the Old English elegies has focused on what have been identified as their apocalyptic elements.⁶³ There is a consensus that *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and probably *The Ruin* present images which anticipate an apocalyptic age. Margrét Champion describes the final section of *The Wanderer* as ‘an eschatology, the articulation of the topic of last things (apocalypse, individual and cosmic death, the last judgment)’.⁶⁴ Liuzza writes that ‘the sense that the world is hastening in a downward spiral towards a dismal end, or that we must rebuild the present in the image of the past, may be thought of as a characteristic historical reflection among the Anglo-Saxons’.⁶⁵ The decline of the world in the Old English elegies is linked to apocalypse. Frank Kermode’s ‘sense of an ending’ was discussed in the introduction to this thesis, and his proposal that humans are driven to create fictions of apocalypse, so as to give meaning to life and art.⁶⁶ *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* enhance their vision of the end by using the poetics of winter to draw a connection with the ages of the world. Winter is the last age of the world, and it signals that the end is coming.

⁶³ See several articles in Richard Landes, Andrew Gow, and David C. Van Meter, eds, *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950–1050* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), also Green, ‘Man, Time and Apocalypse’, and Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre, ‘Discourse and Ideology in the Old English “The Wanderer”: Time and Eternity’, in *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño, *International Medieval Research*, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 331–53.

⁶⁴ Margrét Gunnarsdóttir Champion, ‘From Complaint to Praise: Language as Cure in “The Wanderer”’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 69 (1997), 187–202 (p. 197).

⁶⁵ Liuzza, ‘The Tower of Babel’, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 7.

Seasons

Earlier chapters of this thesis discussed the quadripartite life, in which ‘the life of man was seen to correspond to a temporal cycle in the greater world: just as the year was divided by the solstices and equinoxes into four parts, so the human life, another finite stretch of time, had its four seasons’.⁶⁷ Various sets of four were added, such as the elements, qualities, and humours. ‘Byrhtferth’s Diagram’ illustrates the connections among these in early medieval thought,⁶⁸ which Bede also discussed.⁶⁹ The seasons are a natural cycle, but in the poetic of elegies, the cycle has been paused (in *The Wanderer*, in winter). In *The Wife’s Lament* the Wife finds herself suspended in summer-time, while in the *The Seafarer* we do significantly find a change of season. I will argue that the use of the imagery of the seasons is an important aspect of these elegies, and that this imagery is connected with the concept of the quadripartite life cycle. In the case of the treatment of winter and its associated phenomena, the tetradic scheme emphasises the decay and decline discussed above: the world is in its final age and its final season. Similarly, the Wife’s ‘summer’ can be read as tied to what the poet is describing about her mental state.

In *The Wife’s Lament*, the wife sits weeping all the ‘sumorlangne dæg’: ‘þær ic sittan mot sumorlangne dæg, | þær ic wepan mæg mine wræcsiþas’ (‘there I may sit the summer-long day,

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 9.

⁶⁸ Oxford, St John’s College, MS 17, fol 7^v. *The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford, St John’s College MS17*, McGill University Library, Digital Collections Program, 2007 <<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17>> [accessed 5 August 2013]

⁶⁹ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 35.

where I can weep my miseries’, 37–38). The *sumorlangne dæg* is a crux comparable with *Beowulf’s morgenlongne dæg* (2894); the two are parallel constructions, if not the same word, the one referring to a season and the other a time of day. Eric Stanley is certain that the *sumorlangne dæg* is meant literally in *The Wife’s Lament*, while the *morgenlong dæg* in *Beowulf* is not.⁷⁰ I argue that the idea of the ‘summer-long day’ encompasses both literal and metaphoric meaning.

Summer days are longer than those of any other season in terms of daylight, as everyone can observe, even in a world without clocks, and as Bede describes: ‘the summer sun rises much earlier for us who live under the same latitude, and seems to remain much longer on the point of setting.’⁷¹ When hours are defined as one-twelfth of daylight, rather than as equal units each of sixty equal minutes, then summer hours are also longer than winter hours. It may not be literally summer in *The Wife’s Lament*, as there are no direct seasonal cues — although I argue below that the poem alludes to the elements, qualities, and humours of summer found in tetradic thinking — but if not literal the metaphoric meaning is still clear: the experience of the day is drawn out for her, as long as a summer day.

The phrase *sumerlonge dæg* is also found in *Juliana* (another text of the Exeter Book) in a speech by the devil where its use is hyperbolic.⁷² Exaggeration cannot be discounted in *The*

⁷⁰ Eric Stanley, ‘Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Penitent’s Prayer*’, *Anglia*, 73 (1955), 413–66 (p. 435). See discussion of the phrase in chapter three.

⁷¹ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 92.

⁷² ‘Ic asecgan ne mæg,
þeah ic gesitte sumerlongne dæg,
eal þa earfeþu þe ic ær ond siþ

Wife's Lament either. The other rhetorical purpose of the phrase in the elegy is to demonstrate how the wife is out of time with her 'friends on earth' (33). She has no work or duties to perform; she is awake while others sleep. Green argues, 'her time is all present – a present without end. Her days are all summer-long days, one day like the next.'⁷³ The wife's situation parodically anticipates the eternal day of heaven described by Bede and mentioned in *The Seafarer* – but when experienced on earth it produces misery, not bliss. Alone, an exile, she lacks the context of community and the schedule that communal activity provides.

The prevalence of summer and winter in the elegies is not necessarily attributable, as Earl Anderson attempts to argue, to the fact that the Anglo-Saxons in practice counted just two seasons, *winter*, the wet season, and *sumer*, the rest of the year.⁷⁴ Anderson suggests that the four-season frame, adding *lencten*, or spring, and *hærfest*, or autumn, is the result of Latinate influence and not culturally central.⁷⁵ In his two-season model, 'just as *winter* symbolizes adversity, *sumer* symbolizes pleasance', with *sumer* including what we would now call spring and autumn,⁷⁶ but this dichotomy is not present in the elegies. The wife's *sumerlong dæg* is clearly intended by the poet to contribute to the description of her unhappy experience of time,

gefremede to facne.' 494b–97a in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie. Translation: 'Even if I should sit a summer day's length, I cannot tell all the miseries which I have caused', 'Juliana', in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. and trans. by S. A. J. Bradley (London: Dent, 1982), pp. 301–20 (p. 314). The hyperbole suggests that even the length of a day in summer, when the days are longest, is not enough time for the devil to tell of all his misdeeds: it may be impossible for him to ever tell them all. This is of course what Juliana is making him do, regardless of the time.

⁷³ Green, 'Time, Memory, and Elegy', p. 126.

⁷⁴ Earl R. Anderson, 'The Seasons of the Year in Old English', *ASE*, 26 (1997), 231–63 (p. 232).

⁷⁵ Anderson, 'The Seasons of the Year in Old English', p. 232.

⁷⁶ Anderson, 'The Seasons of the Year in Old English', p. 240.

and not at all joyful, however ironic it might be: she is miserable when she ought to be joyful. Furthermore, Anderson has only a little evidence for summer-as-pleasant in Old English literature, while the association is stronger in later poetry, such as some Harley lyrics and Chaucer's *Parlement of Fowles*.⁷⁷

Anderson's two-season model also proposes a learned and popular divide between systems for classifying the seasons. The seasons are not the only 'semantic domains' in Old English that 'exhibit the co-existence of two classification systems, a native Germanic one beside a newer one that resulted from Latin learning or, more broadly, from the diffusion of Romano-Christian ideas throughout the Western European area.'⁷⁸ There is evidence that Anglo-Saxons consciously 'applied the technique of *interpretatio romana*, according to which Roman semantic systems are analysed by equating them to supposed Germanic parallels.'⁷⁹ However, it is evidence of this *interpretatio romana*, in the form of tetradic thinking, that persuades me that far from the elegies lacking any Latinate influence, the opposite is true. Even if Anderson is correct that two seasons was the more popular model, the use of tetradic associations in the elegies signifies learned authors.

The particular forbidding qualities of winter are well-suited to the gloomy tone of the elegies. Stanley wondered if the use of cold as a binding force was a mere 'scientific fact to the Anglo-Saxons; for how else is the solidifying of water to be explained?'⁸⁰ B. K. Martin's later

⁷⁷ See Anderson, 'The Seasons of the Year in Old English', p. 261–62.

⁷⁸ Anderson, 'The Seasons of the Year in Old English', p. 245. Another classification system in Anderson's argument is a Germanic four-day week as opposed to the Latin seven-day week.

⁷⁹ Anderson, 'The Seasons of the Year in Old English', p. 245.

⁸⁰ Stanley, 'Old English Poetic Diction', p. 432.

research traces images of cold as binding in Old English and Latin literature, demonstrating that it is a frequent poetic trope.⁸¹ In fact, images of bonds of cold and bridges of ice ‘were recognised as artistic and conventional diction for amplifying the topic of winter, or cold, and not merely chance usages’.⁸² However, in the scientific works by Bede (as well as Ælfric and Byrhtferth) discussed in chapter one, winter is not singled out as worse than any other season. Each has its own qualities, elements, and humours, and in the medieval calendar, each month and season has its own tasks.⁸³ Only in Old English poetry is winter so threatening, where poets use wintry language ‘to develop thought, mood, and atmosphere’.⁸⁴ Earl Anderson argues that authors such as Bede would not have needed to explain the four seasons at all if they were in popular usage,⁸⁵ a proposal that ignores the intentions of the works in question. Bede’s *DTR* and similar textbooks, and its vernacular precedents, were written to provide information for those who seek it, regardless of their prior knowledge. As encyclopaedic works they aimed to be exhaustive. Furthermore, these authors had to describe the seasons in order to properly situate them within the microcosm-macrocosm scheme that underlay much medieval scientific thought. Medieval traditions about the seasons included aspects of computus, science, philosophy, the labour of the seasons, and poetic rhetoric, ‘all of which’, in Enkvist’s words, ‘were shaped with a characteristic love of unity and order’.⁸⁶ In this way, the seasons ‘became part of a well-reasoned

⁸¹ Martin, B. K., ‘Aspects of Winter in Latin and Old English Poetry’, *JEGP*, 68 (1969), 375–90 (p. 380).

⁸² Martin, ‘Aspects of Winter’, p. 383.

⁸³ See Bridget Ann Henisch, *The Medieval Calendar Year* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999)

⁸⁴ Martin, ‘Aspects of Winter’, p. 378.

⁸⁵ Anderson, ‘The Seasons of the Year in Old English’, p. 231.

⁸⁶ Nils E. Enkvist, *The Seasons of the Year: Chapters on a Motif from Beowulf to the Shepherd’s Calendar* (Helsinki: Centraltryckeriet, 1957), p. 38, 39.

cosmological, scientific, philosophical and religious theory which bore witness to the great unity of God's universe'.⁸⁷ We have seen these theories in action in Bede's work, and his great interest in a well-ordered world; that sense of order pervaded the learned world and could be used in poetry.

Byrhtferth of Ramsey also had a great love of order. According to his manual, 'summer is hot and dry', and corresponds to fire and adolescence.⁸⁸ Its humour is red bile, which according to Bede 'makes people lean, even though they eat a lot, swift, bold, irritable and agile'.⁸⁹ Red bile 'is at its most active' in the young.⁹⁰ In Byrhtferth's diagram, as previously mentioned, the age of adolescence is between the years of 14 and 28, and its elements are fire and earth. *The Wife's Lament* takes place in either a literal or metaphoric summer, and she has at least some of the qualities of red bile, being bold, irritable, and as agile as her enclosure allows – an enclosure that seems under the earth, or associated in some way with earth. The poem's use of the seasons, then, portrays a woman in the correct humour for a particular stage of life, an adolescent not yet considered fully mature.⁹¹

The quadripartite imagery suggested in *The Wife's Lament* can be seen to emerge more clearly in those poems which use the imagery of winter. Winter, Bede writes, is cold and moist,

⁸⁷ Enkvist, *The Seasons of the Year*, p. 42.

⁸⁸ *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, EETS, s.s. 15 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for EETS, 1995), I.i.

⁸⁹ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 35, p. 101.

⁹⁰ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 101.

⁹¹ I do not think adolescence precludes her from having been married, especially if the age of adolescence extends to 28 years. Whether the ages of man applied to both sexes in the same way is a matter for further research.

like the ‘phlegmatic humours’ that dominate it, and ‘phlegmatic humours produce people who are slow, sleepy and forgetful.’⁹² In Byrhtferth’s diagram, winter is placed between water and air, its elements, and is said to last until the age of 70 or 80, following on from *iuventus*, maturity, which lasts until 48 years. Implicit but unstated by Bede, Byrhtferth, and the diagram that carries Byrhtferth’s name, is that this last age, *senectus*, ends in death. The Wanderer is particularly phlegmatic, in both the modern meaning of stolid calmness, and also in his apparent sleepiness which produces dreams that haunt his waking hours. He is, of course, not forgetful but the opposite, too mindful of his memories, but he is certainly a man of maturity. Winter is also used, as Nils Enkvist states, to suggest ‘the idea of an imminent destruction of the poet’s universe’.⁹³ The snow, wind, rain, and hail which make up the atmospheric conditions of *The Wanderer* are marks of the mingling of water and air in the old and infirm as death approaches. This evokes the idea that the Wanderer is in the final stage of his life, and the world is in its final age.

The Seafarer, in contrast with *The Wanderer* and *The Wife’s Lament*, marks a change of season:

Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,
 wongas wlitigað, woruld onetteð;
 ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
 sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð
 on flodwegas feor gewitan. (48–52)

Groves take blossoms, strongholds become beautiful, fields brighten, the world hastens on; all then reminds the eager mind’s heart to journey that who so intends to depart far on ocean-paths.

The *blostmum*, the flowers, are a clear sign of the passing of winter, and in the following lines the cuckoo is described as ‘summeres weard’ (‘summer’s guardian’, 54). The change from winter

⁹² *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, p. 101.

⁹³ Enkvist, *The Seasons of the Year*, p. 9.

increases the Seafarer's longing, because it means he will soon be able to sail. However if this is early spring, Roy Leslie suggests that he would still have to wait: 'the worst storms of the winter around the coast of Britain often come in the early spring; anyone wishing to go on a voyage would simply have to wait till they abated.'⁹⁴ The change in seasons does not mean that the world is not still in decline; as Bately notes in relation to *The Seafarer*, each new year brings the end of the world closer.⁹⁵

The idea of a world in decline emerges in both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. After the Seafarer describes the importance of living a good life so that one will be praised after death, the poem segues into a generalised elegy for a lost heroic world:

Dagas sind gewitene,
 ealle onmedlan eorþan rices;
 næron nu cyningas ne caseras
 ne goldgiefan swylce iu wæron,
 þonne hi mæst mid him mærp̃a gefremedon
 ond on dryhtlicestum dome lifdon.
 Gedroren is þeos duguð eal, dreamas sind gewitene,
 wuniað þa wacran ond þas woruld healdaþ,
 brucað þurh bisgo. Blæd is gehnæged,
 eorþan indryhto ealdað ond searað,
 swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard. (80b–90)

Days are departed, all magnificence on earth of kingdom; there are not now kings or caesars nor gold-givers as were of old, when they provided most of themselves with glory, and lived in most lordly fame. This troop is all collapsed, joys are departed, the more slender ones occupy and hold this world, they enjoy through their care. Glory is humbled, nobility of earth grows old and withers, as now each man throughout middle-earth. Old age overtakes him, face grows pale, the hoary-haired one mourns, knows his former friends, children of princes, given to earth.

⁹⁴ Roy F. Leslie, 'The Meaning and Structure of *The Seafarer*', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), pp. 96–122 (p. 111).

⁹⁵ Bately, 'Time and the Passing of Time', p. 6.

Not only are the days gone, but the men of the world are growing old, never to experience youth again, and there is no hint of any young men to take their place aside from the ‘slender’ or weak ones, whose hold on the world is tenuous. J. E. Cross explains that medieval thought inherited a classical and early Christian belief ‘that the men of their own generation and/or the world were physically weaker than mankind and/or world of some (often unspecified) preceding age. For men moral weakness accompanied physical weakness.’⁹⁶ Such slow decay, Cross notes, is at odds with Christian doctrine, which favours a sudden destruction.⁹⁷ The medieval world was considered to be in its final age,⁹⁸ old and approaching the end; even Bede thought so: ‘The Sixth Age, which is now in progress, is not fixed according to any sequence of generations or times, but like senility, this [Age] will come to an end in the death of the whole world.’⁹⁹ The winter imagery of both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* is thus connected to the ending of the aged world.

Uhta

Within Anglo-Saxon culture, as in any other, people live within temporal constructs which create an expectation of the order of time, whether the horarium of monastery, hall, or home. In the rhetoric of *The Wanderer* and *The Wife’s Lament* even natural time, the cycle of night and day, is interrupted: the Wanderer is never described explicitly as experiencing full day, and the Wife has

⁹⁶ Cross, ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm’, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Cross, ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm’, p. 6.

⁹⁸ Cross, ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm’, p. 2.

⁹⁹ *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. by Wallis, ch. 66, p. 158.

no night; his winter does not end, and nor does her ‘summer-long day’. However, in both poems both are described as awake each day at the time of *uhta*.

The first line of direct speech in *The Wanderer* establishes *uhta* as the time of day for his lamentations: ‘oft ic sceolde ana uhtna gehwylce | mine ceare cwipān’ (‘often I must lament my sorrow alone, each time before dawn,’ 8–9a). The wife of *The Wife’s Lament* also describes herself as alone (*ana*) at *uhta*: ‘þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge | under actreo eond þas eorðscrafu’ (‘when I alone at daybreak walk under the oak-tree around these earth-caves’, 35–36). She is also described as suffering from *uhtceare*: ‘hæfde ic uhtceare | hwær min leodfruma | londes wære’ (‘I had dawn-care about where in the country my lord might be’, 7b–8). The compound *uhtceare*, pre-dawn care, or worry, or sorrow, is a hapax legomenon, although both parts of the compound are used in *The Wanderer* to describe his experience of time. *Uhta* and *cearu* clearly go together. In a similar example, *Resignation* refers to *morgenseoc*, being morning-sick, while sad: at line 96 *þæs anhoga* (‘this wanderer’, 89) is described as ‘a sefa geomor, | mod morgenseoc’ (‘always sad in mind, a morning-sick mind’).¹⁰⁰ Chapter three established the ambivalence in *Beowulf* of the morning as a welcome time of day, revealing as it does to Beowulf his safety from the sea-monsters after fighting them in darkness; however, it is more often a time of sadness as the daylight reveals sources of grief, such as the attacks by Grendel and his mother. Eric Stanley argues that while the time of *uhta* is difficult to define precisely, ‘the mood is clear. The early morning is a time of terror without solace’.¹⁰¹ However, terror is

¹⁰⁰ The *morgenseoc* compound is also a hapax legomenon, and it is the only *morgen-* compound to refer to a morning sensation; however it is not a direct parallel to *uhtcearu* as *morgen* refers to the whole morning, or day itself, while *uhta* is a specific time of day.

¹⁰¹ Stanley, ‘Old English Poetic Diction’, p. 434.

overstating the effect somewhat, for while the Wanderer and the Wife are anguished, they do not express fear.

According to Tupper, the moment of *uhta* varies with the seasons ‘but it meant doubtless, to churchman and layman, the darkest portion of the night, the hour before dawn’.¹⁰² Tupper explains that ‘Uhtsang or Nocturns, formerly only Vigils, became a separate Canonical Hour in the Anglo-Saxon Church’,¹⁰³ and furthermore

The Hours of the Canons were fraught with symbolism to the mediaeval monk. Not only was a special significance given to each period by some circumstance in the Saviour's passion, but the stages of the world and the periods of human life were represented by the Hours.¹⁰⁴

It is clear from Tupper's textual evidence, largely composed of both Latin and vernacular prose, including homilies, that ‘Uhtsang must end at dawn, and the period, Uhta, always precedes the light’.¹⁰⁵ Those who should be awake at the hour of *uhta* should also be attending *uhtsang*; anyone else is out of time. The *uhta* lamentations of the Wanderer and Wife could therefore be read as either thematically linked to *matins*, as a kind of prayer of penance, or even as perversions of *uhtsang*.

Other possibilities have been suggested for exactly which time of day *uhta* refers to, none reasonable. Raymond Tripp argues unconvincingly for a ‘ballad approach’ that allows the possibility of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Wife* to be figures of the dead, relating their

¹⁰² Frederick Tupper, Jr, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, *PMLA*, 10 (1895), 111–241 (p. 147).

¹⁰³ Tupper, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, p. 145.

¹⁰⁴ Tupper, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, p. 145.

¹⁰⁵ Tupper, ‘Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl’, p. 147.

life story to the living.¹⁰⁶ He claims that ‘in both pagan and Christian traditions the dead live on under the ground and can be made to tell their stories’.¹⁰⁷ He sees these pre-dawn narrators as revenants or ghosts and calls *uhta* ‘the traditional hour most painful to ghosts, when just before dawn, *dægred*, they must return to their graves and their souls to the torments of hell’.¹⁰⁸ William Johnson takes a similar approach in arguing improbably that the speaker of *The Wife’s Lament* is the ghost of a woman, murdered by her husband and earth-bound in torment.¹⁰⁹ In this scenario, Johnson suggests, the nature of the narrator ‘seems less important poetically than that she speaks from the world of the grave and so witnesses to the living despair of damnation’.¹¹⁰ Neither scholar presents any convincing evidence for their theories.

Conclusion: ‘As if it never were’

Two of the elegies contain lines that suggest that time can be stopped or even erased, ‘as if it never were’. *The Wife’s Lament* has a simple narrative in that *ærest*, first her lord departed (6),

¹⁰⁶ Raymond P. Tripp, ‘The Narrator as Revenant: A Reconsideration of Three Old English Elegies’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 8 (1972), 339–61.

¹⁰⁷ Raymond P. Tripp, ‘Odin’s Powers and the Old English Elegies’, in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), pp. 57–68 (p. 59).

¹⁰⁸ Tripp, ‘The Narrator as Revenant’, p. 347.

¹⁰⁹ William C. Johnson, ‘*The Wife’s Lament* as Death-Song’, in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), pp. 69–81.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, ‘*The Wife’s Lament* as Death-Song’, p. 77.

then (*þa*, 9) she went looking, after which his kinsmen *ongunnon hycgan*, began to plan (11), and then they were separated from each other.¹¹¹ In the past:

Bliþe gebæro ful oft wit beotedan
 þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana
 owiht elles; eft is þæt onhworfen,
 is nu *swa hit no wære*
 freondscipe uncer. (21–25a, emphasis added)

With joyful demeanour very often we two vowed that we not be separated by anything else except by death alone; that is changed now, is now.... our friendship as if it never were.

The simple declaration that things are changed now marks the interruption between past and present caused by the separation, and the line ‘*swa hit no wære*’ makes clear the break.¹¹² Not only are these events gone, but it is as if they did not happen. However, the events have left their mark on the present, if only on the wife and her memory, for she still has thoughts and feelings associated with this past. The friendship may have been obliterated, but not the friends, or not this half of the pair. She exists still, and remembers still, and so the memory lives on in her.

The Wanderer uses almost identical phrasing after the *ubi sunt* section quoted earlier:

‘Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat, | genap under nihthelm, *swa heo no wære*’ (‘Alas, majesty of the lord! How the time went, grew dark under cover of night, *as if it never were*’, 95–

¹¹¹ Although as Martin Green points out, ‘the syntactic markers of temporality are missing at key places’ and so the reader must infer some of the timeframe. ‘Green, ‘Time, Memory, and Elegy’, p. 127.

¹¹² Klinck notes: ‘This line is abnormally short, and it looks as if part of the one of the verses has been lost [...] It is possible, though, that the poet deliberately took this metrical liberty for dramatic effect’, Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 183. Even if the a-line is damaged or corrupted, it is the b-line that is of most interest here, especially as it is so similar to 96b in *The Wanderer*.

96, emphasis added). A third statement in a similar vein is the ‘þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs’ (18) line from *Wulf and Eadwacer* discussed above.¹¹³

The literal reality of ‘as if it never were’ aligns with Augustine’s reasoning that time has no independent existence. However, Augustine’s ‘present sense of things past’ lingers in the mind:

When a true account is given of past events, what is brought forth from the memory is not the events themselves, which have passed away, but words formed from images of those events which, as they happened and went on their way, left some kind of traces in the mind through the medium of the senses. This is the case with my childhood, which no longer exists: it belongs to past time which exists no longer, but when I recall it and tell the story I contemplate the image of it which is still in my memory.¹¹⁴

Things can seem as if they never happened, but as long as traces exist in the mind, they never really pass. Certainly, as long as the elegiac poems persist, the speaker’s memories cannot be erased or come to seem as if they never were.

The mental wandering of the speakers recalls Augustine’s *distentio animi*. When the Wanderer and the Seafarer think on the decline of the world and its future end, they look for the eternity that will cease the movement of time and finally provide peace. While the elegies are not always overtly Christian, someone considered them worthy of preservation; there must have been a purpose. The poems do offer some Christian solace, in the form of the need to steel one’s mind and prepare for the future. The apocalyptic elements rely on a knowledge of scripture, and the use of tetradic schemes speaks to a familiarity with classical texts, so the elegies were likely

¹¹³ Note that for the female speakers, these statements are about the mutability of their relationships, while for the Wanderer, the departing time is related to the transience of worldly things, a difference in timescales discussed earlier in this chapter.

¹¹⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.18, 23.

composed in some kind of monastic or other religious setting. The elegies combine several temporal constructions, such as the ages of man and associated qualities, cycles of the day and the seasons, and the ages of the world.

‘As if it never were’ is representative of the unusual constructs of time in the elegies. The elegiac mode is one of interrupted time, in which the speakers are out of time with the communities they were once a part of. To be at odds with time is emphatically abnormal and undesirable, and a source of misery for all speakers. The focus on the personal experience of time is at odds with the narrative poetry previously examined. The elegies thus offer both a cautionary tale — do not become exiled — and some small comfort to readers who might feel similarly. While the speakers suffer alone, their grief becomes communal by being shared through poetry. Nostalgia is a collective experience, while longing is an individual sensation. The poems depict the breakdown of an ordered society into disorder, and present such an outcome as the unavoidable result of the passage of time. The elegies suggest that the world is inexorably headed towards chaos, and that decline is inevitable and irreversible. This pessimistic vision of the future is not shared by all Anglo-Saxon literature, or indeed all of the Old English elegies, but it is the inevitable outcome of the unpredictability of the future; this is Kermode’s ‘sense of an ending’: ‘eschatology is stretched over the whole of history, the End is present at every moment, the types always relevant.’¹¹⁵ Collective longing is usually nostalgic, but for the individual in a state of longing their condition is one of misery. The intense yearning felt by the Wanderer, the Seafarer, the Wife, and the speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer* traps them in time. They are in stasis, placed and held there by their doleful emotions. The losses sustained by these

¹¹⁵ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 26.

speakers are intensified by the act of remembrance, reflection without restoration, and so there can be no relief from their suffering.

Conclusion

The thesis contributes a new understanding of what the Anglo-Saxons knew about time and how Anglo-Saxon authors constructed time in their works. Their science of time was based in the movements of God's creation, as measured and marked by sundials and calendars, and included biblical time, history, ages of the world and ages of man schemata. This thesis uses a holistic approach to demonstrate how this science of time was incorporated into vernacular literature for particular narrative effect. All of the texts examined draw upon a poetics of time that is often shared, in which particular divisions of time or time-markers have symbolic effect. The philosophy of time was only rarely used, though the phenomenology of time appears in the elegies.

Chapter one demonstrated how the works of the Venerable Bede form a sustained project to construct time for his present-day audience as Christian and eschatological. He combined his knowledge of science and history with biblical exegesis, weaving all three disciplines together in his construct of time. Bede is interested in the problem of time, though not from a philosophical perspective — because he was not trained in philosophy, and did not indulge in speculation — and in finding practical solutions for chronological problems. Through the *HE* and his chronicles Bede charts historical time in the context of Creation, the founding of Rome, and the birth of Christ. For Bede Rome was the foundation of historicity and theology. When God became incarnate, human time mingled with the divine; eternal God became, for a time, human, and subject to death. Easter celebrates the temporal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, the triumph over time in the form of death, and Christ's coming both hallowed the sixth age of the world and facilitated the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Christ's Resurrection made possible

the immortality that had originally been intended for man at Creation, but which was lost in the Fall; Bede's commentary on Genesis clarifies this link. Through the Fall man became subject to time, but the promise of the Resurrection is eternal life. Bede makes clear in his *HE* that this promise also belongs to the Anglo-Saxons, and that it was always intended for them.

The great narrative of the *HE* is the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, and the national identity forged by this process. Two episodes anchor the *HE*: the conversion of King Edwin and the Synod of Whitby. These gatherings have each attracted much critical attention. In the text they have the power of an assembly or parliament; each is a moment of national decision concerned with the problem of time. King Edwin's men choose Christianity because of the certainty it can provide about time, about what has come before the present moment, and what will follow. Bede's depiction of the meeting is a recreation, not a verbatim account; as such it demonstrates Bede's interest in the temporal meaning provided by Christianity, a metaphorical light where once there was darkness. The flight of the sparrow through the hall emphasises that Christian time gives meaning to both individuals and communities. The image of communal warmth in the hall against the dark storm outside resounds throughout Old English poetry. The comfort of the hall is the comfort of community and shared time, and for this setting to be disrupted, as it is in *Beowulf* and the elegies, is to be outside of time. Through this image, Bede connects the *HE* and its themes to Anglo-Saxon daily life.

The Synod of Whitby, in contrast to King Edwin's council, is reported more accurately and perhaps with less poetic touches. This is because this meeting was more recent to Bede's time, and theologically more important. At stake is the asynchrony of the kingdom of Northumbria, who do not celebrate Easter at the correct time, and are therefore not in communion with the rest of the English church. Bede's side 'wins', and this vindication of the

Roman method of dating Easter also confirms the importance of Roman historicity to the Christian community of Anglo-Saxon England. Northumbria and the other kingdoms are afterwards united in shared practice and shared chronology, and joined to the world chronology centred on Rome. The new chronology offered by AD dating was both satisfactorily symbolic and politically expedient for Bede. Dating the years from Christ's birth made clear the saviour's central position in the religion, and emphasised the reversal of time made possible by his death and Resurrection. Because AD numbering restarted at one, Bede was provided with powerful ammunition against accusations of heresy directed towards him and his work. AD dating made clear that Christ's birth was the start of a new age, and while it could exist alongside conceptions of the six ages of the world, it did not make direct reference to this scheme, insulating Bede from criticism from ignorant 'rustics'.

Bede's scientific works, though liable to misunderstanding from certain quarters, cemented the importance of AD dating as part of how divine time interacted with the human. This interaction allowed for a particular symbolism which became part of the poetics of time available to Anglo-Saxon authors, including Bede himself in his poem *De die iudicii*. Bede continually explores the operation of biblical typology as a pattern of time, in which every event has meaning. Despite Bede's trust in God as the creator of time, and his value on the importance of understanding time, he is insistent that no one can know or predict the whole span of time. Time is not fixed, because it will end with the end of the world. Time will be replaced by eternity, which is the opposite of time, and the solution to Augustine's *distentio animi*. In eternity there is *stabilitate*.

The historical and temporal importance of Rome continues in *Elene*, which begins with the historical moment when Christian time became Roman time. The event is located relative to

the incarnation, and the poem returns to the site of the Crucifixion, the place where God left human time when he suffered death and rose again. The rediscovery of the Cross is confirmation of the new temporality brought about by the resurrection: the promise of future salvation. The AD date given at the beginning of *Elene* is far afield from the historical reality, but Cynewulf likely realised this, and used it nonetheless, possibly for the symbolism of the numbers 200 and 33. In fact, while the number 233 likely came from his source, Cynewulf changed the start of the dating from Christ's Passion to his birth, to reinforce the symbolism of the events of *Elene*. It is clear that in Anglo-Saxon texts the meaning of time was generally prized more than accurate chronology; even Bede was accused by a person who took issue not with an incorrect date, but with an imagined implication that Christ was not born in the sixth age of the world. By setting his poem two hundred years after the Crucifixion, Cynewulf reinforces the meanings of the cross at the heart of the narrative as both historical artefact and liturgical and typological symbol.

Elene marks time as a poetic that focuses on the importance of conversion before the Judgement Day, before it is too late. The poem's historicizing of its narrative makes the Jews a people reluctant to accept Christ or follow their own past. Roman history and Jewish history meet, as Elene brings her knowledge learned from books back to those for whom the books were originally written. The implication for the reader is a reflection of Anglo-Saxon conversion and a reminder of the centrality of the Crucifixion to the Christian faith. The poem combines the linearity of history with the cyclicity of the solar liturgical year, prompting annual reflection on the significance of the Cross in the histories of salvation, empire, and the world.

The cyclical nature of the liturgical year is the prime focus of *Andreas*. The poem's forty days mark its narrative as the typological imprinting of the divine plan upon human events throughout biblical history. Through the course of the poem Andrew encounters the divine Christ

disguised as a human, who moves freely through time while Andrew is subject to it, especially in his three days of torture in Mermedonia, a typological echo of Christ's own Passion. Andrew must submit to time, especially God's time, before he can understand the eternal place he will have in heaven — a place seen not by Andrew but by his men, who are moved through time by angels — though even at the end of the poem Andrew is in a hurry to leave. His final task of assisting in establishing the church in Mermedonia both recalls the seven days of Creation and anticipates the new church that will be built at the end of time. The *Andreas*-poet manipulates his sources carefully so that the time of his narrative comes to forty days. This timeframe is no accident, but carries a wealth of meanings for the literate, reflective reader.

That *Andreas* and *Elene* are both verse saints' lives, and found in the same manuscript, suggests the author of each poem was interested in the poetic possibilities of time. Both poems construct time using the liturgy, typology, and number symbolism to find meaning, but *Elene* also attempts to perform history. That is, perhaps, the greatest difference between the two poems in their approach to time. It is true that *Elene*'s historical date ultimately carries no 'reality', and did not need to, but the *Andreas*-poet eschews real time entirely, focusing instead on the liturgical and the symbolic. As saints' lives, *Elene* and *Andreas* pay particular attention to time, especially to enhance the subject saints as Christ-types, as well as to treat the events of each narrative as microcosmic and therefore representative of the macrocosmic world. The similarities suggest an acknowledgement that time in Old English verse saints' lives ought to operate in this way, with an emphasis on typology and the liturgy. The differences between that treatment of time, however, suggest two authors, both highly literate. *Elene* is signed by Cynewulf and we have no reason to doubt his authorship, but the possibility that he also composed *Andreas* is unlikely, as it is so wholly focused on number symbolism and creates its own self-contained

forty-day narrative without any reference to historical chronology. The strange relationship between *Andreas* and *Beowulf* lends further weight to the two-author hypothesis, as *Elene* has no trace of the latter poem. It is also noteworthy that while the *Andreas*-poet makes his debt to *Beowulf* clear, he does not use time in *Andreas* in any of the ways in which it is used in *Beowulf* as discussed in this thesis.

Critics have long noted time as a theme and structural element of *Beowulf*. The narrative is set *in geardagum*, and some events — the Last Survivor and his treasure — even further back, *in geardagum* again. Though the timeframe of the main narrative is short, covering just a few days in Beowulf's life, the digressions range through the much broader timeframes of history and myth. Such expansive chronology is contrasted with the diurnal-nocturnal cycle, in which monsters attack at night, and the morning brings mourning, until the last morning of Beowulf's own life. With the rising of the sun the poem articulates the passing of the seasons as time accumulates. Buried within such seemingly benign descriptions of times of day are clues to when certain events within the poem take place, suggesting that Beowulf arrives in Denmark in early spring, possibly implying that he is, after all, intended to be a Christ-like figure. The time Beowulf spends underwater in Grendel's mere is marked in the poem as being approximately six hours, suggesting both a supernatural feat on Beowulf's part, and the disruption of normal time wrought by the Grendelkin. The diurnal cycle that structures *Beowulf* on the micro level continues to the macro, at which the poem as a whole depicts the rising and setting of Beowulf's life; the day and night of his life.

Beowulf engages with both the ages of the world in the Christian context, as discussed by Augustine and Bede, and the ages of man in what may be termed a more secular context. The ages of man were linked to ages of the world, although more usually in a set of four rather than

six – although divisions of six and other numbers were also possible. Beowulf's two moments in life, his day and his night, are the zeniths of his youth and his old age. While Beowulf's age in the poem is unstated, and it is unclear whether the fifty years between his youth and old age are literal or symbolic periods of time, he is certainly in the adolescent stage at the beginning, and in *senectus* at the end. The lengthy timespans of the latter part of the poem suggest the treasure is from an earlier age of the world, which is partly why it is useless to the Geats, and causes them so much grief: it is not part of their time. The dragon, too, at over three hundred years of age, is beyond human time. These items from a shadowy past, and the poem's nostalgia for a lost heroic life, crystallise in the figure of the Last Survivor and his *unnyt* treasure, the relics of a people unable to use them. The Last Survivor lacks a name, a context, and a history, but his ancient treasure forms a connection to the Geats which implies they will share in his society's fate, as Beowulf's great life and deeds pass into legend. *Beowulf* engages in the elegiac mode here, which, as the study of the Old English elegies in chapter four demonstrates, takes a particular attitude to time.

The Old English elegies mourn lost pasts, focused through individual speakers. These poems have long defied genre categories, but at least some of them share a poetics of time. The seasonal imagery in the elegies suggests that the poets and readers were familiar with the schemata that constructed relationships between time, humours, ages of the world, life cycles, and the celestial bodies; the quadripartite life used in *Beowulf* recurs in the elegies. It is particularly pronounced in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, in which the old age of the speakers is connected with the old age of the world, and both illustrated by winter imagery, and in *The Wife's Lament*, which takes place in summer, signalling the wife's adolescence and 'hot' temperament. The early morning, the hour of *uhta*, holds particular significance in the elegies as

a time for lamentation and mourning. Those awake at this time of day and not engaging in canonical hours are outside of normal time.

The speakers of the Old English elegies are trapped in the present while their minds experience the distension described by Augustine; they recall memories of the past but to do so is painful. The Wanderer's past overwhelms his present, but he manages to overcome the power of his memories and look to an eternal future. The Wife of *The Wife's Lament* is also trapped by her memories, unable to position herself in the present while she longs for her happier past. The passage of time does not heal all wounds but intensifies the emotional pain experienced by the speakers. Both the Wife and the Wanderer realise that the past is unstable and unfixed, and can ultimately come to seem 'as if it never were'. They and other speakers long for an end to time as an end to their pain; ultimately they crave the stillness of eternity that Bede so fervently believed in, as an antidote to the problems of being in time.

The poetics of time in Anglo-Saxon literature are thus many and varied: they begin with the rich liturgical, typological, and biblical symbolism offered by Christianity, and encompass the symbolism of numbers and the meanings given to particular times of day and years. Historical time, as codified in particular by Bede, allows *Elene* to imitate a chronicle in its opening. Typological time allows *Andreas* to structure its narrative as a microcosm of biblical history, from Creation to Flood to Passion and Resurrection, then to Apocalypse. The heroic time of *Beowulf* is multivalent, and the elegiac mode intensely painful and personal. And yet elements of each linger in the others; for example, *Elene's* opening would not carry nearly so much weight without the context of Bede's *HE* and chronicles of time. Particular genres, or groups of texts, do work within particular constructs and poetics of time, but none of these are exclusive. This thesis demonstrates that ideas of time overlap between texts, leading to a coherent, though varied,

Anglo-Saxon literary expression of time. The similarities between *Andreas* and *Elene*, and between the elegies as a group and the elegies as grouped with *Beowulf*, suggest certain types of poetry share constructions of time. In addition, or instead of, certain manuscripts have been compiled to group similar temporal approaches, and perhaps future research will confirm this.

The Anglo-Saxon construct and poetic of time as seen in all the texts under discussion is multi-dimensional. It is primarily a Christian construction, set within the framework of biblical history. All the works discussed in this thesis look towards the time after death — the storm outside the hall — as a promise of heavenly joy and eternal life. The elegies, too, while not always explicitly looking towards a Christian future, are looking to the end of time and thus an end to the difficulties of temporality. The end of time promises an end to pain; eternity is the opposite of time and the solution to Augustine's *distentio animi* as the way the mind has to stretch to perceive and understand time. In eternity there is stability, as Bede knew, and in eternity there is no time: time may truly come to seem 'as if it never were'.

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