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RIVISTA DI FILOLOGIA E ALTRA MEDIEVALISTICA



1/1-2017

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Medioevo Europeo is an International Peer-Reviewed Journal

ISSN 2532-6856

Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Studi Interculturali
Via Santa Reparata, 93 - 50129 Firenze
redazione@medioevoeuropeo-uniupo.com

Libreria Editrice Alfani SNC, Via Degli Alfani 84/R, 50121 Firenze

progetto grafico realizzato da Gabriele Albertini

INDICE

Magdalena Bator, <i>How (im)precise can a cook be? The case of medieval English recipes</i>	5
Giulia Brun, <i>Transmission and Circulation of Written Knowledge on Art in the Middle Ages. The Case of the Compositiones lucenses Tradition and the Connection with Vitruvius' De architectura</i>	17
Nicodemo Cannavò, <i>Per un'edizione dei testi di Guilhem Ademar: problemi attributivi</i>	31
Daniela Fruscione, <i>Gender, social and marital status in the seventh century the legal framework.</i>	55
Gerardo Larghi, <i>Una sezione di poesia d'amore nel canzoniere di Guilhem Olivier d'Arles</i>	67
Carla Riviello, <i>A joyless dwelling: exiles and traitors, pilgrims and sinners in Old English poetry</i>	131

A joyless dwelling: exiles and traitors, pilgrims and sinners in Old English poetry

ABSTRACT: Nella poesia in inglese antico lo spazio di esclusione dalla società si definisce nella rappresentazione del contrasto tra un qui e un altrove. In una dimensione pagana, l'individuo privato dell'appartenenza al gruppo è l'ultimo superstite di una comunità distrutta o, più spesso, un emarginato per non aver rispettato l'ordine sociale; in una dimensione cristiana, si presenta, invece, come un alieno alla comunità dei fedeli, un peccatore, o come un pellegrino, un credente che ha deciso di seguire un percorso ascetico in solitudine verso il divino. L'analisi della rappresentazione di questo tema in poemi molto diversi—*Maxims*, *Beowulf*, *Wife's Lament*, *Seafarer*, *Wanderer*, *Riming Poem*, *Ruin*, *Genesis*, *Christ III*, *Christ and Satan* — fa emergere l'angoscia del mondo anglosassone nel percepire e sperimentare come il confine tra qui e altrove, sia facilmente valicabile e instabile: il vivido realismo di alcune immagini, e l'introspezione psicologica di altre ritraggono la condizione dell'escluso come insostenibile, verbalizzando così una paura primitiva della solitudine e dell'ignoto.

ABSTRACT: In Old English poetry, the space of exclusion from society is defined in the representation of the contrast between a *here* and an *elsewhere*. Within a pagan dimension, the individual deprived of group belonging is typically the last survivor of a destroyed community or, more often, an outcast for not respecting the social order. Within a Christian dimension, he is either alien to the community of the faithful, or a sinner, or a pilgrim of sorts, a believer who has decided to follow a solitary, ascetic path toward the divine. Analyzing this theme's modes of representation in very different poems — such as *Maxims*, *Beowulf*, *Wife's Lament*, *Seafarer*, *Wanderer*, *Riming Poem*, *Ruin*, *Genesis*, *Christ III*, *Christ and Satan* — demonstrates the anxious perception, within the Anglo-Saxon world, of how the boundary between *here* and *elsewhere* is easily crossed and movable: the vivid realism of certain images and the wise psychological introspection of others portray the condition of the outcast as unsustainable, thus verbalizing a primitive fear of loneliness and the unknown.

PAROLE-CHIAVE: Poesia anglosassone, Spazio, Esilio, Dolore.
KEYWORDS: Old English Poetry, Space, Exile, Pain.

hæfde æghwæðer ende gefered
lænan lifes
(*Beowulf* ll. 2844-2845a)

The major miscellaneous codices that have preserved Old English poetry were composed during the period of the Benedictine Reform. This means that, independently of the difficulties inherent in identifying the chronological gap between the creation of texts and their respective copies,¹ independently of efforts to establish specific motivations and goals underlying the composition of each of the four codices,² the poems of the *Exeter Book*, *Vercelli Book*, *Junius XI* and *Cotton Vitellius AXV* were chosen as worthy of copying because representative, in their form and content, of Anglo-Saxon culture and society. In general, these poetic texts propose the image of a social context that, albeit filtered by literary construction, reflects an idealized version of ethical values and behavioral norms characteristic of the whole chronological period of Old English (Magennis 1996:1-34). Within this perspective, the repetition of phrases and images evoking exile and the place of exile can be read as expressing an anxious perception of individual and social frailty within the Anglo-Saxon world – a deeply rooted perception that perhaps is sublimated or placated through poetic artifice in a variety of effective emotive representations of this condition.

Of the vast range of outcasts that medieval society places outside the social sphere (Zaremska 2004),³ Old English poetry proposes many different examples that use similar stylistic and descriptive strategies, even though the types of exclusion relate to different contexts (Greenfield 1955, Frey 1963, Bessai 1964). Within a secular framework, the individual deprived of belonging to a group might be the last survivor of a destroyed community or someone banished for not respecting the social order, an outcast who does not respect shared rules. Within a Christian dimension, on the other hand, we find the believer who has embarked on a solitary ascetic journey toward the divine, or someone alienated from the community of believers for transgressing established precepts (Ladner 1967). Whether as exile or traitor, pilgrim or sinner, the condition of the outcast is defined by the absence of elements characterizing a shared context. Representation via contrast thus separates the space between a positive *here* and a negative *elsewhere*.⁴ The *here* involves ownership of material goods, a status allowing the individual to live in harmony with the community; the *elsewhere*, on the other hand, represents a place of loss, absence, and solitude. The *here* is an inside, a closed, protected environment regulated by accepted norms; the *elsewhere* is an outside, often a natural environment open to danger, hostile to human life, and dominated by chaos. This dichotomy gains strong connotations through sensory and emotional images. The *here* is characterized by light and heat, the *elsewhere*

¹ Within the articulated and complex debate on this topic, among others see Fulk–Cain (2013: 42-56), Scragg (2013), and also Klinck (2001: 13-21) with reference to Anglo-Saxon elegies in particular.

² See, for example, Zimmermann (1995).

³ Isidorus, in *Etimologiae* V, XXVII, 28-30, had already explained exile and its different typologies: «Exilium dictum quasi extra solum. Nam exul dicitur qui extra solum est [...]. Dividitur autem exilium in relegatis et deportatis. Relegatus est, quem bona sua sequuntur: deportatus, quem non sequuntur. Proscriptio exilii procul damnatio, quasi porro scriptio. Item proscriptus, quia palam scriptus».

⁴ On the dichotomies of here/elsewhere and inside/outside in spatial representation in the Middle Ages, see Zumthor (1993: 58-62).

by darkness and cold. Even more significantly, life on the inside is full of communal joy and well-being, whereas life on the outside is filled with individual pain and desperation.

In many Old English poems, this dichotomy makes up the spatial structure wherein the characters are placed; the dynamic nature of the action lies in their moving from *here* to *elsewhere* and vice versa. Therefore, the location of individuals within space defines their identity (Le Goff 1983: 835-836, Zumthor 1993: 53) and the identity of the protagonists takes shape from the movement between these two places and the related connotations that this movement conveys.⁵

In these representations, the *here* par excellence is defined particularly by the connotations of the hall, a space built by men, situated in the residence of the sovereign or leader, and within which the founding social rituals of community life unfold. The hall is, in fact, where the joy of victory over enemies is celebrated with the distribution of precious goods that the generous leader must bestow on the members of his *comitatus*. The hall is where the mead is poured during banquet festivities while bards applaud the courage and eternal glory of present heroes by invoking the glorious exploits of past heroes belonging to a shared folk tradition. The *elsewhere*, on the other hand, coincides with a sort of anti-hall, an undefined place within nature that is uncontaminated by humans and thus inhospitable, a place where the outcast resigns himself to the suffering of his solitude and the inability to take any constructive action because useful action is impossible outside the community.⁶

The clear acceptance of this image of society is concisely and precisely confirmed by precepts in the gnomic poems.⁷ In *Maxims II*, for example, we find a definition of the places where humans and animals must live:

- (1) wulf sceal on bearowe,
 earm anhaga, efor sceal on holte,
 toðmægenes trum. Til sceal on eðle
 domes wyrcean. [...]
 Cyning sceal on healle
 beagas dælan Bera sceal on hæðe,
 eald and egesfull. (*MxII* 18b-30)⁸

⁵ Of interest on this topic is the work of Michelet (2006), which, through an analysis of literary evidence, defines ways of perceiving and representing space as the basis for the construction of Anglo-Saxon identity. On the relationship between spatial representation and identity, also see the work of Howe (2001 and 2008) which, focusing on other aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture, identifies the myth of migration as the founding element of its identity.

⁶ On the concept of hall as «a centre of a cluster of ideas», see Hume (1974), as well as the ample analysis by Magennis (1996). For treatment of the correspondences and connections between historical-archeological documents and literary-poetic texts, see Pollington (2003) as well as Garner (2011: 3-176), who investigates, if sometimes unconvincingly, the relationship between architectural imagery and Anglo-Saxon poetry.

⁷ For an evaluation of the precepts formulated in *Maxims I* and *II* as an effective representation of the values dear to Anglo-Saxon society, see Taylor (1969) and Cavill (1999: 178-183).

⁸ Here, as also for subsequent quotes from Anglo-Saxon poetic texts, I follow the edition by Krapp-Dobbie (1931-1953).

The wolf, a wretched recluse, is typically in a grove. The boar, strong of tusk-might, is typically in a forest. The good man typically strives after glory in his homeland. [...] The king typically dispenses rings in the hall. The bear, old and dreadful, is typically on a heath.⁹

Menacing animals thus belong to woods, forests and wilderness, whereas humans must live in their native homes. Additionally, the tight bond that unites the sovereign, the hall and the distribution of treasures is considered obvious and natural, and equivalent to the description of the equally obvious and natural behaviors of the animal world.¹⁰

Analogously, *Maxims I* celebrates the fortune of he who can live in his native land and stigmatizes the traitor because, if the *here* is the place of safety and protection, internal conflicts must be forbidden:

- (2) Eadig bið se þe in his eþle geþihð, earm se him his frynd geswicað. (*MxI* 37)¹¹

A man who gets on well in his own home is fortunate, a man whose friends let him down is wretched. (Shippey 1976)

He who must face a voyage should therefore share the experience with trusted friends to avoid the paradox that might drive a *wineleas* ('friendless') and thus *wonsælig* ('unhappy') man to choose the company of the wolf, who will devour him at the first occasion:

- (3) Wel mon sceal wine healdan on wega gehwylcum;
oft mon fereð feor bi tune, þær him wat freond unwirotodne.
Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to geferan,
felafæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð;
gryre sceal for greggum, græf deadum men; (*MxI* 144-148)¹²

A man must be careful to keep a friend on every road; you often go a long way round a town, where you know you will not find a friend. The unhappy man who has no friends takes wolves as his companions, most treacherous beasts. Very often his companion tears him. One should fear the grey beast, give a dead man a grave. (Shippey 1976)¹³

- (4) Earm biþ se þe sceal ana lifgan,
wineleas wunian hafaþ him wyrd geteod;
betre him wære þæt he broþor ahte, begen hi anes monnes,
eorles eaforan wæran, gif hi sceoldan eofor onginnan
opþe begen beran; (*MxI* 172-176a)

⁹ I cite the translation by Greenfield–Evert (1975: 347-349), agreeing in this case with the interpretation of *sceal on* as 'is typically in'. On the different semantic value of *sceal* and *biþ* in the so-called gnomic verses, see also Nelson (1981), Larrington (1994: 6-9) and the more convincing arguments by Cavill (1999: 45-50).

¹⁰ Bollard (1973: 179-180) rightly notes: «the poet [...] lists aspects of the world and of society which must be and must remain as they are in order that the realms of man and nature may survive together», cf. also Larrington (1994: 131-132).

¹¹ On the formulaic value of *eadig biþ* / *earn biþ*, see also *infra Maxims I* l.172a and Cavill (1999: 82-98).

¹² On the interpretation of lines 146-151 as «a hint of funeral lamentation», see Lendinara (1973).

¹³ It is pertinent to specify that in Shippey's edition the verses cited correspond to *Maxims I* C ll. 7-11.

The man who has to live by himself is miserable, fate has dictated that he should live without friends. It would be better for him to have a brother, for them both to be the sons of one man, one nobleman, if they were to have to attack a boar, or overpower a bear; that is an animal with cruel paws. (Shippey 1976)¹⁴

In sanctioning the need to live in a known interior rather than face the solitary, external space inhabited by dangerous enemies, the gnomic maxims also seem to measure the real dimensions of the external threat and thus, in fact, betray a fearful awareness that the two spaces are not actually so separate.

Analogous desires and fears can be found in *Beowulf*. The hall is represented at the height of its vitality. One need look no further than the initial verses where the hero, following procedures needed to identify himself as a stranger and decipher his intentions, is finally admitted with his followers to the court of the Danish king Hroþgar:

- (5) þa wæs Geatmæcgum geador ætsomne
 on beorsele benc gerymed;
 þær swiðferhþe sittan eodon,
 þryðum dealle. þegn nytte beheold,
 se þe on handa bær hroden ealowæge,
 scencte scir wered. Scop hwilum sang
 hador on Heorote. þær wæs hæleða dream,
 duguð unlytel Dena ond Wedera. (*Bwf* 491-498)

Then was a bench cleared in the beer-hall for the men of the Geats all together. Then the stout-hearted ones went to sit down, proud in their might. A thane did his work who bore in his hands an embellished ale-cup, poured the bright drink. At times a scop sang, clear-voiced in Heorot. There was joy, of brave men, no little company of Danes and Weather-Geats. (Donaldson 2002)

Another example can be found in the celebrations after the first victory over Grendel, which are meant to honor Beowulf and share the joy over the monster's defeat:

- (6) Bugon þa to bence blædagande,
 fülle gefægon; fægere geþægon
 medoful manig magas þara
 swiðhicgende on sele þam hean,
 Hroðgar ond Hroþulf. Heorot innan wæs
 freondum afylled; [...]
 Forgeaf þa Beowulfe bearn Healfdenes
 segen gyldenne sigores to leane;
 hroden hildecumbor, helm ond byrnan,
 mære maðþumsweord manige gesawon
 beforan beorn beran. (*Bwf* 1013-1024a)

Men who were known for courage sat at the benches, rejoiced in the feast. Their kinsmen, stout-hearted Hrothgar and Hrothulf, partook fairly of many a mead-cup in the high hall. Heorot within was filled with friends [...]. Then the son of Healfdene gave Beowulf a golden standard to reward his victory, -a decorate battle-banner- a helmet and mailshirt: many saw the glorious, costly sword borne before the warrior. (Donaldson 2002)

Multiple times, the hall is defined as a 'beer-hall' (*beorsele*, l. 482, l. 492, l. 1094, l. 2635) 'wine-hall' (*winsele*, l. 695, l. 771, l. 2456; *winreced*, l. 714, l. 993), or 'mead-hall'

¹⁴ In Shippey's edition, *Maxims I C* ll. 35-39a.

(*meoduheall*, l. 484, l. 638; *meduseld*, l. 3065), with clear reference to the libations consumed therein, or also as a ‘gold-hall’ (*goldsele*, l. 715, l. 1253, l. 1693, l. 2083) to evoke the precious metal that the leader distributes to worthy warriors and the bright energy that it emanates. Additionally, the *sele* is often connoted by the adjective ‘high’ (*hêah*), clearly alluding to a vast, airy, dimension, the superb space we see in the already cited lines 1016 and 713, 919, 1984, as well as in the *hapax hêahsele* (l. 647).¹⁵ The hall is, in fact, animated by vital luminosity and joyous dynamism: here we find the sum of social pleasures made up of feasting and music identified in the poetic lexicon as *drêam*, and conventionally translated as ‘joy, bliss’ (*DOE*).

Nevertheless, the *elsewhere* of the monsters is a reality that the hall’s inhabitants must face.¹⁶ It is made up of underground tunnels, dark crevices and narrow caves: the dragon’s home, for example, is referred to repeatedly as ‘earth-hall’ (*eorðsele*, l. 2232,¹⁷ l. 2410, l. 2515), ‘earth-house’ (with the *hapax eorðreced*, l. 2719), and ‘earth-cave’ (*eorðscræf*, l. 3046), and it is surrounded by a deserted, desolate territory, (*on þære westenne* l. 2298). The den in which Grendel’s mother lives and where the confrontation with the hero takes place is defined by the *hapax niðsele*, an odious, hostile hall:

- (7) ða se eorl ongeat
 þæt he in niðsele nathwylcum wæs, (*Bwf* 1513b-14)
 Then the earl saw that he was in some hostile hall. (by Donaldson 2002)

The landscape where this ‘feind-hall’ is located is particularly dark and sinister. Hroþgar abundantly describes it before facing it, after the ferocious attack by the monster’s mother, when he begs Beowulf to follow her and drive her out of her den:

- (8) [...] wulfhleoþu, windige næssas,
 frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream
 under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,
 flod under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon
 milgearnearces þæt se mere standeð;
 ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
 wudu wyrtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.
 þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,
 fyr on flode. No þæs frod leofað
 gumena bearna, þæt þone grund wite;
 ðeah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,
 heorot hornum trum, holtwudu sece,
 feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,
 aldor on ofre, ær he in wille
 hafelan hydan. Nis þæt heoru stow!

¹⁵ Regarding a possible semantic distinction between *sele* and *heall*, see De Roo (1980).

¹⁶ Among the more recent examinations of spatial representation in the poem, see in particular Michalet (2006: 74-114), who highlights the porous nature of the boundaries between hall and anti-hall; Elden (2009), who reads its symbolic-political value through the criteria of an ‘emotional and imaginative geography’; and Garner (2011: 42-63), who almost too emphatically attributes a connotation to wood, stone and earth, the building materials of Heorot, Grendel’s den, and the devil’s lair, respectively.

¹⁷ It is relevant to note that the reconstruction *eorðse[le]* in line 2232 is the one proposed by more recent editions; see *Beowulf*b, Fulk–Bjork–Niles (2009), and related bibliography, compared to *eorð[hu]se* found in Krapp–Dobbie (1931-1953, vol. IV), and in *Beowulf* a, Klaeber (1950).

þonon yðgeblond up astigeð
 won to wolcnum, þonne wind styreþ,
 lað gewidru, oðþæt lyft drysmaþ,
 roderas reotað. (*Bwf* 1358-1376a)

[...] the wolf-slopes, the windy headlands, the dangerous fen-paths where the mountain stream goes down under the darkness of the hills, the flood under the earth. It is not far from here, measured in miles, that the mere stands; over it hang frost-covered woods, trees fast of root close over the water. There each night may be seen fire on the flood, a fearful wonder. Of the son of men there lives none, old of wisdom, who knows the bottom. Though the heath-stalker, the strong-horned hart, harassed by the hounds makes for the forest after long flight, rather will he give his life, his being, on the bank than save his head by entering. That is no pleasant place. From it the surging waves rise up black to the heavens when the wind stirs up awful storms, until the air becomes gloomy, the skies weep. (Donaldson 2002)

In addition to suggesting allegorical-symbolic readings,¹⁸ critics have identified numerous sources, influences, and intertextual correspondences for this passage: from Virgil's verses about Aeneas' trip to the underworld,¹⁹ to the final passage in *Blicking Homily XVI* that narrates Saint Paul's visit to hell with references to the tradition of the *Visio Pauli*, broadly disseminated both in Latin and the vernacular in medieval England;²⁰ from

¹⁸ For example, Robertson (1951: 32-34) points out the Patristic implications of the garden trope in this passage, whereas the close reading in Faraci (1996-1997) focuses on the symbolic aspects of the deer within Christian literature.

¹⁹ The comparison is based primarily on the verses in *Aeneid* VI, ll. 237-241: «Spelunca alta fuit vastoque immanis hiatu, / scrupea, tuta lacu nigro nemorumque tenebris, / quam super haud ullae poterant impune volantes / tendere iter pennis: talis sese halitus atris / faucibus effundens supera ad convexa ferebat» and VI, 282-284: «In medio ramos annosaque brachia pandit / ulmus opaca ingens, quam sedem Somnia volgo / vana tenere ferunt foliisque sub omnibus haerent». Among the first to suggest this comparison were Klaeber (1911: 341) and Haber (1931: 92-96); among more recent contributions, see North (2007: 91-92). For additional bibliographical references, see Magennis (1996: 136-138) and *Beowulf* b, Fulk–Bjork–Niles (2009: 200-201).

²⁰ See the text and its translation in *Blicking Homilies* b, Kelly (2003: 144, 197-207): «Swa Sanctus Paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard, þær ealle wætero niðergewitað, ond he þær geseah ofer ðæm wætere sumne harne stán, ond wæron norð of ðæm stane awexene swiðe hrimige bearwas. Ond ðær wæron þystrogenipo, ond under þæm stáne wæs niccra eardung ond wearga. Ond he geseah þæt on ðæm clife hangodan on ðæm ísigean bearwum manige swearte saula be heora handum gebundne. Ond þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnesse heora gripende wæron, swa swa grædig wulf. And þæt wæter wæs sweart under þæm clife neoðan. Ond betuh þæm clife on ðæm wætre wæron swylce twelf míla, ond ðonne ða twigum forburston þonne gewitan þa saula niðer þa þe on ðæm twigum hangodan, ond him onfengon ða nicras». ('As St. Paul was looking towards the northern region of the earth from where all waters pass down, he saw above the water a hoary stone, and north of the stone the woods had grown very frosty. Dark mists existed there, and under the stone was the dwelling place of monsters and abominable creatures. He saw that many black souls with their hands bounds hanging on the cliff of these icy woods. The devils in the likeness of monsters were seizing them like greedy wolves. The water under the cliff beneath was black. Between the cliff and the water there was a distance of about twelve miles, when the (cliff) twigs broke the souls who hung on these twigs fell down and the monsters seized them'). Even in this case, the bibliography is very large. Morris (1874-78: vii (*Blicking Homilies*a)) had already identified a relationship between the prose passage, belonging to the homily catalogued in this edition as XVII, and the verses of the poem; and also Klaeber (1912: 185-187). Similarly, Brown (1938), proposing a systematic lexical comparison, argued that the poem influenced the homily, as did Niles (1983: 17-19) and Schrader (1983: 81). This thesis is rejected by Collins (1984: 61-69), whereas others hypothesized a parallel derivation from a common source, as in Wright (1993: 113-136) and Magennis (1996: 133-135). A more likely hypothesis is the independent reception of the same homiletic themes, as in Tristram (1978: 111). For a bibliography on the *Visio Pauli* tradition

the comparison with certain passages of the *Grettis saga*²¹ to the more recent connection made with certain verses of the Anglo-Saxon dialogic poem *Salomon and Saturn II*.²² Even though there are undeniable parallels with representations of a dark and threatening world of the dead, with frightening descriptions of hell (Malone 1958, Tristram 1978: 108-111), these intertextual echoes take nothing away from the unique expressive effectiveness of *Beowulf*, where the representation of its freezing and bitter wintery landscape, whipped by a violent wind, points us to a present condition of deep, physical and psychological discomfort.²³ This becomes even clearer in the following verses, which describe the course traveled by Hroþgar, Beowulf and their following steep inclines and narrow paths ending in a 'joyless wood' (*wynleas wudu*):

- (9) Ofereode þa æþelinga bearn
 steap stanhliðo, stige nearwe,
 enge anpaðas uncuð gelad,
 neowle næssas, nicorhusa fela.
 [...]

 oþþæt he færinga fyrgenbeamas
 ofer harne stan²⁴ hleonian funde,
 wynleasne wudu; (*Bwf* 1408-1416a)

The son of noble forebears moved over the steep rocky slopes, narrow paths where only one could go at a time, an unfamiliar trail, steep hills, many a lair of water-monsters. [...] until suddenly he found mountain trees leaning out over hoary stone, a joyless wood. (Donaldson 2002)

A similar description is given of the den to which the mortally wounded Grendel escapes:

- (10) scolde Grendel þonan
 feorhseoc fleon under fenhleoðu,
 secean wynleas wic; (*Bwf* 819b-821a)

Grendel must flee from there, mortally sick, seek his joyless home in the fen-slopes (Donaldson 2002)

This emotive connotation given to the places inhabited by Grendel and his mother reflects their exclusion from the activities of the hall and the joys of life in society. Grendel's status as an outsider to the *drêam* is repeatedly described throughout²⁵ and portrayed

in the Middle Ages, see, on the other hand, Bremmer (2007: 211-236) and for the diffusion and reception of the various versions of the *Visio Pauli* in the Anglo-Saxon area, see especially *Vision of St. Paul*, diPaolo Healey (1978: 41-57) and Wright (1993: 106-174).

²¹ In particular, see Lawrence (1912: 231-245) and, for a broader comparison between the Anglo-Saxon poem and Icelandic saga (Fjalldal 1998), Orchard (2003a: 140-168) and bibliographic references therein.

²² See Anzelak (2007), who discusses «the Avernian tradition in Old English Poetry», proposing connections and correspondences with multiple texts in both Classical and Christian Latin tradition, whereas for a generic overview of the major studies that have identified the influences of the Latin world on the poem, see Orchard (2003b: 132-136).

²³ On the originality with which elements shared by other traditions are used in *Beowulf*, see Wright (1993: 135) and Orchard (2003b: 158). On the complexity of this passage and the multiplicity of suggested interpretations, see Butts (1987) and Orchard (2003a: 37-47).

²⁴ On the use of the formula *hara stan* to indicate «a marker of boundary» in Old English texts, see Swisher (2002).

²⁵ In line 105, for example, Grendel is defined as *wonsælig* ('unhappy'), the same adjective that con-

with remarkable effectiveness in the verses narrating his arrival at Heorot, before the conflict with Beowulf, where the contrast between the vital luminosity of the golden hall and the dark mists accompanying the creature is striking:

- (11) *ða com of more under misthleoþum*
Grendel gongan, godes yrre bær;
mynte se manscaða manna cynnes
sumne besyrwan in sele þam hean.
Wod under wolcnum to þæs þe he winreced,
goldsele gumena, gearwost wisse,
fættum fahne. [...]
Com þa to recede rinc siðian,
dreamum bedæled. (Bwf 710-721a)

Then from the moor under the mist-hills Grendel came walking, wearing God's anger. The foul ravager thought to catch some one of mankind there in the high hall. Under the clouds he moved until he could see most clearly the wine-hall, treasure-house of men, shining with gold. [...] The creature deprived of joy came walking to the hall. (Donaldson 2002)

Without entering into the merits of the hypothesis that Grendel originally represented a man cast out for great misdeeds, a sort of malefactor banned from the community,²⁶ it is clear that the solitude of these monsters, their lack of supportive ties with humans, and particularly the desolate places where they live are associated with images analogous, often both in form and content, to representations of the exile.²⁷

Significant examples of this can be found in the elegies of the *Exeter Book*, which propose mostly first-person laments by different kinds of outcasts telling their stories of painful isolation.²⁸

Thus we find in *The Wife's Lament* a female narrator weeping over her forced separation from her companion.²⁹ The description of the place where she has been relegated is similar to the landscape characteristics of Grendel's den:³⁰

- (12) *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. (WfL 27-32a)

notes the friendless man in *Maxims I*, l. 146; elsewhere we find *dreama leas* ('without joy' l. 850) or *dreame bedæled* ('deprived of joy' l. 1275).

²⁶ See, among others, contributions by Bessai (1964), Baird (1966), Goldsmith (1970: 97), Dragland (1977), Feldman (1987), and Princi Braccini (1997: 1141-1195). For an orienting approach to the very vast bibliography dedicated to Grendel and his mother, see the bibliographic references provided by Orchard (2003b: 189, n. 97 and 191, n. 99).

²⁷ Incidentally, we might remember that Grendel is associated with the race of Cain (ll. 102-114). As this topic is beyond the scope of the present paper, I refer my readers once again to Orchard (2003a: 58-85) for a thorough discussion of it, as well as to the bibliographical references in the previous footnote.

²⁸ On the ways in which Anglo-Saxon elegies can be considered a literary genre, see Klinck (2001: 221-251) and Riviello (2011: 260-261).

²⁹ For an overview of the multiple interpretations elaborated by critics for this brief composition, see Klinck (2001: 49-54).

³⁰ Efforts at assimilating these landscapes with representations of hell are less compelling, in this case; for example, see Hall (2002: 6-7 and 19-20).

They forced me to live in a forest grove, / under an oak tree in an earthen cave. / This earth-hall is old, and I ache with longing; / the dales are dark, the hills too high, / harsh hedges overhung with briars, / a home without joy. (Liuzza 2014)

Even here we see references to a thick, dark vegetation with steep and threatening promontories. Some of the nouns used to indicate the dragon's lair in *Beowulf*, *eorðscræf* (l. 3046) and *eorðsele* (l. 2410 and l. 2515), aptly define the image of this 'earth-hall', which is then explicitly given an emotional connotation through the phrases *bitre burgtunas*³¹ and especially *wic wynna leas* ('home without joy'). It has been opportunely noted that:

The grim landscape externalizes the speaker's mood and feelings [...]. The oak tree and the earth-hall are such concrete entities in a poem that is otherwise devoid of concrete detail, they force themselves on the reader as potential carriers of meaning. Like the hills, valleys, and briars, they can be seen as embodiments of the speaker's isolation. (Green 1983: 125)³²

Within this perspective, it is superfluous to try to identify with realistic precision what type of cave the anonymous poet described with the nouns *eorðscræf* and *eorðsele*.³³ An analogous emotive representation characterizes the verses that describe where the beloved is: as with *niðsele*, even here the anti-hall is described with *dreorsele* ('dreary hall'), a *hapax* compound wherein the adjective's connotation contrasts the images of the hall proper:

- (13) þæt min freond siteð
 under stanhlīpe storme behrimed,
 wine werigmod, wætre beflowen
 on dreorsele. Dreogeð se min wine
 micle modceare; he gemon to oft
 wynlicran wic. (*WjL* 47b-52a)

so that my friend sits / under stone cliffs chilled by storms, / weary-minded, surrounded by water / in a sad dreary hall! My beloved will suffer / the cares of a sorrowful mind; he will remember / too often a happier home. (Liuzza 2014)

³¹ Even though I find plausible the interpretations of *bitre burgtunas* provided by Leslie (1988: 56) («The epithet *biter* has probably the meaning 'sharp' [...], and refers to the briars which have grown over the protecting walls of the cave or mound») and by Klinck (2001: 184) («the bitter enclosure overgrown with briars»), I agree with the observation made by Garner (2011: 174): «When <bitter> is assigned as an attribute of the entirety of the woman's *burgtunas*, the physical space itself becomes designated as an appropriate locus for grief, regret and sorrow».

³² On this point, also see Jensen (1990), Lapidge (1997: 34), and Bueno (1998).

³³ Critics have hypothesized that this could refer to a grave, or more precisely a «chambered barrow» (Leslie 1988: 56) or more likely a 'cave' (Harris 1977), also on the basis of «a considerable body of evidence – historical, archaeological, and literary – documenting the human use of caves» (Wentersdorf 1981: 503), as well as a «sunken-featured building» (Anderson 1991: 73-76) or «a *soutterain*, an artificial underground dwelling or chamber» (Battles 1994: 268). Less convincing is the interpretation by Garner 2011: 174, which, in noting how underground dwellings in Anglo-Saxon poetry are heavily associated with death, identifies in *eorðscræf* «a dwelling for the living who are facing death». Finally, it is relevant to specify that, while *eorðscræf* is found in numerous instances in Old English documentation, both in poetry and prose, with the meanings of 'cave', 'grave' or even 'chasm', in *Andreas* 1588, *eorðsele* appears only in the above-mentioned instances in *Beowulf* and *The Wife's Lament*.

The relative shortness of the elegiac poems, even more than *Beowulf*, thus highlights how the solitary suffering of the exile or outcast expands and is projected onto the surrounding environment (Stanley 1955: 434, Neville 1999: 204).

An analogous physical and psychological unease provides connotation even where the anti-hall is by the sea, a natural setting equally inhospitable to humans. Thus in the *Seafarer* the first verses place the elegy's hero on the bow of a ship tormented by a stormy sea:

- (14) Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
 siþas secgan hu ic geswincedagum
 earfoðhwile oft þrowade,
 bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,
 gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela,
 atol yþa gewealc, þær mec oft bigeat
 nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan,
 þonne he be clifum cnossað. (*Sfr*1-6a)

I can sing a true song of myself, / tell of my journeys, how in days of toil / I've often suffered troubled times, / endured hard heartache, come to know / many of care's dwellings on the keel of a ship, / terrible tossing of the waves, where the anxious / night-watch often held me at the ship's stem / when it crashes against the cliffs. (Liuzza 2014)

Once again, the ease with which the poetic lexicon combines diverse elements, creating new, pertinent and transparent compounds, allows the creation of the *hapax cearseld* ('care's dwelling'), which evokes, paradoxically and contrastively, the word *meduseld* (*Beowulf* l. 3065), one of the many synonyms for 'mead-hall' (*Seafarer*, see Gordon 1996: 33, Hume 1974: 70, Cucina 2008: 217-244). In fact, the first part of this complex poem especially represents the condition of the seafarer forced to wander the ice-cold sea in contrast with the condition of he who remains protected in his own social context:

- (15) hungor innan slat
 merewerges mod. Ðæt se mon ne wat
 þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
 hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ
 winter wunade wræccan lastum,
 winemægum bidroren,
 bihongen hrimgicelum; hægl scurum fleag.
 þær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ,
 iscealdne wæg. Hwilum ylfete song
 dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor
 ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,
 mæw singende fore medodrince. (*Sfr*12b-22)

Hunger gnawed my sea-weary mind. That man does not know, / he whose lot is fairest on land, / how I dwelt all winter, wretched with care, / on the ice-cold sea in the paths of exile, / deprived of dear kinsmen, / hung with icicles of frost while hail flew in showers. / I heard nothing there but the noise of the sea, / the ice-cold waves; the wild swan's song / sometimes served for music, the gannet's call / and the curlew's cry for the laughter of men, / the seagull's singing for mead-drink. (Liuzza 2014)

Even in this case, the winter cold presented in its extreme, aggressive ferocity mirrors and amplifies the psychological condition of pain experienced by he who is separated from his friends, the solitary exile forced to substitute the festive noise of the hall and the laughter of men with the call of sea birds. Thus in the following verses we see:

- (16) Forþon him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn
 gebiden in burgum, bealosipa hwon,
 wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft
 in brimlade bidan sceolde.
 Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde,
 hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,
 corna caldast (*Sfr* 27-33a)

And so he who has tasted life's joy in towns, / suffered few sad journeys, scarcely believes, / proud
 and puffed up with wine, what I, weary, / have often had to endure in my seafaring. / The night-
 shadow darkened; snow came from the north, / frost bound the ground, hail fell on earth, / coldest of
 grains. (Liuzza 2014)

- (17) þæt se beorn ne wat,
 esteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað
 þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað. (*Sfr* 55b-57)

He does not know, / the man blessed with ease, what those endure / who walk most widely in the
 paths of exile. (Liuzza 2014)

The context, however, is different. This seafarer, whose suffering is described with so much realistic veracity, voluntarily chooses to face the sea in adverse atmospheric conditions that no Anglo-Saxon sailor would have faced in a non-literary dimension. Especially in the second part of the poem, in fact, this voyage turns out to be the journey of a believer traveling the difficult path toward God.³⁴ In a poem characterized by a stratified semantic weave, the substitution of bird calls for human laughter vividly evokes the contrast between the past on land and the present on the sea: «company, not loneliness, warmth, not cold, relaxation, not tension» (Tucker 1959: 223). At the same time, however:

Laughter for the poet of *Seafarer* is a symbol [of] the bright world of the Germanic hall but is simultaneously a symbol of vanity. [...]. The poem's appreciation of the brightness of the world as compellingly symbolized by laughter and feasting gives power and depth to its renunciatory message. (Magennis 1992: 204)

Analogously the cold, which in Anglo-Saxon poetry often alludes to hostile, negative contexts (Stanley 1955: 426-428, Salmon 1959) echoes the spiritual cold that grips those who wander away from the word of God (Hill 1968, Cucina 2008: 246-266).

Similar descriptive traits define the condition of the protagonist of another elegy, *The Wanderer*. Even in this case, the anti-hall is located on the ice-cold sea:

- (18) Oft him anhaga are gebideð,
 metudes miltse þeah þe he modcearig
 geond lagulade longe sceolde
 hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ,
 wadan wræclastas. (*Wan* 1-5a)

³⁴ This interpretation has gathered the broadest consensus, though within a very diverse bibliography, an examination of which can be found in Cucina (2008: 115-155).

Always the one alone longs for mercy, / the Maker's mildness, though, troubled in mind, / across the ocean-ways he has long been forced / to stir with his hands the frost-cold sea, / and walk in exile's paths. (Liuzza 2014)³⁵

The wanderer presents himself as the sole survivor of the destruction of his people, the group to which he belonged; he is forced to roam a stormy sea in the cold of winter, in complete solitude and deprived of his native land where, according to the gnomic maxims, happiness comes only to one who succeeds in his search for another mead-hall, a community that can save him from alienation:

- (19) Swa ic modsefan minne sceolde
 oft earmcearig, eðle bidæled,
 freomægum feor feterum sælan,
 siþþan geara iu goldwine minne
 hrusan heolstre biwrah ond ic hean þonan
 wod wintercearig ofer wapema gebind,
 sohte seledreorig sinces bryttan,
 hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte
 þone þe in meoduhealle mine wisse,
 oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
 weman mid wynnum. (*Wan* 19-29a)³⁶

just as I have had to take my own heart –/ often wretched, cut off from my homeland, / far from dear kinsmen – and bind it in fetters, / ever since long ago I hid my gold-giving friend / in the darkness of earth, and went wretched, / winter-sad, over the ice-locked waves, / sought, hall-sick, a treasure-giver, / wherever I might find, far or near, / someone in a meadhall who might know my people, / or who would want to comfort me, friendless, / accustom me to joy. (by Liuzza 2014)

Hapax and compounds belonging only to the poetic lexicon such as *earmcearig*, *wintercearig*, *seledreorig*, and the formulaic phrases *eðle bidæled* and *freomægum feor* define the *topoi* of exile with original effectiveness, tying the state of mind of the wanderer bound by chains, (*modsefan* [...] *feterum sælan*), to the hostile nature that surrounds him (*ofer wapema gebind*).³⁷

In addition, just as the seafarer substitutes the call of the birds for the laughter of men, the wanderer can have only sorrow as his companion:³⁸

- (20) Wat se þe cunnað,
 hu sliþen bið sorg to geferan,
 þam þe him lyt hafað leofra geholena. (*Wan* 29b-31)

³⁵ For critics' different evaluations of the compositional structure and overall meaning of the poem on the basis of different interpretations of these first verses, see in particular Muir (2000: 503-505) and Klinck (2001: 106-107).

³⁶ This passage is taken from the edition by Klinck (2001), which proposes for line 25 the compound *seledreorig* instead of *sele dreorig* in Krapp–Dobbie (1931-1953, vol. III).

³⁷ The repeated use of utterances aimed at representing suffering as an oppressive physical and psychological constriction has been considered repeatedly as a stylistic-connotative marker of this poem by Rosier (1964: 367-368), Cook (1996), and Harbus (1996: 166-167), among others. On the opportune inclusion among these phrases of *ofer wapema gebind*, in contrast with *Wanderer*, Leslie (1985: 74), see Malmberg (1970), Greentree (2002) and Langeslang (2015: 142).

³⁸ On the personification of sorrow as a companion, see Riviello (2012: 180-184).

He who has come to know / how cruel a companion is sorrow / for one whit few dear friends, will understand. (Liuzza 2014)

An unwitting exile, he can only rely on his memory to re-evoked the warm and welcoming space of the hall, the throne of gifts:

- (21) Gemon he selescegas ond sincþege,
hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine
wenede to wiste. Wyn eal gedreas! (*Wan* 34-36)

He remembers hall-holders and treasure-taking, / how in his youth his gold-giving lord / accustomed him to the feast – that joy has all faded. (Liuzza 2014)

or abandon himself to dreaming to feel once again the reassuring joy of his lord's embrace:

- (22) þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
clyppe ond cysse, ond on cneo lecce
honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
in geardagum giefstolas breac. (*Wan* 41-44)

it seems in his mind that he clasps and kisses / his lord of men, and on his knee lays / hands and head, as he sometimes long ago / in earlier days enjoyed the gift-throne. (Liuzza 2014)

Even beyond the attempts to identify in this passage references and allusions to rituals of the heroic world (*Wanderer*, cf. Leslie 1985: 78-79), to note the deceptive nature of the dream (Harbus 1996) or to see interesting influences of a Latin patristic tradition (Clemoes 1969: 73-77, Galloway 1994: 481-485), these verses communicate above all the wanderer's deeply emotional experience in evoking the lost hall. Then the one who finds himself in exile for contingent reasons will understand his error in having trusted in the transitory nature of earthly life, identifying within Christian doctrine the new context, the new hall to which to aspire. He who has survived a disintegrating era, will acquire through pain and suffering an awareness of the inconsistency of pagan-heroic values and the fleeting nature of earthly riches, thus perceiving the need to embark on a different course. Although with different premises from those that animate the verses of *The Seafarer*, even as a secular exile the wanderer seems to become a Christian pilgrim.³⁹

An analogous situation is found in another one of the so-called elegiac poems, *The Riming Poem*. The narrator, likely the head of a valiant *comitatus*, a sovereign divested of his role,⁴⁰ evokes the hall, the emblematic space of his power:

- (23) Hæfde ic heanne had, ne wæs me in healle gad,
þæt þær rof weord rad. Oft þær rinc gebad,
þæt he in sele sæge sincgewæge,
þegnum geþyhte. (*Rim* 15-18a)

³⁹ Dyas (2001: 105) aptly notes: «In the *Wanderer* and in *the Seafarer* [...] it is possible to observe the creative interaction between secular and spiritual understandings of exile, the nature of security, and the priorities which human beings should observe as they navigate the trials of this world».

⁴⁰ This is the convincing hypothesis formulated by Wentersdorf (1985) and substantially accepted by critics (cf. Klinck 2001: 40-43). The interpretation by Lehmann (1970: 440), according to which the narrator was identified with «the will of God», was outright refuted by Macrae-Gibson (1973: 66).

I held high rank, in hall lacked nothing, / where the proud band of riders often fortun'd / to see great store of all such treasures / as noble men need. (Macrae-Gibson 1983)

remaining aware, however, of the certain disappearance of this world:

- (24) Werig winneð, widsið onginneð,
 sar ne sinniþ, sorgum cinnið,
 blæd his blinnið, blisse linnið,
 listum linneð, lustum ne tinneð.
 Dreamas swa her gedreosað, dryhtscype gehreosað,
 lif her men forleosað, leahtras oft geceosað;
 treowþrag is to trag, seo untrume genag,
 steapum eatole misþah, ond eal stund genag. (*Rim* 51-58)

The death-struggle starts, the far journey- / constant pain, procreating sorrow, / end of good fame, parting from joys, / parting from skills, going no more at will. / So here delights fall, nobilities dash down, / here men harshly lose life, gain only evils; / the season of faith is an ill one, sick, sinking, / misthruven in deep horror, ever sinking. (Macrae-Gibson 1983)

The protagonist seems to give up his role because, as we see especially in the last part of the poem, he is animated by a deep Christian faith more than by political and military ambitions (Wentersdorf 1985: 268-270). The use of rhyme within the alliterative verse creates a complex structure that slows down, at least for a modern reader, the immediate emotive perception of the content.⁴¹ The use of images belonging to a heroic society and the painful representation of its decadence appear with less expressive force here than in the other cited texts. However, even here we find the ideal centrality of the hall within the social sphere.

Elsewhere the agonizing regret over the loss of the hall takes shape in the representation of its ruin, of its abandonment that seems to imply or evoke the dissolution of the social order celebrated therein and of the ethical values expressed by the community that had built it.

One might, for example, call to mind another short elegiac poem, *The Ruin*, which is focused on the description of a destroyed city. To cite just a few of the interpretive hypotheses that have been formulated, these ruins have been identified on the basis of archeological data as Bath or other real cities (Leslie 1988: 22-28, Wentersdorf 1977), and on the basis of a figurative interpretation as Babylon (Keenan 1966) or an allegorical city of men parallel to Augustine's city of God (Doubleday 1972). Alternatively, starting from the sensible premise that «the actual location of the poem is at best peripheral to our understanding of it», the poem has been ascribed to the *encomium urbis* genre (Lee 1973: 443-444). We can also find metaphorical readings in Christological terms (Cammarota 1997) and others where the identification of a wordplay between body parts and buildings has justified a reading of the poem as a «Body-city Riddle» since «If the body is like a building because it encloses and protects dwellers (the heart and soul), it is like a city and the wall surrounding it, which enclose and protect the inhabitants» (Johnson

⁴¹ Having identified in the poem traits of a *hisperic style*, Earl (1987: 195) concludes: «It is not a metrical exercise but a verse experiment. The poet's primary interest – his realm 'theme', as it were – is the poetic language itself, which in his hands is very rich. The poem certainly bursts with meaning – many meanings – but it does not attempt the precise narrative situations or psychological realism we appreciate in the other elegies». Also see Macrae-Gibson (1973: 75).

1980: 405).⁴² Of greatest interest for the present study, however, is how the description of the destroyed city is made by evoking the mead-hall once filled with joy, a place where warriors covered in precious shields moved in the opulence of sparkling gems and gold:

- (25) meodoheall monig *mondreama* full,
 oppæt þæt onwende *wyrd seo swiþe*. (*Rui* 23-24)

many a meadhall filled with men's joys, / until mighty fate made an end to all that. (Liuzza 2014)

- (26) Hryre wong gecrong
 gebrocen to beorgum, þær iu beorn monig
 glædmod ond goldbeorht gleoma gefrætwed,
 wlonc ond wingal wighyrstum scan;
 seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,
 on ead, on æht, on eorcanstan,
 on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices. (*Rui* 31b-37)

The ruins toppled to the ground, / broken into rubble, where once many a man / glad-minded, gold-bright, bedecked in splendor, / proud, full of wine, shone in his war-gear, / gazed on treasure, on silver, on sparkling gems, / on wealth, on possessions, on the precious stone / on this bright capital of a broad kingdom. (Liuzza 2014)

The opposition between past and present is thus actualized on a plane of simultaneity:⁴³ the poet builds and transmits the dynamic vision of magnificent edifices once filled with life and now transformed into desolate ruins. He succeeds in involving his public in painful dismay through a simple description, without the explicit suffering expressed as a first-person memory.⁴⁴

This perception of painful bewilderment over the loss of the hall, the tragic subversion of its function when the principles regulating its harmony are violated, is represented with an emotional involvement that is even more intense in *Beowulf*, in the so-called lament of the bereaved father (ll. 2444-2459), and in particular:

- (27) Gesyhð sorhcearig on his suna bure
 winsele westne, windge reste
 reote berofene. Ridend swefað,
 hæleð in hoðman; nis þær hearpan sweg,
 gomen in gearдум, swylce ðær iu wæron. (*Bwf* 2455-2459)

⁴² The interpretive difficulties for this poem are amplified by the damage to the *folia* of the *Exeter Book* (123v, 124rv). For an interesting attempt to reconstruct the lost verses, see Orchard (2008).

⁴³ Calder (1971) refers to a «shifting tense»; Lee (1973: 451) writes: «His [the poet's] vision has a timeless quality which brings the city of the past as close or closer than the present one». On the other hand, Trilling (2009: 164), who reads the poem as a constellation of different elements, argues that the image of the ruins represents «a locus for the simultaneous existence of past and present, and the poem posits reflection on the past as an experience in which the past is brought into a dialectical relationship with the reader's present-and, implicitly, future». Regarding this last point, see also Dailey (2006: 182-187).

⁴⁴ Renoir (1983: 150) aptly writes: «whereas the physical frame of reference is merely ambiguous and accordingly enables dedicated scholars to hold out for Bath or Chester or some other location, the emotional frame of reference is a total vacuum, which the modern reader must fill from his or her own reading of the text». On the «ruin-motif» in Anglo-Saxon poetry, also see Hume (1976) and Liuzza (2003).

Sorrowful he sees in his son's dwelling the empty wine-hall, the windy resting place without of joy – the riders sleep, the warriors in the grave. There is no sound of the harp, no joy in the dwelling, as there was on old. (Donaldson 2002)

In the poem, the aged man (*gomel ceorl* 2444) and his impotent suffering before his hanged son mirror the terrible pain of another old father, King Hrêðel, who cannot avenge the murder of his son because committed by his other son, the victim's brother (ll. 2426-2443).⁴⁵ Presumably, the entire episode, narrated by Beowulf in his speech before facing the dragon, also reflects the hero's anguish, aware as he is of the imminent disintegration of his world.⁴⁶ What is striking here, however, is the visual strength of the images, outlined in an almost cinematographic description of the stunned and heartbroken expression of the elderly parent. The possible echo and references to the popular *topos ubi sunt* (Schrader 1984) do not undermine its originality and appeal. The place of once joyous banquets is now uninhabited, silent and left to the wind, an atmospheric agent that is capable of penetrating an environment no longer closed and protected as it should have been. The wind invades the hall when it is empty because its order has now been subverted.

The wine-hall, reduced to a sad simulacrum of what it once was and now deserted (*westen*), just like the place where the dragon's lair is found, like the emptiness created by the ruins of a destroyed city⁴⁷ – these move the boundary between *here* and *elsewhere* from a spatial dimension to a temporal one, revealing their disturbing contiguity: the *here* can be transformed into an *elsewhere*, with the two places being not so separate as one would want.

In eminently Christian-themed literature, in poems that directly stage events taken from the Sacred Scriptures, this ideal dichotomy assumes the typical oppositions of Eden/earthly world and heaven/hell. In the narrative of events featuring as protagonists Adam and Eve, Cain, Satan, the rebellious angels and all the sinners condemned to hell, for example, it is not surprising to find Anglo-Saxon poetry using formulaic phrases associated with the imagery of exile.⁴⁸ It is also clear that in these texts the contrasting representation cannot resolve itself merely in the hall/anti-hall paradigm, but it is also defined through the specific elements taken from Latin Christian tradition.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, it is interesting

⁴⁵ The legal motivations that might have forbidden revenge have been investigated by Whitelock (1939).

⁴⁶ On the value that the entire episode assumes within the poem, see in particular Georgianna (1987). Of interest is also the approach of those who have investigated possible correspondences between the content of these verses and Norse documentation, for example that of Taylor (1952), Harris (1994), and Wehlau (1998a), the latter identifying «seeds of sorrow» in these verses similar to those in *Wanderer* and *Sonattorek*.

⁴⁷ On the symbolic value that places with the connotation of *westen* assume in *The Ruin* and *Beowulf*, see Dailey (2008: 187-193).

⁴⁸ In identifying in many Anglo-Saxon poems «the concept of the pilgrimage of life», Dyas (2001: 68-69) writes: «The concept of pilgrimage as mankind's journey through life to the heavenly home was in fact so deeply embedded in the minds and imaginations of those who produced Old English poetry and prose that it was possible for it to be widely used without explanation or amplification».

⁴⁹ See for example, the analyses in Magennis (1996: 40-42 and 144-167). Less compelling, because of its lack of attention to the specificity to individual poems, on the other hand, is the idea that ties the nevertheless interesting essays by Lee (1972): in analyzing the metaphor of the hall in Anglo-Saxon poetry, Lee argues that all this documentation, inasmuch as it is born from the fusion of a poetic lexicon and the ethos of

to note that, even when we are dealing with characters from the Sacred Scriptures, often the places of exile are given a strong emotive connotation: even in these cases, the representation absorbs, re-elaborates and strongly expresses the psychological condition of the exile.

In *Genesis B*, for example, when Adam becomes aware of having lost his status and the ease and peace that went with it, he forecasts their new, desperate situation to Eve:

- (28) Nu wit hreowige magon
 sorgian for þis siðe. Forþon he unc self bebead
 þæt wit unc wite warian sceolden,
 hearma mæstne. Nu slit me hunger and þurst
 bitre on breostum, þæs wit begra ær
 wæron orsorge on ealle tid.
 Hu sculon wit nu libban oððe on þys lande wesan,
 gif her wind cymð, westan oððe eastan,
 suðan oððe norðan? Gesweorc up færeð,
 cymeð hægles scur hefone getenge,
 færeð forst on gemang, se byð fyrnum ceald.
 Hwilum of heofnum hate scineð,
 blicð þeos beorhte sunne, and wit her baru standað,
 unwered wædo. Nys unc wuht beforan
 to scursceade, ne sceattes wiht
 to mete gemearcod, ac unc is mihtig god,
 waldend wraðmod. (*Gen* 799b-815a)

Now we have cause to grieve, remorseful, over this destiny, for he himself enjoined us that we should be on our guard against pain, the greatest of afflictions. Now hunger and thirst gnaw me cruelly in my breast, for both of which we were once without a care through all time. How shall we now survive or exist in this land if wind comes here from west or east, south or north? Dark clouds will loom up, a hailstorm will come pelting from the sky and frost will set in along with it, which will be wickedly cold; at times the bright sun will glare and gleam down hotly from the heavens and we stand here naked, unprotected by clothing. There is nothing in front of us as a defence against the storm nor any provision made for food, but mighty God the Ruler is in angry mood toward us. (Bradley 1995)

The re-elaboration of biblical material obviously occurs within a fully assimilated, erudite Christian tradition, from which it absorbs themes, influences and suggestions.⁵⁰ In his refined analysis, for example, Ericksen (1996:1-3) suggests reading the removal of Adam and Eve «from Paradise to the world outside the Garden» and that of Satan «from

a heroic, pagan-Germanic world with the «recreation, in poetic terms, of the biblical vision of human life», is animated by an «imaginative unity», a «poetic mythology», which can be identified substantially in the creation, loss and reacquisition of paradise.

⁵⁰ References to possible sources are provided by Doane (1991: 93-107). For a thorough, albeit strongly polemical, review of the critical debate surrounding the poem, see Vickrey (2015: 14-36). Furthermore, it should be noted that the quoted verses correspond to lines 9b-24a of the Vatican fragment in Old Saxon. The challenges of investigating the entities and typology of relationships between the two poetic traditions to assess dependencies and autonomies of the Anglo-Saxon and the Old Saxon text, can be found in the work of Schwab (1974-1977 and 1988), and in Doane (2011), whereas a point-by-point comparison of the two poems can be found in Doane (1991: 55-64). Finally, regarding the claim in Derolez (1994: 409) that we should analyze *Genesis B* as a translation and not «as if it were Old English poetry *tout court*», we can argue that, in the passages discussed here, the elements associated with exile imagery fully find echoes in other Old English poems.

heaven to hell», in relation to their obedience or disobedience to God and their subsequent positioning within the metaphorical territory of *Likeness* or *Unlikeness* in relation to the Creator, according to a theological opposition already theorized by Augustine. We can thus share the concluding claim that «one doctrinal nicety became a central part of the vivid story» (Ericksen 1996: 20), rather than the hypothesis formulated by Evans (1963:16), according to which the poet was «less interested in doctrinal niceties than in telling a vivid story». The liveliness of the story, as the quoted verses demonstrate, is given by the creation of well-known imagery: the contrast between Eden and the world to which Adam and Even are relegated is built through the contrast between the warmth and light of the place where they lived and the coldness and darkness of the place in which they are forced to stay.⁵¹ The desperation surrounding their hunger and thirst re-proposes the known representation of paradise as a place absent of any physical need, but the phrase *Nu slit me hunger and þurst / bitre on breostum* (ll. 802b-803a) takes us back to *Seafarer* ll. 11b-12a, *hungor innan slat / merewerges mod*, and the peculiar use of the verb *slitan* (‘to cut, tear’) is part of Old English poetic diction, with echoes in other poetic texts, always used to convey «the severity of the experience of hunger» (Magennis 1999: 44).

The status of exiled outcasts banished from Eden is further underlined in the words that God, in the following verses, speaks to the first man:

- (29) þu scealt oðerne eðel secean,
 wynleasran wic, and on wræc hweorfan
 nacod niedwædla, neorxnawanges
 dugeðum bedæled; þe is gedal witod
 lices and sawle. (*Gen* 927-931a)

You are to seek of another homeland, a dwelling-place devoid of happiness, and wander in exile, a naked and needy destitute deprived of the privileges of Paradise; divorce of body and soul is ordained for you. (Bradley 1995)

The specific condition of this exile is marked by the reference to nudity,⁵² as well as the condemnation of a divorce of body and soul; still, just like Grendel in *Beowulf* (l. 821a, l. 1416a) and the exiled woman and her man in *The Wife's Lament* (l. 32a, l. 52a), man cast out of Eden is condemned to live in a ‘joyless dwelling’ (*wynleas wic*).

It is noteworthy that an analogous phrase is used to connote hell. In *Christ III*, sinners and devils, those who have betrayed God, are condemned to suffering without end in a *dreamleas hus* (‘a house devoid of joy’):

- (30) ðonne halig gæst helle biluceð,
 morþerhusa mæst, þurh meahht godes,
 fyres fulle, ond feonda here,
 cynninges worde. Se biþ cwealma mæst

⁵¹ Neville (1999: 20) goes so far as to claim: «Adam’s lament does more than establish an archetype; it sets out the human race’s new place in the universe»; see also Magennis (1996: 149). Additionally, within a Christian vision that imagines earthly life as an exile and travel as the possibility of achieving salvation, Adam can be considered the first pilgrim (Dyas 2001).

⁵² On the perception of nakedness in this text as the visible sign of guilt and thus as the acquired awareness of the need for repentance, see Ericksen (2003).

deofla ond monna! þæt is dreamleas hus,
 ðær ænig ne mæg ower losian
 caldan clommum. Hy bræcon cyninges word,
 beorht boca bibod; forþon hy abidan sceolon
 in sinnehte, sar endeleas,
 firendædum fa, forð þrowian,
 ða þe her forhogdun heofonrices þrym. (*Chr* 1623-1633)

Then the Holy Ghost, by the might of God at the word of the King, will lock up hell, that hugest house of torment filled with fire, and the lost of his enemies. It will be the extremest anguish for devils and for men. It is a house devoid of joy where no one may ever shed his chill shackles. They violated the word of the King, the divine comandment of the Scriptures; therefore they will have to languish in perpetuity and go on suffering endless pain, being guilty of wicked deeds, such as here rejected the majesty of the kingdom of heaven. (Bradley 1995)

In a poem focused on the theme of the Harrowing of Hell, widely disseminated in Old English literature,⁵³ hell is referenced multiple times as *hus* ('house'): it is, in fact, *witehus* ('house of punishment', l. 1535), and its variation *deaðsele deofles* ('devil's hall of death', l. 1536); alternatively it is *susla hus* ('house of torment', l. 1603), *morþerhusa mæst* ('the hugest house of torment', l. 1624), and finally *dreamleas hus* (l. 1627). Thus in proposing a representation according to the Sacred Scriptures of hell as a place of eternal pain and torment, the texts evoke a place that is built or constructed, *hus*, *sele*. The adjective *dreamleas* therefore falls within the negative connotations given to this abode of sinners, coloring the image with an emotional charge.

In *Christ and Satan*, on the other hand, Satan is described according to the usual formula of the exile denied of any possibility of atonement and salvation:

(31) Forðon ic sceal hean and earm hweorfan ðy widor,
 wadan wræclastas, wuldre benemed,
 duguðum bedeled, nænigne dream agan
 uppe mid ænglum, þes ðe ic ær gecwæð
 þæt ic wære seolfa swægles brytta,
 wihta wealdend. (*XSt* 119-124a)

Therefore I must, abject and wretched, wander the wider, / voyage on the paths of exile, deprived of glory, / bereaved of riches, keeping nothing of the joys / upwards among the angels, when I had earlier claimed / to be the Dispenser of the Sky myself, the Wielder of All Creatures. / Yet something worse befell me! (Hostetter 2015)

The connotative element that is perhaps the richest in terms of exile imagery is given by the presence of the wind in the dwelling of Satan and sinners:

(32) Hwæt, her hat and ceald hwilum mencgað;
 hwilum ic gehere hellescealcas,
 gnornende cynn, grundas mænan,
 niðer under næssum; hwilum nacode men
 winnað ymb wyrmas. Is þes windiga sele
 eall inneward atole gefylled. (*XSt* 131-137)

⁵³ For an investigation of the relationship between the re-elaboration of the theme in the Anglo-Saxon area and the text that is considered its primary source, *the Gospel of Nicodemus*, see Campbell (1982). For an examination of the sources of *Christ III*, on the other hand, see in particular Biggs (1986 and 1989-1990).

Listen! Here heat and cold are at one time mingled; / Sometimes I hear infernal devils, a mourning tribe, / lamenting this ground under the headlands / At other times naked humans struggle with serpents. / This is a wind-torn hall entirely filled with terrible things. (Hostetter 2015)

The description of hellish torments adds, to the more common motif of alternating heat and cold,⁵⁴ the presence of the wind, reiterated in the following lines where the cries of the forsaken seem to blend with its sound:

- (33) hreopan deofla,
wide geond windsele wean cwanedon,
man and morður. (*XSt* 317b-320a)

The devils howled widely throughout their windy hall, bewailing their woes, their wickedness and deadly sin. (Hostetter 2015)

þa wæron mid egsan ealle afyrhte,
wide geond windsele wordum mændon (*XSt* 383-384)⁵⁵

They were all frightened with terror, / widely throughout their windy hall, and they complained wordfully. (Hostetter 2015)

The poem's *hapax* compound *windsele* ('windy hall') reposes another oppositional variant to *Beowulf's* *beorsele*: the atmospheric agent that blows through the empty hall observed by the bereaved father and that is seen by Adam as one of the anguish-producing elements of his new condition here describes the most terrible exile—that from which there is no return.⁵⁶

Christ and Satan is, in fact, a poem articulated around three thematic nuclei: the Fall of Satan, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Temptation. The narration alternates between dialogues in the form of a lament or exhortation and narrative parts.⁵⁷ The representation of the battle between Christ and Satan, good and evil, and thus heaven and hell, is built through a poetic diction and imagery evoking the oppositional representation of hall/anti-hall. This occurs, for example, where Satan describes his change of condition following his rebellion:

- (34) þis is ðeostræ ham, ðearle gebunden
fæstum fyrclommum; flor is on welme
at tre onæled. Nis nu ende feor
þæt we sceolun ætsomne susel þrowian,
wean and wergu, nalles wuldres blæd
habban in heofnum, hehselda wyn.

⁵⁴ For references to other Anglo-Saxon texts that mention alternating heat and cold among the torments of hell, see *Christ and Satan* (Finnegan 1977: 44).

⁵⁵ The compound *windsele* in both occurrences appears in the manuscript as the form *winsele* with the letter *d* written above *n* and *s* (see *Christ and Satan* (Finnegan 1977)). Sleeth (1982: 122 and 124) rightly explains the motivation for reading the compound as *windsele*, as already seen in Krapp – Dobbie (1931-1953, vol. I).

⁵⁶ Uncertain about the meaning of the wind in these passages, Sleeth (1982: 89), on the other hand, hypothesizes that «perhaps we are to think of a hot blast of combustion sweeping endlessly through hell to torment its denizens».

⁵⁷ On the unity of the poem and its possible sources, see in particular *Christ and Satan* (Finnegan 1977: 12-55), and Sleeth (1982: 3-26, 50-67).

Hwæt, we for dryhtene iu dreamas hefdon,
 song on swegle selrum tidum,
 þær nu ymb ðone æcan æðele stondað,
 heleð ymb hehseld, herigað drihten
 wordum and wercum, and ic in wite sceal
 bidan in bendum, and me bættran ham
 for oferhygdum æfre ne wene. (*XSt* 38-50)

This is a shadowy home, violently bound with fixed fiery bands. / The floor is in a boil, ignited in poison. It is not far from the end / which we must together suffer torment, pain and affliction—/ not at all the fruits of glory we once had in heaven, / the joys of high seats. Listen! Once we possessed delight before the Lord, / singing in the skies, in better seasons, where now stand / the noble warriors around the Eternal and his high throne, / praising the Lord with words and deeds, and I must in torment / abide in bonds, nor ever hope for any better home for my over-mind. (Hostetter 2015)

And again, we find a remembrance of the joys of old in Satan's second speech:

- (35) Ic wæs iu in heofnum halig ængel,
 dryhtene deore; hefde me dream mid gode,
 micelne for meotode, and ðeos menego swa some.
 [...]
 Nu ic eow henne to hæftum ham gefærde
 alle of earde. Nis her eadiges tir,
 wloncra winsele, ne worulde dream,
 ne ængla ðreat, ne we upheofon
 agan moten. Is ðes atola ham
 fyre onæled. (*XSt* 81-96a)

I was formerly in heaven a holy angel, dear to the Lord. / I had great delight in God on account of the Measurer, / and so did this host united. [...] There is no glory of the blessed here, / no wine-halls of the proud, nor the delights of the world, / no company of angels, nor may we possess / upper heaven again. This is a terrible house, / kindled with fire. (Hostetter 2015)

Satan here seems to understand the loss he has experienced and the seriousness of its consequences.⁵⁸ The *we* of heaven, a shared space, is contrasted with the *I* of hell, of tormented pain that, even if lived by others, is experienced in anguishing solitude. Heaven is represented in these verses as the place where a sovereign God is surrounded by his acolytes (*heliðos*), who happily sing and act sharing the joys (*dreamas*) of the hall in his name, whereas those who are tainted with grave sins are condemned to the horrific punishments of hell. Half-line 93a repropose the image of the *wloncra winsele* ('the winehall of proud') through the nominalized adjective *wlonc* used to designate those who belong to the hall also in the half-line *wlonc and wingal* ('proud and full of wine') found in *Seafarer* 29a and in *Ruin* 34a.

This oppositional representation is substantially reiterated in the entire poem. Even though they reach different conclusions, both Sleeth (1982: 15-19) and Pasternack (1995: 163-166) have aptly identified in *Christ and Satan* a significant «web of echoic repetition».⁵⁹ The repetition of a lexicon and imagery tied to the representation of exile thus create the structure of this poem, determining its aesthetic effectiveness. The for-

⁵⁸ On the awareness of guilt demonstrated by Satan in the poem, see reflections by Clemons (1995: 297-299) and Pasternack (1995: 98).

⁵⁹ Sleeth (1982: 71-111) proposes a large list of terms repeated in a functional way within the poem.

mulaic nature of Old English poetic diction facilitates both the poet's composition and his audience's comprehension through the use of recognizable elements tied together, evoking images present in other texts (Pasternack 1995: 165-166). This common procedure in Anglo-Saxon poetry, however, does not undermine the specificity of the text's message—the invitation to seek «the right knowledge through the Church's wisdom» for one's salvation (Ericksen 2002: 314).⁶⁰

Even if not comprehensive of all of Old English poetic documentation, the examples discussed here propose different identities for the outcast or *other*, and they describe the different places assigned to receive him. The gnomic maxims essentially situate the unhappy, friendless man in a forest infested with ferocious animals. In an epic poem such as *Beowulf*, monsters are relegated to hidden underwater shelters in a dark and gloomy mere or earthen caves surrounded by deserted areas. In the so-called elegiac poems, the exiled woman, who suffers particularly from her beloved's distance, is forced into an earth-hall in a dark wood, and the ice-cold stormy sea represents for the seafarer both the difficult journey of the believer in search of the heavenly homeland and a place where the survivor of a destroyed society understands the transitory nature of material things and comes to trust the afterlife. We also find the representation of ruins, places once animated and now deserted, which express the destructive force of time upon the edifices built by men. In primarily Christian-themed poems, we find Adam, responsible with Eve for original sin, describing their new home as a place with no shelter from the elements, and wind appears in hell where we find Satan, the fallen angels, and all those who have not respected Christian precepts.

The passages cited here belong to texts that differ in many ways, from their length to the topics they cover, to the modalities with which direct sources or even mere influences or suggestions from Classical and Latin Christian tradition are received, re-elaborated and absorbed. Even the limited bibliographic data referenced here provides a general orientation to the possible literal and metaphorical interpretations for each text and, whether one shares each individual hypothesis or not, one can ascertain from them the textual complexity and the articulated semantic stratification of this literature. Related to a single, fundamental theme, the images identified seem built through an apt and original combination of a common lexicon of formulaic phrases and structures that are never rigidly artificial. Each image is striking and effective in how it communicates semantically and aesthetically. Each image is perspicuous and pertinent to the context in which it is placed, even as it reveals an articulated network of intertextual references. The differences and analogies that emerge in the comparison of these passages should be evaluated, therefore, within a view that considers Anglo-Saxon poetry as the product of a culture created by both a pagan Germanic oral tradition and a Latin Christian written tradition, rather than as an expression of one tradition dominating the other. If, in *Christ and Satan*,

⁶⁰ For a possible reading of the poem within the *wisdom literature*, also see Wehlau (1998b: 2), which proposes an analysis of the text based on the assumption that «its content and structure offer ample evidence of the poet's concern for the reader's response through its emphasis on the theme of knowledge, recognition, and remembrance», whereas Ericksen's investigation aims to explain the location of the poem within the manuscript with the possibility «to read the wisdom poem at the end of the collection without reading the biblical poems that precede it» (2002: 319).

Satan in his windy abode remembers paradise using descriptions similar to those used to represent the hall in heroic poetry, in *Beowulf* Grendel's swamp evokes images of hell: from the Virgilian underworld to the medieval *Visio Pauli*.⁶¹ Most notably, in each poem the oppositional paradigm of hall/anti-hall, the battle between good and evil, light and darkness, joy and pain, assumes specific values and connotations directly connected to the referenced topic.

What I would like to highlight, however, is how in all these instances, the dichotomy here/elsewhere builds the spatial structure of reference, whereby each character seems to know both places, is able to compare them and uniquely express the painful awareness that this albeit reassuring dichotomy cannot contain or represent the complexity of real life. Thus the ruins observed by the poet's narrative voice testify to the fact that the *here* can sadly become *elsewhere*. Thus in *The Seafarer* and in different terms also in *The Wanderer* and *The Riming Poem*, the hall/anti-hall opposition is resolved in the search or aspiration for a third place, the *here* of the hall being replaced by another ideal place.

The painful sentiment that emerges from these texts, therefore, is the anguish of perceiving and experiencing how the boundary between *here* and *elsewhere* is easily crossed and movable. This is clearly Hroþgar's anguish as he describes Grendel's den, and it is Beowulf's as he tells of the episode around Hreþel and the bereaved father. The same sentiment dominates the painful memory of the elegiac heroes,⁶² independently from the solutions that some of them will find; it is the anguish of Adam cast out of Eden, of Satan who compares heaven and hell, and the poet in *The Ruin* who remembers the splendor of the hall as he beholds its ruins.

These recurring representations likely reflect the fears of a society that is unsure of its internal cohesion. If we consider the history of medieval England, the stigmatization of the outcast and the celebration of communal life remain relevant throughout the centuries, continuously re-elaborated and re-adapted with renewed, dynamic vitality in texts that differ in theme and date of composition – texts that continue to be produced and handed down as expressions of a sociohistorical unease, and also perhaps as a warning that only a strong compactness *here* would protect from the dangers coming from *elsewhere*.

Even so, in what presents itself as an ideological-political motivation, I believe that there is a deeper, psychological driver: indulging in the suffering of the outcast – whether it be the monster Grendel, the elegiac exiles, the seafaring pilgrim, the sinner Adam or the traitor Satan – seems to be an expression of an existential suffering, the bewilderment of the individual before the universe, the desire to remain within a known, shared context that can assuage and contain this sense of being lost. The emotional participation that comes through these descriptions, the vivid realism of certain images, and the wise psychological introspection of others portray the condition of the outcast as unsustainable, verbalizing a primitive fear of loneliness and the unknown.

For this reason, reading these texts seems to erase any temporal distance and evoke empathy for the lost expression of the elderly father in *Beowulf*, the desperate bewilder-

⁶¹ The connection between Grendel and Cain, for example, is aptly investigated also in light of the representation of damned exiles such as Satan in *Christ and Satan* and Adam's own son in *Genesis* (Orchard 2003b: 58-85).

⁶² Liuzza (2003: 16), for example, notes how the wanderer's pain stems less from the loss of a social context than from the sense of stability given by that context.

ment of Adam in *Genesis*, and the impotent anger of Satan in *Christ and Satan*. The ice that paralyzes the limbs of the *seafarer* and the anguish that knocks at his heart, the abandoned woman's anxiety that comes at dawn after a restless night in the *Wife's Lament*, the dream world as the only way of seeing one's loved ones and the paradox of pain as the only possible companion for the wanderer – these images speak with great clarity to our sensibilities because they evoke sensations that are universal and profoundly human.

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