THE OLD ENGLISH ELEGY AND CRITICAL TRADITION

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Critical comment on Old English elegiac poetry is discussed from the following three standpoints: definition of the genre 'elegy'; interpretations of representative elegiac poems; stylistic analysis. The theories of critics are evaluated, with the aim of establishing the features of elegiac poetry in Old English and assessing the adequacy of critical coverage of them to date.

Not many critics have attempted to define the Old English elegy as a genre, and their definitions tend to be either too vague or too restrictive, needing to be qualified in a number of ways. However, it appears that the elegy in Old English is an abstract kind of poetry. It presents a state of mind rather than a specific person or event. In addition, there are certain recurrent features by which the genre can be defined. The elegy presents the viewpoint of an individual, usually in monologue form. It often contains structural elements which are conventional. The typical themes of elegy are separation from a loved one, exile, banishment, the contrast between present desolation and past or absent happiness. These themes are associated with conventional descriptions, the recurrent features of which extend to quite small particulars of wording and imagery.

Interpretations of the following elegiac poems are discussed: The Seafarer, The Wanderer, The Ruin, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, Wulf and Eadwacer. Critical theories regarding these poems show, by and large, a change from considering them primitive and pagan (sometimes with
Christian interpolations) to stressing their sophistication, unity, and essential Christianity. It is, on the whole, a change for the better, but the sophistication and the Christian element now tend to be overemphasised, especially by those critics who interpret the poems as allegories. Present interpretations show two main trends: a tendency to relate the poems to Latin influence, often patristic, and a movement towards closer investigation of the poems by internal evidence alone, without regard to sources and analogues.

Stylistic studies have mostly considered Old English poetry as a whole, rather than any particular branch of it, but although the elegies employ the same formal devices as the rest of the poetry, they tend to handle them in a freer and more personal way. Also, the tendency of Old English poetry to use external description with a symbolic purpose is particularly shown in the elegies, which make an extensive use of natural description as a vehicle of mood. There has been a change in stylistic analysis similar to that in interpretation. Instead of regarding Old English poetry as unsophisticated, as earlier scholars tended to do, modern critics stress its subtlety and skilful integration, both structurally and syntactically. This change of attitude has affected criticism of the elegies, although the focus has not usually been specifically on them. The stylistic investigations which have shed most light on the elegy as a type have been the formulaic analyses. Apart from the formulaic studies, there has been little direct stylistic examination of elegiac poetry, and it is here that most remains to be done, as regards both formal devices and the looser patterns of imagery and description.
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INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to examine in the light of changing trends in criticism those Old English poems which have been called 'elegies'.¹ Although there were one or two editions of Old English poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by and large, scholarly investigation of the poetry begins with the nineteenth. This is especially true of the poems to be considered here. In the case of these poems the starting point is J.J. Conybeare's Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, published in 1826,² which contains certain elegiac poems, along with other specimens of Old English verse. Not much work was done in the first half of the last century, but in the second half Old English scholarship increased rapidly, until by the end of the century a very great deal was being produced. This

Quotations will be taken from the following editions: I.L. Gordon, The Seafarer (London, 1960)
Fr. Klaeber, Beowulf, Third Edition (Boston, 1950)
Leslie, The Wanderer (Manchester, 1966)
All quotations from poems not found in the four above editions will be taken from Krapp-Dobbie.
For the sake of consistency, accent-marks will be included in all cases, whether or not this corresponds with editorial practice.

²London, 1826.
survey, then, will largely concern itself with criticism from the end of the nineteenth century up to the present day, although a few significant contributions before this period will need to be noted. The emphasis will be on the work of English and American critics.

It will appear that there have been certain tendencies and fashions in criticism prevailing at different times. Aside from the purely textual and linguistic studies, nineteenth-century criticism frequently shows that the earlier scholars were attracted to Old English for what might be called 'romantic' reasons. They saw the poems as representing their own Germanic origins, primitive and pagan. Their comments are sometimes rhapsodic rather than evaluative: 'Read it, Teuton! and your heart-strings will twitch as if plucked by a hand reached out from the past'. Linked with this type of 'criticism' is another prominent nineteenth-century attitude, which in fact persisted long after the end of the century, namely the critical approach which attempted to separate out the 'original', 'pagan' parts of the poems from the 'later', 'Christian' interpolations. This approach has now largely given way to an emphasis on the integrity and thematic unity of the poems as found in their manuscript form. Comments and theories as to the sources and analogues of the poems have always been forthcoming, but they have tended to

\[3\] A.H. Tolman, 'The Style of Anglo-Saxon Poetry', PMLA, III (1887), 34.
concentrate on more and more detailed and minute particulars. In particular, the poems have been increasingly related to Latin influence, both in theme and style. This trend is not recent, but only in the past thirty years or so has it become widespread and thoroughgoing. The reason for this can be seen to be a reaction against the previous emphasis on the primitive and pagan character of the poems. Latin models, classical, and more especially patristic, have been cited. The demonstration of Latin influence is thus linked with the modern emphasis on the essentially Christian nature of the poetry. It is also linked with the modern trend to stress the sophistication, rather than the primitive nature, of the poems. The elegiac poems are not characterised by a clear thought-progression. While the earlier critics simply regarded them as confused or varyingly interpolated, more recent critics have been concerned to explore their hidden meaning, which would give them kinds of inner coherence or consequence that externally they seem to lack. Some critics have thus been led to exegetical, allegorical interpretations. Others, working along the same lines of 'explication de texte' as have been applied to more recent poetry, have examined the poems by internal evidence alone, studying structure, imagery, and diction.

On the one hand, there have been a great many studies interpreting the poems with regard to themes and sources; i.e., these have been studies of 'content'. On the other hand, there have been very few studies of elegiac poetry as a type or of
its stylistic features. For this reason, the chapter on 'Interpretations', below, is very much longer than those on "Genre" and "Style" respectively. In these two chapters, particularly the 'Genre' chapter, much has needed to be added to the statements of critics to illustrate the significant marks of these poems. Critical statements and theories will be evaluated in the course of this study, with a view to analysing their contribution to our understanding of the elegiac poems.
The Definition of Elegy: Theme, Motif, and Structure

There have been surprisingly few attempts to define and classify Old English elegiac poetry. Many critics, especially the earlier (i.e., nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century) ones, have readily used the terms 'elegy' and 'elegiac' with reference to Old English verse without explaining what they meant by these terms. Since no Old English poetry is elegiac in either a classical sense or in the sense in which the term is used with reference to later English poetry, some explanation of its usage is desirable. The purpose of this chapter will be to examine some of the more noteworthy definitions of the word 'elegy' as applied to Old English, with a view towards establishing the characteristic features of Old English elegiac poetry. The survey will be in the main historical, with indications of the links between related schools of thought. As elegy is marked chiefly by its themes, motifs, and structure, a fairly detailed consideration of these will be called for. Additions to the definitions given by critics will be supplied where necessary.

The term 'elegy' as a designation for certain pieces of poetry in Old English is used in a sense similar to its broadest meaning as given by the Oxford Dictionary, that of 'song of lamentation'. Not all who use the term apply it to the same pieces of poetry, some critics being more restrictive than others. Taking a liberal view, we can say
that the word 'elegy' has been used to describe the following poems: The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Ruin, Resignation, The Rhyming Poem, The Husband's Message, The Wife's Lament, Wulf and Eadwacer, and Deor. There are other pieces which represent reflective poetry, but which have not been considered elegies. The Dream of the Rood is an example. Its rather specifically iconographic nature sets it somewhat apart. Many instances of elegiac poetry occur in the longer poems. The most clearly defined examples are Beowulf 2247-66 and 2444-62a (these passages will henceforth be referred to respectively as The Lament of the Last Survivor and The Father's Lament), and Guthlac 1348-79, a servant's report of the death of Guthlac (the poem appears to break off unfinished at line 1379). All these poems and passages have certain affinities, but whether they should properly be called elegies, or whether they should all be called elegies has been a vexed question. The Husband's Message, for instance, is not even melancholy in tone; on the contrary, it is quite optimistic. Yet it has strong resemblances to the other poems which have the requisite melancholy cast, and there is a widespread feeling among critics that it should in some way be grouped with them.

Some critics prefer to use the term 'lyric' to cover more or less the same pieces that others designate 'elegy'. Elliott entitles an article 'Form and Image in the Old English Lyrics,' whereas Irving calls an article of very

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There are disadvantages to 'lyric' as a term as well as to 'elegy'. The former term implies a poem expressing the emotions of an individual, usually in the first person. 'Lyric' nicely covers The Husband's Message, but it does not apply well to The Ruin, which is a description composed in the third person. The use of the terms 'elegy' and 'lyric' more or less synonymously is explained by the fact that the lyrical poetry of Anglo-Saxon times is nearly all of a melancholy kind. Edith Wardale, who, in her Chapters on Old English Literature, introduces the poems commonly called elegies by means of the topic of lyrical poetry, says 'almost all O.E. lyrical poems are elegiac in character'. Critics appear to be becoming more cautious of using the term 'elegy'. Leslie entitles his 1961 edition of 'The Wife's Lament', 'The Husband's Message', and 'The Ruin' Three Old English Elegies; but in his 1966 edition of The Wanderer he prefers to use the expression 'elegiac lyrics' (p. 34), when referring to the group of poems to which The Wanderer belongs. Nevertheless, as anyone familiar with Old English poetry would understand by the word 'elegy' a poem or passage, usually of a melancholy kind, with conventional images of exile, the lost-joys of the hall, etc., it is clear that the word has a meaning, 

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even though its precise reference is in dispute. That meaning is more encompassing and more exact in drawing together poetry of a related kind than the meaning of the term 'lyric', which appears to exclude impersonal poetry, and which has nothing to say about the typical melancholy of the poems to which it refers.

The word 'elegy' is derived from the Greek elegia, meaning 'lament'. The elegy in Greek appears to have been originally a lament for the dead, but in classical Greek 'elegiac poetry' is distinguished not by its subject but by its metre, that of the elegiac distich, which consisted of a hexameter followed by a pentameter. 'Elegiac poetry' in classical Greece and Rome is frequently love-poetry. There is no classical or any other special elegiac metre in Old English, and the Anglo-Saxons had no thought of composing 'elegies' in any classical sense. The term was simply bestowed on some of their poems, not by them, but by later critics. It is a possibility that the more educated Anglo-Saxons were aware of and even influenced by some of the Latin elegies. The major Roman elegists are Ovid, Propertius, and Tibullus. According to Ogilvy, Ovid was quite widely known, and Propertius was known at least to Alcuin. Tibullus is not one of the writers listed by Ogilvy as known to the Anglo-Saxons. Helga Reuschel thinks that The Wanderer and The Seafarer may have been influenced by Ovid's Tristia and

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Ex Ponto. These are not among the works of Ovid cited by Ogilvy. If such influence was a factor, it is not apparent in any obvious way. The Old English elegies are very dissimilar to the later English pastoral elegies like Lycidas, Adonais, and Thyrsis, poems obviously reminiscent of classical models and closely related to the eclogue and idyll. However, the term 'elegy' has never been used exclusively in English to refer to pastoral elegies of this type. In the sixteenth century it was used for poems on the classical-elegiac model, whether or not they were laments. Grey's Elegy is not in the pastoral elegiac style, and it deals with general topics of transience and decay rather than with the death of a particular person. It is thus closer to the Old English poems. Tennyson's In Memoriam, which is sometimes spoken of as an elegy, is different again: longer and more various. Since the word 'elegy' has always been used to cover a variety of poems in English, there seems to be no reason why it should be inherently inappropriate to describe the poetry of lament in Old English.

The first person to use the term 'elegy' in connection with Old English is unknown. By the second half of the last century 'elegy' was being used quite commonly to designate a certain kind of Old English poem. The earlier critics tend to use the term without defining its usage in any very exact way. Ten Brink, in 1877, makes a statement very similar to

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that made later by Miss Wardale. He says: 'The Old English lyrical feeling knows in reality but one art-form, that of the elegy'. He gives no systematic definitions of the term, but his succeeding sentences contain some expansion and explanation of it. 'Painful longing for lost-happiness is its keynote. It seeks to voice this mood in reflective and descriptive language'. Ten Brink does not state explicitly which poems are to be regarded as elegies, but he gives consideration in this context to Deor, The Wanderer, The Ruin, The Lament of the Last Survivor, The Seafarer, The Wife's Lament, and The Husband's Message (pp. 60-63).

Stopford Brooke, in his History of Early English Literature of 1892, shows a consciousness of using the term 'elegy' in rather a special sense, but he gives only a perfunctory explanation of this usage. Referring to The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Husband's Message, and The Wife's Lament, the four poems which he distinguishes as elegies, he says: 'I may claim that term for them; at least in its earlier sense among the Greeks. Three of them are laments, and one is a longing cry of love'. Brooke appears to be assuming that the 'elegy' in Greek was originally a poem of lament, whatever its form.

Among the more prominent German critics of the early part of this century, Brandl and Sieper both regard elegy as


7The History of Early English Literature (London and New York, 1892), II, 166.
a distinct type of poetry in Old English, and Sieper devotes a book to it. Brandl, writing in Paul's *Grundriss*, which was completed in 1909, speaks of the elegy as an actual genre in Old English, but places the elegiac poems in a section headed 'Lyrik'. He treats mainly poems complete in themselves: *Deor*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Husband's Message*, *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Seafarer*. Sieper, in 1915, associates the Old English elegy with Germanic funeral rites, deriving it from an ancient lament for the dead. Such an origin is possible in the case of laments of the type of the *Beowulf* elegies. The elegies like *The Wanderer*, which embody a personal account, Sieper derives from a supposed custom of friends at the funeral showing sympathy by reciting the hardships which they themselves had passed through. This view can be no more than an elaborate hypothesis. Neither Brandl nor Sieper appears to have made a specific attempt to explore the meaning of 'elegy' or the exact sense in which the Old English poems are elegiac.

One of the first critics to examine the poems empirically instead of using the term 'elegy' or 'lyric' and going on from there, is Norah Kershaw. Miss Kershaw (later Mrs. N.K. Chadwick) edited 'The Wanderer', 'The Seafarer', 'The

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10He uses the words 'eine blühende Gattung' (p. 975).
Wife's Lament', 'The Husband's Message', and 'The Ruin' (along with 'The Battle of Brunanburh', which, of course, is not an elegiac poem) in her edition of Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems, published in 1922.\(^{11}\) She is unwilling to call the poems either elegiac or lyric because they have no special metrical form (not a valid reason in the case of Old English poetry, since if we are to subdivide the poems by metre we shall have hardly any subdivisions at all). But when she seeks to define the characteristics of these five poems, she is in fact attempting to define a genre, and that genre is elegy as it appears in Old English:

If we seek for a common definition applicable to these five poems, we may perhaps describe them as (somewhat elaborate) studies of situation or emotion applied to imaginary and nameless persons who are detached from any definite associations of time and place. The same description holds good for the two passages in Beowulf . . . (p. 6)

The above definition is an accurate description of the five poems, but it is rather vague and awkward, and it says nothing of the melancholy pervading four out of the five. However, Miss Kershaw's definition has the merit of stressing the abstract character of the most typical elegiac poetry in Old English. The five poems selected by her comprise the most typical examples of elegies in the form of complete poems. To these five I would add Wulf and Eadwacer, also a poem of high quality, and abstract in character. The names

\(^{11}\text{Cambridge, 1922.}\)
in it are probably fictitious, and whether or not, the general impression is essentially elegiac. All these poems describe internal states; events which give rise to them are played down; external individualising detail is largely absent; such externals as are mentioned are typical, and mainly symbolic in function. The abstract character of elegy as described by Miss Kershaw is a highly important feature, and leads us to other features associated with it which will need to be discussed fairly fully.

The distinctive character of the best elegies, namely The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Wife's Lament, and Wulf and Eadwacer is the product of the combination of this abstract character with personal emotion of the most intense kind. The poems are full of moments of passionate feeling so strong that belief in the speaker's reality, and identification with his/her position, is immediate and unquestioning. Such moments are the wanderer's imagining in his dream bent he his mondryhten / clyppe ond cysse as he did long ago, the compulsion that sends the seafarer's spirit out over the waves, after which it comes back to him afre ond grædag, the wife's picture of herself sitting and weeping all the sumorlangne dæg, the words of the abandoned mistress when she says that it was the expectation of her lover and his seldcymas (a vivid instance of Old English understatement) that made her

12See below, Chap. II, p. 163.

13Some scholars take this literally as 'rare comings', but it seems to me clearly intended as understatement. See below, Chap. III, p. 189
sick, not lack of food.

The openings of The Seafarer and The Wife's Lament, stylised yet intimate, establish right at the beginning this combinative effect of abstract form and intense personal emotion:

Mæg ic be mǣ sylfum sōgied wrecan,
sipas secgan, hū ic geswinedagum
earfoðhwille oft prōwade. (Seafarer, 1-3)

Ic pis giedd wrece bī mǣ ful geōmorre,
mīnre sylfre sīđ. Ic bæst secgan mǣg
hwætic yrmpa gebād sipban ic ūp [a]wēox,
nīwes opbe ealdes, nō mā bonne nū. (Wife's Lament, 1-4)

The speaker is unnamed and uncharacterised and the terms are general, but the emphasis is on personal experience; the listener/reader accepts it as such and promptly sympathises. The persona created seems real. Lines 8ff. of The Wanderer, often regarded as the opening of the wanderer's speech, are similar in style and effect:

'Oft ic sceolde āna Ûhtna gehwylce
mīnre ceare cwĪpan; nīs nū cwicra nān
be ic him mōdsefan mInne durre
sweotule āsecgan. (Wanderer, 8-11a)

The reader is moved to pity for a state that seems actual. And yet such a case is typical, and must have been especially felt to be so by the contemporary audience, familiar with many more poems of this kind. The opening of Wulf and Eadwacer is different, but the personal element is indicated by mīnum in the first line. Again, the speaker is nameless. It is possible that some lines are missing at the beginning,14 and

14See below, Chap. II, p. 151.
that the opening was in fact more conventional.

Thus, the abstract yet personal character of the poems is sometimes introduced by the formal structural device of a set opening.¹⁵ In all four poems the abstract/personal paradox is a striking feature. The narrator is scarcely individualised, and the 'I' of each poem remains a shadowy figure. The appearance of the speakers is a mystery. The events of their lives are unclear, and scholars have reconstructed them with varying results. The wanderer's lord died, presumably in battle, but details are absent. The wife is separated from her husband and condemned to a cave in the earth, we do not know why. The poet's aim must have been to create a situation which his audience recognised as universal. It is the generally recognisable emotion on which he concentrates, omitting details which would limit it to one person, one occasion. His skill is to create a state of mind that is intense in quality, while remaining vague in its specific associations. It is a technique different from that of most modern literature, where situations are highly particularised, and the aim is to give, not abstracts of life's essentials, but scenes which could have existed in life itself.

The other two poems referred to by Miss Kershaw are somewhat different. The Husband's Message has less intensity.

¹⁵A similar passage is found in Deor: Deor ic be me sylfum secgan wille . . . Here it occurs at line 35 and not at the beginning of the poem, but it does introduce the personal account of Deor's own misfortunes as opposed to the preceding references to the misfortunes of others. In Resignation, 96b-97a (Ic be me tylgust / sege bis sar spel) the poet draws on the same type of formal expression, but it has no introductory force.
It is more formal, the woman being addressed as *sinchroden* (line 14) and *bœodnes dohtor* (line 48), and treated with a certain ceremoniousness. But it too has the personal yet abstract quality introduced by the nameless *ic* of the first line, and an atmosphere of intimacy is created by its being an actual address to a second person, *be*, made privately (*onsundran*). The Ruin has no personal speaker, but it gives a striking impression of the poet's actually being present at the scene described. The description is vivid enough to have convinced many scholars that the poet must have had a particular site in mind. There is a sense of immediacy. The word 'this' is used several times (lines 1, 9, 29, 30, 37). The opening *Wrætlic is bes wealstān* suggests the wonder and admiration of one standing and looking on.

Norah Kershaw drew attention to the fact that the elegies were 'studies of situation or emotion' (the alternative 'or' is presumably to be taken in a complementary rather than antithetical sense), and that they were not particularised in their associations, but she failed to indicate the highly personal quality of the best poems. It might be objected that the abstract character she describes is not applicable to some of the elegiac pieces, and that therefore her definition is not really a definition of elegy. It is true that some of the pieces which have been called elegies have a more specific reference. *Deor* is a poem of lament, but it is full of allusions to particular figures of heroic legend. The speech at the end of *Guthlac* has a particular
application to Guthlac and his disciple. These pieces should for this very reason be regarded as less typically elegiac; they have other affinities. Deor should be linked as much with Widsith as with the elegies. The Guthlac passage must be taken as a part of the poem to which it belongs. The same is true of the Beowulf elegies, but less so, because neither directly involves any of the actors in the epic. Thus, the Beowulf elegies are cited by Miss Kershaw as poetry of the same type as that she is defining.

Nevertheless, even in the more restricted contexts, individualising detail is lacking. Deor and the people he mentions, and Guthlac and his servant, are not distinguished from any other persons in similar situations. Lack of individualisation is in fact a general characteristic of all Old English poetry, which, as Brodeur says, exhibits 'a desire to savor all . . . [the] typical aspects' of a person or thing. Where details are given they tend to be standard ones. Guthlac's servant and Deor tend to express themselves in broad statements. It is significant that these broad statements frequently show a striking similarity to the expressions of the more exclusively elegiac poems. Guthlac's servant speaks of himself in the same third-person generalisations as the wanderer and the seafarer. When the servant says (referring to his previous dictum Ellen bib sælast . . .):

\[
\text{Aswæman særigferð, wat his sinclœfan}
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\text{(A.G. Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf (Berkeley and Los Angeles), 1960, p. 20.)}
\]
holdne biheledne. He sceal hēan ṇonan
geōmor hweorfan.  Bām bīg gomenes wana
de pā earfedā oftost drēgada
on sārgum sefan,

(Guthlac, 1348-56a)

one is reminded of

Wāt sē be cunnað
hū slīben bīg sorg tō gefēran
bām bē him līt hafād lēofra geholena

(Wanderer, 29b-31)

and

seftēadig secg, ḟeatsē beorn ne wāt
hwæt pā sume drēgoða
bē pā wræclēstas widost lecgada.

(Seafarer, 55b-57)

This is not the place to discuss the formulaic content of the poems.17 The speech of Guthlac's servant is in fact full of words and turns of phrase that crop up in the elegies. Suffice it to say that in its choice of typical, and at the same time highly emotive language, this speech closely resembles the elegiac pieces 'detached from any definite associations of time or place'.

The absence of distinctive detail has led to a good deal of critical speculation as to the exact meaning of the allusions in Deor. In this poem the vagueness associated with the use of broad statements and typical expressions merges into another kind of vagueness characteristic of Old

17See below Chap. III, pp.221-227. Some of the smaller verbal parallels will be mentioned in the present chapter in order to show the relationship between poems and passages.
English poetry, the vagueness of the allusive method, which assumes prior knowledge, and often leads to obscurity as far as the modern reader is concerned. The meaning of the opening line

Welund him be wurman wraeces cunnade

is unclear. What are the wurman? A tribe? Serpents? Damascened swords? What is the sense of wraeces? No clear picture can be formed, although the Anglo-Saxons would have known the event to which this line referred. But

hæfde him tō geslppee sorge ond longap, wintercealde wraece

(Deor, 3-4a)

is poignantly suggestive of suffering and care, and the image of sorrow as a companion will be seen to be the same as that expressed in the lines just quoted from The Wanderer. The concept, embodying a concentrated bitterness and irony in its implication of the absence of other companions, must have been a familiar one. Again, the evocative wintercealde is similar to wintercearig in line 24 of The Wanderer.

Connections with actual events, real or traditional, remove Deor and the Guthlac passage from the 'mood-poetry' pure and simple of the most typical elegies, but the use in these two pieces of what is clearly an elegiac convention demands that they be considered in association with it. As already pointed out, the Beowulf passages have more of the abstract quality characteristic of elegy than Deor and the speech from Guthlac. It is not strictly necessary to introduce The Lament of the Last Survivor in connection with the dragon's hoard,
and The Father's Lament does not bear directly on the situation with which it is linked. It is inspired by the painful position of Hrethel, who is unable to exact vengeance for the death of his son because he has been accidentally killed by another son, but the actual figure associated with the lament is an unknown person, similarly helpless as he sees his son hanging on the gallows. Thus, to a certain extent both passages are divorced from their contexts. Each of the passages is a set-piece, almost as detached from time and place as the most typical elegiac poems. The theme of each of the *Beowulf* elegies is the familiar contrast between past activity and present silence and decay:

Sceal sæ hearda helm (hyr)stedgolde, 
faæ tum befeallen; feormynd swesfað, 
þà ðæ beadorgfman bywnan sceoldon. (Beowulf, 2255-57)

nis þær hearpan swæg 
gomen in geardum, swylce ðær in wæron. (Beowulf, 2458b-59)

This contrast is dwelt on at length in The Ruin, and appears in the famous passage from The Wanderer, lines 92 ff., which begins

Hwæð cwōm mearg? Hwæð cwōm mago? Hwæð cwōm mappumgyfa?

The *Beowulf* elegies, however, are more muted in tone. They do not reach the high pitch of emotion found in the poems which I selected as the best examples of elegy. This difference may be observed in the passages quoted above. It is not necessarily an adverse criticism of The Lament of the Last
Survivor and The Father's Lament; these pieces are part of a poem altogether more stately, less spontaneous and intimate in its method.

In 1932, in *The Growth of Literature*,¹⁸ the Chadwicks give a classification of the Old English elegiac poems which seems to have grown out of Miss Kershaw's earlier definition. They do not use the term 'elegy' in their classification. Of the pieces they discuss, the only one referred to as an 'elegy' is The Lament of the Last Survivor. Their use of the word is strictly limited to its sense of 'lament for the dead'. They distinguish several types of heroic poetry, to one of which, Type B, 'poetry dealing with situation or emotion, and consisting wholly or mainly of speeches', they assign the Old English poems usually called elegies. The only Old English poem that they regard as an unqualified example of Type B is *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which they believe refers to heroic story. They consider the absence of proper names in the other poems something of a drawback if they are to be assigned to a category of heroic verse. All the same, they classify the rest of the pieces as a sub-type of B, describing them as poems of a 'timeless nameless character' consisting mostly of speeches. The poetry so designated comprises The Lament of the Last Survivor, *The Wanderer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*.¹⁹

¹⁹The classification described in this paragraph can be found in Vol. I, Chap. III, 'Heroic Poetry and Saga' (see especially p. 28) and Chap. XIV, 'Poetry and Saga Relating to Unspecified Individuals' (see particularly p. 423).
In 1936 C.W. Kennedy published a translation of the Old English elegies containing 'The Wanderer', 'The Seafarer', 'The Ruin', 'Deor', 'The Wife's Lament', 'The Husband's Message', and The Lament of the Last Survivor. In the Introduction he defines their species as follows:

... these Old English elegies differ markedly in mood and pattern from the [later] personal elegy. They do not bewail the death, or eulogize the life of an individual. They have little in common with modern elegies of the type of Lycidas and Adonais. In detail and design they owe no debt to the pastoral idyll. Their range of interest is universal, deriving from a moving sense of the tragedy of life itself... (p. 2)

This description is perfectly in keeping with what we have found so far. I would merely qualify Kennedy's statement that the elegies do not bewail the death of an individual. It is true that none of them makes its subject a lately departed individual who is carefully characterised and different from all other individuals. However, the death of a person may inspire an elegy, or it may occur in an elegy as the event which gives rise to a wretched situation. The latter is the case in The Wanderer, and, much more incidentally, in The Seafarer (lines 92b-93). The reference is to the accompaniments of old age, one of which is that a man must mourn for his dead lord). Kennedy's description is accurate on the whole, and more informative than Miss Kershaw's, which does not even mention the prevailing melancholy of the poems, and which concentrates on one, admittedly vital, characteristic:

20 Old English Elegies (Princeton, 1936).
the abstract nature of the elegies. But Kennedy also leaves a good deal to be said.

In 1942 appeared one of the few critical works dealing directly with the problem of defining and limiting the genre 'elegy' in Old English: B.J. Timmer's article 'The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry.' Timmer examined all the complete poems provisionally designated as elegiac at the beginning of this chapter. He ignored the passages from longer poems. He came to the conclusion that there were only two elegies in Old English: The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer. None of the other so-called elegies really merited the name. The genre 'elegy' had, he decided, once existed, but was negligible in extant Old English. However, he agreed that the elegiac mood was widespread in Old English poetry. Referring to the two poems he allows as elegies, he says: 'they contain the typically elegiac features of banishment, separation from a beloved person, and even longing for love'. (He says 'even' because sexual love was rare in Old English poetry. But longing for love of a different kind is certainly present in The Wanderer, where the narrator indicates that he missed the affection of lœofra geholenan [line 31] and tells how he sought another lord who would show him love.

\[21\]ES, XXIV, 33-44.

\[22\]Timmer, p. 40.

\[23\]For instance, words which refer specifically to conjugal affection are very rare. The Wife's Lament uses terms which in other contexts have a non-sexual application. See below Chap. II, p. 122. Wælcafan, Beowulf, 2065, is a striking and isolated example of a term which specifically denotes affection of this kind.
Timmer has quite rightly picked out the most significant themes of elegy, but he might have allowed elegiac quality to poems containing any one of them. Instead, he disqualifies most of the elegies for one reason or another. All poems of religious content, i.e., The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Rhyming Poem, and Resignation, are automatically excluded, and termed instead 'religious didactic lyrics'. In this, Timmer is following Imelmann and Heusler. It seems to me, however, that there is no necessary conflict between the terms 'religious didactic lyric' and 'elegy'. Timmer excludes The Ruin on the grounds of its being impersonal. Presumably he believes that the word 'elegy' (like the word 'lyric') suggests a personal utterance. This viewpoint is tenable, but not obligatory. Deor he considers too closely connected with heroic material; The Husband's Message optimistic, and therefore not elegiac.

The objections to the last three poems are by no means unreasonable, but nevertheless these poems all have strong thematic and verbal links with the elegiac convention. The theme of exile, the most common of all the elegiac themes, and fully developed in The Wanderer and The Wife's Lament is implied in both Deor and The Husband's Message. In Deor the implication is carried by the words wraeces and wraece

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24 Imelmann excluded Resignation and The Rhyming Poem because of their religious content. He also excluded The Ruin by virtue of its being a topographical poem (Forschungen zur altenglischen Poesie, [Berlin, 1920], p. 423). Heusler takes the same view (Die altgermanische Dichtung [Berlin, 1923], p. 140, n. 2). See Timmer, pp. 37-38.
in the first stanza. *Wraece* means either 'exile' or torment', the former being synonymous with the latter in Anglo-Saxon eyes.\(^2\)

Exile may be referred to in the fourth stanza (there is dispute as to whether *Deor*ric reigned for thirty years or was exiled for that period), and it is suggested by the fact that Heorrenda, who has taken over Deor's position as *scop*, has driven out Deor from the court. Verbal resemblance between *Deor* and *The Wanderer* has already been pointed out.

In *The Husband's Message*, exile because of feud is stated: Hine *fæhbo extremist*/ of sigebede (lines 19b-20a). Exile because of battle (in which all his friends and kin have been killed), if not actual feud, is the situation of the speaker in *The Wanderer*. He is mindful of *wræbra waelslehta, winemæga hryre* (line 6). It is because his friends have been killed that he is now homeless and an outcast. Some kind of inter-tribal hostility, in which her husband is involved, seems to be the ultimate cause of the woman's exile in *The Wife's Lament*. She has to suffer the consequences of her husband's feud. (mînes felalëofan fæhû, line 26).\(^2\)

Her husband too may be in exile. The reference to his departure over the waves (*gewât . . . ofer ýba gelâc*, lines 6-7a) and the description of his abode

\(^2\)Bosworth-Toller (J. Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Oxford, 1898; Toller's Supplement, 1921) give 'wrack, misery, suffering' as the primary meaning. From this derives the meaning 'punishment', and finally 'exile'.

\(^2\)Some critics translate 'the hostility of my very dear me', but 'feud' is the proper sense of *fæhû*. See below, Chap. II, p. 128.
in the wilderness at the end of the poem (lines 47b-50a) have this suggestion. Exile is later linked with seafaring in *The Husband's Message*. This particular aspect of the theme is briefly touched on in lines 6-7a of *The Wife's Lament* and seen more clearly in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. The familiar image of the lonely figure setting out across the sea is expressed in the following lines from *The Husband's Message*:

\[n\text{yde gebæded, nacan ut Æbrong, }\]
\[ond on Ýba gel(a)[u Æna] sceolde }\]
\[faran on flotweg, }\]
\[fordesibes georn }\]
\[mengan merestræamæs. }\]

*(Husband's Message, 41-46a)*

The same theme occurs in the early lines of *The Wanderer*, which tell how the solitary man must for a long time hræran mid hondum  hrÍmcealde sæ, /wadan wræcllastas (lines 4-5a). It is found later when the wanderer tells how the wòd wintercearig  ofer wape[m]a gebind (line 24). In *The Seafarer* the theme of seafaring is developed throughout the first half of the poem (up to line 64a). It is seafaring rather than exile which is to the fore, but the fact that the two tend to be linked is indicated by the lines:

\[hú ic earmcearig }\]
\[Iscealdne sæ }\]
\[winter wunade }\]
\[wræccan læstum. }\]

*(Seafarer, 14-15)*

27The word Æna is supplied by Leslie as metrically and contextually suitable. The exile-seafarer is usually alone, and we may assume that the same applies here.
In *The Husband's Message* the hardships of exile and the lonely sea-voyage have been overcome, but by referring to them the poet undoubtedly meant to call up associations in the minds of his audience with a traditional poetic theme. A significant detail in the poem which might be overlooked if not paralleled elsewhere, is the motif of the sad-voiced cuckoo (line 23), found only here and in *The Seafarer* (line 53), and, it would seem, considered appropriate to a certain type of poetic situation. In both poems the image is ambiguous, since the cry of the cuckoo is the summons to a wished-for voyage and is the harbinger of spring, but at the same time the sadness of his note introduces a melancholy cast.28

As for *The Ruin*, its whole theme is the familiar contrast between past joys and present desolation. This theme might be regarded as part of a larger tendency to reflective retrospection in Old English poetry. There is a prevailing sense that the world is not what it was, indicated by lines like

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Swa þes middangeard ealra dōgra gehwām drēoseð ond feallep
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(Wanderer, 62b–63)

and

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nearon nū cyningas ne cāseras
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28The sad call of the cuckoo is paralleled in Celtic poetry. See below, pp.32–33. For theories as to the significance of the sad call, see Chap. II, pp.81–82; Chap. III, p.219.
The heroes of Old English poetry, when they are not saints or biblical figures, are mostly set in the Age of Migration (roughly 400-600 A.D.),\(^\text{30}\) to which the Anglo-Saxons seem to look back nostalgically as a 'golden time'. \textit{Beowulf} is set at this period. It appears likely that Hrothgar and his family actually lived around 500. The archaic language of the poetry is also in keeping with this retrospective tendency.

In \textit{The Ruin}, after describing the ruined city in its present state, the poet imagines it as it was:

\begin{quote}
Beorht wæron burgæced, burnsele monige, 
heæah horngestrœon, hereswæg micel, 
meodoheall monig mondæma full.
\end{quote}

(Ruin, 21-23)

He then moves back by stages to the present again:

\begin{quote}
Brosnade burgsteall; bêtend crungan, 
hergas tō hrûsan, Forpon ðæs hofu dræorgiæd 
ond ðæs tæaforgæapa tigelum sceæded.
\end{quote}

(Ruin, 28-30)

These passages can be set beside those quoted from the \textit{Beowulf} elegies and the \textit{ubi-sunt} passage (\textit{Hwaer cwóm mearg?} etc., lines 92 ff.) referred to in \textit{The Wanderer}.\(^\text{31}\) More specifically,

\begin{quote}
29These passages have been connected by scholars with a homiletic tradition associated with the sixth and final age of the world. See below, Chap. II, pp. 84-85 and note (n.54).

30There are some poems, for instance \textit{The Battle of Brunanburh} and \textit{The Battle of Maldon}, which celebrate contemporary events and heroes, but there is no 'contemporary fiction'.

31See above, p. 20.
the contemplation of ruins is an elegiac theme recurring in lines 73-87 of *The Wanderer*. The treatment is more general—the wanderer is thinking of any ruins, *missenlice gêond bisne middangeard* (line 75), rather than of a particular scene—, but in the same way the picture of the crumbling edifice conjures up thoughts of the fate of those who inhabited it:

\[
\text{Worlaþ pā wīnsalo, waldend licgaþ drēame bidrorene.} \\
(\text{Wanderer, 78-79a})
\]

Among verbal parallels might be mentioned the description of the ruins as *enta geweorc* in both *The Wanderer* (line 87) and *The Ruin* (line 2). *Hrīm* as a motif chosen rather because of the melancholy appearance of hoar-frost than for any appropriateness on a literal level, occurs in *hṛm on līme* (Ruin, 4), *hṛme bihrorene* (Wanderer, 77), and, without reference to ruins but in a similar scene of wintry desolation, *hṛm hṛusan bond* (Seafarer, 32).\(^2\) Hoar-frost can also have sinister associations. It is these which are called upon in the description of the *hṛinde bearwas* ('groves covered with frost') around Grendel's mere (*Beowulf*, 1363).

It will be seen from the preceding paragraphs that whether or not *Deor*, *The Husband's Message*, and *The Ruin* are elegies in Timmer's sense, they can certainly be placed in an elegiac group. Timmer's rigid delimitation of the

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\(^2\)The recurrence of hoar-frost as a motif with melancholy associations is noted by Elliott ('Form and Image in the OE Lyrics', p. 8), who observes that it is chosen rather than snow because of its 'insinuating quality' and the more remarkable visual effects that it can produce. He finds hoar-frost 'more effective as a wasteland image than snow would be'.

genre is not the right approach to its fluid nature. The more fruitful approach is to define the common characteristics of elegy, so that we can be sensitive to the Old English poet's use of the conventional themes and modes for the particular purpose he has in mind.

A number of scholars have pointed out the resemblance between the Old English elegies and early Celtic poetry. In 1826, W.D. Conybeare compared The Ruin to the Old Welsh poem Yr Aelwyt Hon, Llywarch's Hen's lament for the deserted hall of Urien Rheged. Conybeare quotes the poem in full, but the first stanza will be sufficient to show the similarity with the Old English elegies:

This hearth—deserted by the shout—
More habitual on its floor
Was the mead, and the talking of the mead-drinkers.33

Here we have a favourite theme of Old English elegy: the contrast between a place in its present desolation and its former life and vigour. Fairly recently, Mrs. Gordon, in her edition of The Seafarer, devoted considerable time to Celtic analogues. Like Conybeare, she finds a resemblance to the Celtic elegies, especially the cycle associated with Llywarch Hen. She observes that there is 'the same combination of personal lament, "nature" description, and sententious gnomic statement' (p. 16). Mrs. Gordon does not give an illustration

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33J.J. and W.D. Conybeare, Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London, 1826), p. 250. Conybeare does not date the poem, but the Chadwicks indicate that the Llywarch Hen poems date from approximately the eleventh century in their present form but may be based on originals dating from the sixth century (The Growth of Literature, I, 36).
which demonstrates this combination, but the following example will serve to show the manner of the Welsh poems:

Clear is the sight of the watchman;
idleness makes for arrogance;
sore is my heart, disease wastes me.

The cattle are in the shed, the mead in the vessel;
the prosperous man does not desire discord;
patience is the outline of understanding.

The cattle are in the shed, the beer in the vessel;
slippery are the paths, violent is the shower,
and deep is the ford. The heart concocts treason. 34

Although it is true that the three elements mentioned by Mrs. Gordon are found in both Welsh and Old English, the short, rather disjointed vignettes of the Welsh poetry are very different from the effect of the Old English elegies. Mrs. Gordon, unlike Conybeare, goes so far as to propose an actual Celtic influence behind the poems. In view of the moral content of both the Old English and the Welsh elegies, she suggests a Christian background, and seems to favour fifth- and sixth-century Gaul (pp. 18-21). It seems to me unnecessary to assume such a background since, as we shall see later, the 'moral content' goes back to an ultimately pagan gnomic tradition.

Other scholars have related the Old English elegies to Irish poems. Mrs. Chadwick, in The Heritage of Early Britain, speaks of The Wanderer and The Seafarer as being 'probably of direct Celtic inspiration, deriving from the hermit poetry of

P.L. Henry links the elegies with both the Irish hermit poetry and the Welsh poems. However, there are considerable differences between the hermit poetry and the Old English elegies, notably in the treatment of natural scenes, which figure prominently in the hermit poetry. Although the descriptions are not extended, they show a much more precise use of detail than the Old English poems:

A nimble songster, the combative brown wren from the hazel bough, speckled hooded birds, woodpeckers in a great multitude.

Old English natural description is usually more impressionistic.

A rather striking similarity with the Celtic poetry is found in the detail of the sad-voiced cuckoo, which appears in The Seafarer and The Husband's Message. In Celtic poetry the cuckoo often has sad associations, whereas this is not found elsewhere in Germanic poetry. The parallel is mentioned by Mrs. Gordon (p. 17). Henry, and Herbert Pilch, the Culdees. London, 1952, p. 125.


Jackson, p. 8. From an Irish poem (King and Hermit) dated by Jackson as tenth-century.

See below, Chap. III, pp. 211-218.

But O.S. Anderson cites a Swedish proverb in which the cuckoo's call is an evil omen. See below, Chap. II, p. 81.

Henry, pp. 74, and 82-83.

The Elegiac Genre in Old English and Early Welsh Poetry*, ZCP, XXIX (1964), 217.
also draw attention to it. Both compare the motif in *The Seafarer* and *The Husband's Message* with *Claf Abercuawg*. In the Welsh poem the motif is sustained through eight stanzas. Henry also mentions the Welsh *Kintevin* (*'May'*. I quote the relevant stanza:

\[
\text{When cuckoos sing on the top of fine trees} \\
\text{My sadness grows;} \\
\text{Smoke stings, (my) grief is revealed,} \\
\text{For my kinsmen have passed away.}^{42}
\]

But whereas the cuckoos in the Welsh poems only increase the speaker's wretchedness, the significance of the bird in the Old English poems is ambiguous: its call is encouraging and at the same time its sad tone is disturbing. Altogether, it is rather difficult to assess the degree, if any, of Celtic influence on the elegies. There are definite resemblances, but they may be no more than the result of a common stage of cultural development and a common Indo-European heritage, with possibly some oral communication.

Pilch, in 1964, formulates a definition of Old English elegy with specific reference to the Celtic parallels. He believes that ' . . . the elegiac genre in Old English was created in imitation of a similar Welsh genre as known to us through "Claf Abercuawg" (p. 221).' This conclusion is rather an extreme one, since it is based on the similarities with one poem only, and there is no evidence for the existence of

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\(^{42}\)Henry, p. 67. Dated in the period 800-1100 (p. 67, n. 1). Jackson suggests the twelfth century (p. 76).
Welsh poems of this type antedating the Old English elegies. However, in picking out all the points of resemblance with the Welsh poems, Pilch defines and describes the Old English elegy in great detail. His description is so specific that it fails to fit any of the Old English elegies exactly, but it has the merit of picking out the key characteristics of the poems much more fully than any of the preceding definitions. It will therefore be quoted entire, although it is rather long:

The Old English elegy is a monologue spoken before sunrise by an unnamed narrator. It contains no reference to a specific geographic locality or to any definite historical period. It is, in the Chadwicks' words, poetry of the "timeless"—and we should add, of the "placeless"—"variety." The setting includes the sea with cliffs, hail, snow, rain, and storms, plus the meadhall of heroic poetry with its lords, warriors, hawks, horses, and precious cups.

In his monologue the speaker first reviews his own miserable lot. He (or she) is lonely, old, and careworn. He (or she) is banished from society. He prays, without hope of relief in this world. God's wrath is upon him. The speaker suffers from the cold and the wind. The sea separates him from his family (alive or dead). There, beyond the sea, is (or was) the happy life of warriors in the meadhall. Formerly it was the speaker's life. Now it is unattainable to him. His contact with it has been lost for ever. The keynote in the text is struck by the words sorg and longab (and their synonyms). The sorrow and longing relate not to the dead, but to the speaker's membership of society. The Wanderer's distress is due to the fact that after the death of his former employer he cannot find a new one.

In the second part of the text, the musings turn on the transient character of human happiness and of the world in general. It finally leads up to a gnome or prayer. The conclusion (and, in "The Wanderer," also the exordium) is sometimes assigned to a second speaker.

(pp.211-12)
The above definition picks out some of the most recurrent features of elegy. Its fault is that instead of citing them as such it dogmatically presents them as essentials. The first sentence alone contains three assumptions that could give rise to much critical discussion. Monologue is the most common form of the Old English elegies that are preserved, but it is not the only form. The Ruin is not monologue, although it does present a unified view with a narrow focus, and The Father's Lament is not monologue, although it is associated with an individual figure. Some critics detect more than one speaker in The Wanderer and The Seafarer (apart from any consideration of another voice at the beginning or end).

There is simply no basis for a blanket statement that the elegy is spoken before sunrise. We can, however, turn this statement round to a significant observation, that the time just before dawn, on Ühtan, is a time when loneliness and misery are particularly acute. The wanderer speaks of telling his troubles (one must assume that he voices his thoughts aloud) Ühtna gehwylce (line 8), and the banished wife says that at this time she paces alone about her earth-cave. Her misery is accentuated by her knowledge that at this moment other more fortunate ones are with those they love:

Frynd sind on eorban,
lœfe lifgende leger weardiað,
bonne ic on Ühtan Äna gonge
under Æctrēo geond þæs eorpscrafu.

(Wife's Lament, 33b-36)
The time before dawn is the dreariest time of day, and it would be particularly dreadful to a person alone in a wild place, having spent a troubled or sleepless night. It is interesting to note that a recent distinctly ghoulish film, Bergman's Hour of the Wolf, centered on the very same time. The film was prefaced by a brief explanation: this, it said, was the hour when the deepest subconscious fears come to the surface, when physical pain is most acute, and when most people die. An exaggerated description perhaps, but it shows that this time, the word for which, Ühte, we have since unfortunately lost, could be equally disturbing to the Anglo-Saxon and the modern mind. The fact that a reference to this time occurs in two elegiac poems makes it likely that it was a typical elegiac motif. However, that does not make it applicable to all elegies. Pilch refers in a footnote to nearo nihtwaco in The Seafarer (line 7), but there is no reason to assume that this represents the same time. In no elegy is there any indication that that poem as such purports to be uttered on Ûhtan.

The question of whether an elegy is spoken by a nameless narrator has already been discussed. One or two other points that Pilch makes are doubtful. That the speaker of an elegy is necessarily old is one of his assumptions. Certainly, the narrator appears to be old in The Wanderer and The Seafarer, but in Wulf and Eadwacer a young speaker, at the very least a woman young enough to have a small child, is called for. That 'God's wrath is upon him' is another
dubious requirement. Only Resignation presents such an idea directly:

Ne mæg þæs anhaga,
læðwynna læs læng drohtian,
wineðæs wræcca, (is him wræð meotud).

(Resignation, 89b-91)

The opening of The Wanderer, otherwise similar to these lines, states that the anhaga, though wretched, receives God's mercy. Finally, there is no real basis for Pilch's statement that the conclusion of an elegy is sometimes assigned to another speaker. The only elegy of which this is true is The Wanderer, where the concluding lines may be uttered, not so much by another speaker, as by the poet. Some of the opening lines are also delivered by the poet.43

Yet, on the whole, Pilch's observations are very valuable. The motifs of setting which he picks out are typical: the bleak landscape or seascape on the one hand and the absent joys of the hall on the other. The antithesis is sometimes brought out directly:

Hwtlum ylfete song
dyde ic mē þō gomene, ganetes hleopor
ond huilpan sweġ fore hleahtor wera
mǣw singende fore medodrince.

(Seafarer, 19b-22)

warad hine wræclāst nāles wunden gold,
ferōlocā frēorig nālæs foldan blead.

(Wanderer, 32-33)

43See below, Chap. II, p. 111. There is no general agreement as to which lines are to be assigned to the wanderer, and which to the poet.
Such a contrast is related to the contrast between past and present in The Ruin and the Beowulf passages. Another very significant point made by Pilch is that suffering in the elegies is caused more by the speaker's absence from society than by his sorrow for the dead. However, Pilch's reference to the wanderer's 'former employer' is unfortunate, suggesting a somewhat mercenary relationship rather than the intense bond of loyalty which existed between a warrior and his lord. The wanderer's sorrow for the death of his lord is very real, but the very fact that the common elegiac figure is an anhaga, a wraecca, indicates the importance in Anglo-Saxon eyes of belonging to the group. The outcast is the very type of suffering.

The third paragraph of Pilch's definition brings us to an important structural feature of elegy: its tendency to proceed from a lament for individual misfortune to observations of a general kind. In both The Wanderer and The Seafarer there is a shift half-way through the poem. In the former poem, the wanderer is moved by the thought of his own troubles to gloomy reflections on the life of all men. His theme is that all earthly things pass away. In The Seafarer the second half of the poem is more directly Christian in content, the sense being that since earthly pleasure and prosperity is transient a man should strive to win eternal bliss in heaven. In both poems the transition is achieved by means of the loose connective forbon.
The movement towards generalisation is associated with the gnomic or homiletic ending which Pilch mentions as an elegiac feature. The endings of both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are homiletic. The didactic close of *The Wanderer* (lines 111-115) is sharply distinguished from the reflections which precede it, by the use of expanded lines:

Swa cwaæs snottor on mœde; gesæt him sundor æt rūne.  
Til ṣip se be his trœowe gehealdeþ, ne sceal næfre his torn tō r ycne,  
beorn of his brœostum âcypan . . .  

(Wanderer, 111-113a)

There is no such clear distinction in *The Seafarer*, where the whole of the second half is didactic, but lines 103-124 (end) may be set apart as a homiletic ending. Expanded lines are found in this passage but they are not used exclusively, as at the end of *The Wanderer*. This section of *The Seafarer* begins:

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44 In her edition, Mrs. Gordon takes *for bon* (Seafarer, 64b) as correlative with *For bon* in line 58, and therefore part of the same sentence, but it seems to me that the two *for bon*’s are rather widely separated to be correlative (See below, Chap. III, p. 200) Whatever the punctuation, the essential transition occurs at line 64b, with the words *for bon me hætran sind Dryhtnes dræamas bonne bis ðeade līf* . . .

45 Leslie's edition places a quotation mark before *Til*. This is omitted here since it does not seem to me that the following words are a part of the wanderer's speech. See below, Chap. II, p. 111.

46 From the corruption in this passage and the fact that it begins a new folio in the manuscript, it has sometimes been considered not part of *The Seafarer* at all. It is best to assume the continuity of these lines with the previous, but there is certainly a change of manner. See below, Chap. II, pp. 63-64 and 65-66.
Micel bīp sē Meotudes egsa, for bōn hī sēo
molde oncyreð.

Certain lines are reminiscent of those in The Wanderer.

Dūl bīp sē be him his Dryhten ne ondneðeð
 cement him sē dēað unbinged

(Seafarer, 106)

closely resembles Wanderer, line 112. These endings, and
the expanded lines that go with them are part of a gnomic
tradition, and there are parallels with Maxims I and II,
which contain similar pieces or proverbial wisdom, and a
high proportion of expanded lines. In her edition of The
Seafarer, Mrs. Gordon points out the close resemblance
between Seafarer, 106 and Maxims I, line 35:

Dūl bīp sē be his dryhten nāt, to þēas oft
cement dēað unbinged.

The other elegies do not show the well-marked balance
between a personal and a general section found in The Wan-
derer and The Seafarer, but they do favour the inclusion of
general observations near the end. Frequently this generali-
sation may be termed gnomic or homiletic. Lines 42-45a in
The Wife's Lament are in the gnomic style, with the charac-
teristic scyle (line 42) and sceal (line 43). The last
line and a half of the poem are also of the gnomic type:

Wā bið þām be sceal
of langope lēofes abfdan.

(Wife's Lament, 52b-53)

47 The Seafarer, p. 46, note.

48 The application of these lines is disputed. See below,
Chap. II, pp. 125-127. Probably a more specific reference to
the husband is intended, with the generalising gnomic form.
Line 52b shows a formula similar to \( \text{Wel bið hæm be} \ldots \)
in line 114b of *The Wanderer*, and, with a change of syntax, to the \( \text{Dæl bið stæ be} \ldots \) formula. The ending of *Resignation* also offers traditional advice:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Giet biþ pæt sælast}, & \quad \text{ponne mon him sylfe ne mæg wyrd onwendon}, \quad pæt hæ ponne wel þolige. \\
& \quad \text{(Resignation, 117-118)}
\end{align*}
\]

The closing lines of *Wulf and Eadwacer* imply a generalisation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dæt pæt mon sæpe tõsliteð} & \quad \text{bætte næfre gesomnad wæs, uncer gieðd geador.} \\
& \quad \text{(Wulf and Eadwacer, 18-19)}
\end{align*}
\]

The last lines of *The Rhyming Poem* are homiletic, the *uton* ... exhortation reminding us of *Seafarer*, 117—and of the homilies:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Uton nu hælgum gelice} & \quad \text{scyldum biscoyrede scyndan generede, wommum biwerede, wuldre generede, bær moncyn môt for meotude rōt soðne god gesøn, ond Æ in sibbe gefsan.} \\
& \quad \text{(Rhyming Poem, 82b-87)}
\end{align*}
\]

The gnomic tradition lies behind all these endings. Its proverbial wisdom was felt appropriate to the close of a poem. A personal statement was thus rounded off with a general reflection, sometimes hortatory, as at the end of *Resignation*, sometimes merely summarising and crystallising, as in the despairing end of *The Wife's Lament*. The gnomic easily develops into the Christian homiletic, and the exhortation becomes one, not to the traditional stoicism, but to efforts towards gaining the heavenly reward. No sharp line is drawn between gnomic and homiletic. *Resignation* is a poem of specifically Christian sentiment, but a gnomic rather than an explicitly
Christian ending is allowable for its close. Not all the elegies have the gnomic/homiletic ending. *Wulf and Eadwacer* is really a border-line case. *Deor* contains generalisation in lines 31-34 (a reflection on how God gives to some *wislicen blæd*, to others *weana dæl*), but the poem then ends with *Deor*’s personal experience. *The Husband’s Message* has no generalisation at all, but ends with a reinforcement of the pledge mentioned earlier, and an emphatic repetition of line 16, referring to the vows uttered:

pe git on ærdagum oft gespræconn.  

(Husband’s Message, 54)

No generalisations, at the end of elsewhere, appear in the *Beowulf* elegies.

Pilch’s work is more valuable than Timmer’s in defining elegy, simply because Pilch extends farther the method used by Timmer, of selecting elegiac themes and motifs. Both of them fall into the trap of being prescriptive rather than descriptive, and Pilch has a way of making statements as if they were established facts, when actually they are hypotheses of the most dubious kind. Pilch concludes his definition by setting out the poems to be regarded as elegies.49 He includes *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife’s Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and the two *Beowulf* passages. ‘More or less marginal to the genre’, he says, are *Deor*, *The Husband’s Message*, *Resignation*, and *The Rhyming Poem*. Like Timmer, he excludes *The Ruin* because it is not a personal poem. The *Guthlac* piece,

49 Pilch, p. 213.
which is not considered by Timmer, or, for that matter, most critics, he rejects because it is a messenger's report. This objection seems to me irrelevant.

There have been one or two critics who have attempted, not so much to define an elegiac genre, as to establish another genre on the basis of it. Howell Chickering, in a 1965 dissertation on Old English elegiac poetry,\(^{50}\) comes to conclusions similar to Timmer's as far as the definition and limits of the genre 'elegy' are concerned. He decides that The Wanderer, The Rhyming Poem, The Seafarer, and Resignation are best classified as representing a didactic Christian genre. It is this didactic genre which he investigates. Like Timmer, he only allows The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer as elegies proper. He considers Deor a consolation, The Husband's Message a love-letter, and The Ruin of indeterminate genre.

One would not question the didactic element in the first four poems. On the other hand, to regard them as primarily didactic is to ignore much of the poetic effect of the better ones, i.e., The Wanderer and The Seafarer. The descriptions of personal suffering in the first parts of these two poems are too powerful to be merely a means to an end. The figures of the wanderer and the seafarer exist in their own right, and it is because of his acute perception of the hardships of their existence that the poet is led to soften this intensity by

\(^{50}\) Thematic Structure and Didactic Purpose in Old English Elegiac Poetry: A Re-Classification of the Genre' (Univ. of Indiana). See DA, XXVII, 4217 A.
generalisation, and finally to Christian consolation. There can be no doubt about which is the more strongly felt of the following passages:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Calde gebrungen} \\
&wæron \text{mine fæt,} \\
&\text{forste gebunden} \\
&\text{caldum clommum,} \\
&\text{pæwpe ceare seofedun} \\
&\text{hât ymb heortan;} \\
&\text{hungor innan slât} \\
&\text{merewêrges môd.}
\end{align*}
\]

(\textit{Seafarer, 8b-12a})

and

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Uton wê hygan} \\
&\text{hwær wê hâm agen} \\
&\text{ond ponne gebêncan} \\
&\text{hû wê ðider cumen.}
\end{align*}
\]

(\textit{Seafarer, 117-118})

Resignation is in the form of a prayer, and is certainly didactic by implication, but its method is personal statement. The Rhyming Poem is highly obscure, but its subject appears to be the speaker's decline from his former prosperous and happy state. Perhaps the latter two poems are more readily felt to be mainly didactic because they never rise to the same level of acutely felt personal poetry as \textit{The Wanderer} and \textit{The Seafarer}. Resignation is low-key throughout, and the sense of \textit{The Rhyming Poem} is hidden behind the strained language demanded by the exigencies of rhyme. Though the Christian didactic element is important in these poems, it is not the means by which they can best be grouped and classified. As Leslie says, in his Introduction to \textit{The Wanderer}, 'We should beware of placing too much emphasis on the didactic aspects of the poem, for we would not only exclude some of its many dimensions, but would also fail to take account of the links with a non-Christian past which enrich the
Chickering's attempt to identify a didactic genre in Old English elegiac poetry is based on a misplaced emphasis. A more extreme example of the same critical mistake can be found in the theory of P.L. Henry. In his book of 1966, Henry, like Pilch, defines a certain type of Old English poetry by virtue of its assumed connection with Celtic poems. Henry deals rather fully with the characteristics common to the Old English elegies and Celtic poetry. He points out especially the features noted more briefly by Mrs. Gordon, describes how in both Old English and Celtic, particularly Old Welsh, 'nature description is used to delineate a human condition' (p. 126), and speaks of 'the replacing of forthright personal communication and commitment by generalisation (gnomic, reflective, homiletic)' (p. 157). But, as we have seen, in the Welsh poems nature description and generalisation mingle with personal communication in a rather more abrupt way than they do in the Old English poems.

Henry's book is, in effect, a study of 'outcast poetry'. He sees the Old English elegies as coming into this category, and also places in it the Irish hermit-poetry, although, unlike Mrs. Chadwick, he regards the latter as somewhat different. He states that the result of his investigations has been 'to establish an Old English genre of penitential poetry, with Seafarer and Penitent's Prayer [Resignation] as chief exponents,'
flanked by corresponding genres in Early Irish and Welsh. He prefers to use the new term 'penitential' rather than the old term 'elegiac', and the 'residual Old English lyrics can be treated in the light of their relationship to this genre.'  

He regards the penitential genre as one sub-type of outcast poetry, and the hermit-nature poetry as another. Henry's view of Old English elegiac poetry is consciously based on the interpretations of Miss Whitelock and Dr. Stanley with regard to The Seafarer, The Wanderer, and Resignation. If one does not accept that the figures in these poems are peregrini, which is only a hypothesis and not a proven fact, there is only one poem in Henry's penitential genre: Resignation. This poem, which may well be influenced by the psalms, expresses the speaker's desire to turn to the Lord after his sins, and win grace. It is the speech of a penitent. Whether the speaker's desire to purchase a boat is to be taken as an indication of a projected pilgrimage abroad (this being the means by which Stanley makes the link with The Seafarer) is much more doubtful, and equally doubtful is the view that the seafarer has similar intentions and a similarly penitential state of mind. The case as regards The Wanderer is unlikely, and no other poem offers any supporting evidence. The existence of a penitential

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52 Henry, pp. 20-21.
53 Ibid., pp. 157-160.
54 These interpretations will be treated fully in Chap. II. See below, pp. 86-89.
genre in Old Irish and Welsh is not sufficient reason for creating an Old English genre of the same type.\textsuperscript{55}

We have now covered representatives of the major views on the Old English elegy as a genre. Two fairly brief comments by recent critics might finally be mentioned. Stanley B. Greenfield, in a very perceptive study of the elegies, published in 1966,\textsuperscript{56} puts forward a definition of the genre which is rather weaker than his succeeding study of the poems themselves:

We may perhaps formulate a definition of the Old English elegy as a relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience or observation, and expressing an attitude towards that experience.

(p. 143)

Presumably in the same attempt to avoid over-specific statements, Greenfield propounds a definition that, like those of

\begin{quote}
I quote a brief Irish poem in the penitential-pilgrimage tradition and a section from a similar Welsh poem. The original-language versions (together with the translations given here) are included by Henry:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
A dear pure pilgrimage & I shall dress myself becomingly, \\
Subduing faults, a body chaste & Believing no omen, for it is not right; \\
A life of poverty lowly and secluded & The One who made me will strengthen me \\
Occur often to my mind. & My mind is (bent) on a journey, \\
\textit{(p. 66. Middle Irish. Henry gives no date or MS source)} & Intending to go to sea; \\
& A beneficial design;—it will be a boon. \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{(p. 86 Old Welsh. From The Black Book of Carmarthen. No date suggested).} & \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

In neither \textit{The Seafarer} nor \textit{Resignation} is there any such explicit indication of a pilgrimage of penitence.

Miss Kershaw and the Chadwicks, is rather general and awkward. It is, however, more descriptive. It stresses that an elegy is a fairly short poem, which is true, but fails to point out that by a broader definition it may also be a passage in a longer poem. One would agree that an elegy deals with the theme of loss, but it does not necessarily include consolation. The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer are poems of unrelieved misery. The Ruin, because impersonal, is less despairing in tone, but it presents no consolation, merely the picture of present decay after past splendour. The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Rhyming Poem (this last is not one of the poems discussed by Greenfield) move from a depiction of suffering in this world to the idea of winning happiness in the next. Thus, they do contain consolation, but it is the descriptions of pain and mortality which impress themselves upon the reader. Greenfield's qualification that an elegy is 'ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience or observation' brings in The Ruin, but, as has previously been remarked, there is some variation in the degree of personal involvement found in the elegies, The Ruin, the Beowulf passages, and in a different way, The Husband's Message, showing rather less of it than the other pieces. Again, each poem or passage shows a different attitude towards the experience it presents, and to state that an elegy expresses 'an attitude towards that experience' is somewhat meaningless. The poems discussed by Greenfield are The Ruin, The Wanderer, The Seafarer, Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's
Dunning and Bliss, in the Introduction to their edition of The Wanderer, which appeared in 1969, cite Greenfield's definition of elegy with approval, saying 'it would be difficult to improve on Greenfield's suggestion' (p. 102). All the same, they accept the term 'elegy' somewhat reluctantly. They prefer to call The Wanderer a 'divine' poem, since this description indicates the affinity of The Wanderer in spirit and subject matter (if not always in form) with most of the other short poems in the Exeter Book' (p. 102). Earlier in their Introduction (pp. 4 and 79) they link The Wanderer with The Gifts of Men and Precepts, the poems which follow it in the Exeter Book, and which separate it from The Seafarer. They regard The Seafarer as a poem on the same theme as Vainglory, which immediately succeeds it in the manuscript: the theme of pride versus humility, and their respective re-quitement in the after-life. Dunning and Bliss make these connections because they believe there is a significance in the order of the poems in the Exeter Book. There may be more significance than some scholars are willing to credit, but

57 Greenfield does mention Resignation, The Rhyming Poem, and the Beowulf elegies, but leaves them out of his more detailed consideration on the grounds that 'The latter passages are more properly a part of the study of the epic, ... and the former are qualitatively inferior poems' (p. 143).


59 A.A. Prins says of the second half of the Exeter Book that its contents 'show neither rhyme nor reason' ('The Wanderer and The Seafarer', Neophil, XLVII [1964], 238).
Dunning and Bliss take up too extreme a position. The vividness of *The Wanderer*, its sense of urgency, its personal quality, make it a poem very different in kind from *The Gifts of Men* and *Precepts*, which are more general and impersonal in subject, the former being largely descriptive, the latter moralistic. To be sure, the virtue of patience (*Gifts of Men*, 70-71), the choice of spiritual rather than earthly comfort (*Gifts of Men*, 86-88), and the value of prudence and moderation, particularly in the respect of keeping one's thoughts to oneself (*Precepts*, 41-42; 52-58; 83-94), are themes found in *The Wanderer* too, but they are the commonplaces of Anglo-Saxon wisdom, and their occurrence in *The Wanderer* as well as in the two other poems merely illustrates the gnomic/homiletic aspect of it. While this is only one facet of *The Wanderer*, it is the pervading quality of *The Gifts of Men* and *Precepts*. Similarly, the pride-versus-humility theme is treated directly in *The Seafarer* only in lines 106-107, while it forms the whole subject of *Vainglory*. Thus, Dunning and Bliss are guilty of the same kind of misplaced emphasis as Chickering, in the way in which they group *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* with other poems.

They do, however, find 'elegy' a convenient classification: 'The poet's treatment of the theme of transience probably justifies the conventional classification of *The Wanderer* as an elegy'. They accept both Greenfield's definition

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60 These line references are given by Dunning and Bliss (p. 79) for comparison with *The Wanderer*. 

and the poems to which he makes if refer. Their statement in this context is an eminently sensible one: '... the term "elegy" is now so well established to describe a group of poems in the Exeter Book that it is perhaps better to accept it without argument as a somewhat arbitrary designation, and to seek a definition which will indicate the salient features of this by no means homogeneous group' (the seven poems treated by Greenfield are then listed). 61

This moderate viewpoint is one which we can accept. Those who have actually formulated a definition of elegy have all run into difficulties of one kind or another. Some critics have been too vague, others too specific. Almost every scholar who has consciously limited the term has applied it to a different group of poems, some poems being more favoured than others. It is best to relate to the elegiac genre all poetry that employs as a major feature any of the themes, motifs, or structural devices associated with the elegiac convention, without quibbling about whether each poem is, regarded individually, an elegy. For the purposes of this investigation, The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Husband's Message, The Wife's Lament, Wulf and Eadwacer, and The Ruin will be considered in detail, since they are the better and more typical examples of the genre, and afford useful interconnections with one another. Also, they are all separate poems, and therefore do not demand the rather special consideration necessary for pieces which are

61Dunning and Bliss, p. 102.
parts of a larger whole.

The characteristic features of elegy, by which it can be recognised as such, should be summarised. The species involves presentation from the viewpoint of an individual, usually, but not always, through monologue. There appears to have been a fairly standard opening, again, not always employed, by which the speaker, usually nameless, and with little in the way of individual characterisation, introduced himself in the first person. The best elegies combine a detachment from specific associations with an intense personal emotion which gives an effect quite different from the more formal speeches of the epics. It is common in the elegies for there to be a movement from the particular to the general. Frequently the ending is gnomic or homiletic. Certain favourite themes recur. The theme of separation, usually from a lord, but sometimes from a husband, wife, or lover, is common. Exile and banishment are also familiar themes, and may well blend with the previous, since the death or alienation of one's protector was likely to lead to homelessness. These themes are associated with equally recurrent natural motifs. The sea is usually the physical means of separation, not just because it might well have been so on a literal level, but because, particularly in its sterner aspects, it is in itself conducive to melancholy thoughts on man's loneliness and helplessness beside its infinite expanse. Winter landscapes are similarly introduced for their inherent melancholy associations. Pilch picks out the familiar details well in his analysis of elegy.
More joyful scenes may be introduced for the sake of contrast. Numerous smaller details, such as the time before dawn, the sad-voiced cuckoo, and the motif of hoar-frost, can be seen by their recurrence in these poems to be among the concomitants of elegiac poetry.

The above are what seem to me the more prominent features of elegy. Their recurrence in similar form indicates that the poets who used them were aware of a certain type of poetry for which they were regarded as suitable. Established critical practice in the use of the term 'elegy' with regard to Old English, and a well-substantiated frame of reference for it, are sufficient justification for its employment as the name of a genre. In view of the freedom with which types of poetry merge in Old English, a definition of the genre should be based on common, rather than on obligatory, features.
CHAPTER II


It will be convenient to deal poem by poem with the interpretations of the six elegies selected. An attempt will be made to relate the poems to changing trends in criticism, but a strictly chronological approach would be inappropriate, since there are certain types of interpretation which can be traced over a long period and which exist concurrently with views of quite a different kind. The German critics, and the earliest English critics, will be dealt with, on the whole, fairly briefly, but it is hoped to give an adequate representation of the various 'schools' of interpretation, and to cover quite fully the major English interpretations since 1900. Theories concerning date and origin will not be treated, except incidentally,¹ and those studies which are exclusively textual, or which do not give an interpretation distinctively different from those already presented, will be omitted. Critical discussions which are mainly stylistic

¹The actual manuscript, the Exeter Book, which contains, along with other material, the six poems to be discussed, is dated in the late tenth century (See Krapp-Dobbie, The Exeter Book, pp. xiii-xiv), but the poems themselves are earlier, and variously dated. It was for a long time assumed that the elegies, along with the bulk of Old English poetry, were of early date and Northumbrian origin, but this is now questioned. Kenneth Sisam is of the opinion that much Old English poetry belongs 'to a general Old English Poetic dialect, artificial, archaic, and perhaps mixed in its vocabulary' (Studies in the History of Old English Literature [Oxford, 1953], p. 138).
will be left to the next chapter. The emphasis will therefore be on those studies which have attempted to shed light on the overall meaning of these elegies. Interpretations will be evaluated, with the aim of reaching a balanced view of each poem.

Since *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* have often been linked in critical works, they will, to a certain extent, be discussed together, but this is not to be taken as an indication of any necessary connection between the two. Some scholars have believed that the same author must have been responsible, or partly responsible, for both of them. Thus, R.C. Boer supposed that the similar expressions in the two were evidence that they had been reworked by the same man. However, such similarities may be accounted for by the indebtedness of both poems to the same elegiac tradition and the formulaic expressions associated with it. W.J. Sedgefield was convinced that the similar moods which he found in the poems pointed to a common author. He says of *The Seafarer*, 'We can hardly doubt that this poem is by the same author as the preceding one [*The Wanderer*]; there is the same sadness, self-pity, longing and weariness'. The poems do show similarities of mood—both present personal suffering

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3 See below, Chap. III, pp. 224-225.

with great poignancy—, although Sedgefield's description of them needs some qualification. More recently, G.V. Smithers, who believed that the two poems expressed the same theme, suggested that the same author, probably a cleric, was responsible for both. But T.P. Dunning and A.J. Bliss point out metrical dissimilarities between the two poems, which, they say, 'must cast some doubt on the conventional view that the two poems are closely related in genre, tone and style'. In fact, the poems do show overall similarities, and Dunning and Bliss go too far in stressing the difference between them. Both poems show the same balance of a personal first-half with a general second-half, and a similarly high degree of poetic ability in the creation of the persona in each poem. In view of these facts, it is natural to relate the two poems to some extent. More than that we cannot say.

The earlier critics tended to regard The Wanderer and The Seafarer as depictions of a primitive culture and its outlook on life. This viewpoint is illustrated by the 1894 article of C.C. Ferrell, 'Old Germanic Life in the Anglo-Saxon "Wanderer" and "Seafarer"'. Ferrell sees the poems as full of pagan references, for instance to 'the Norn Wyrd' in

5 'The Meaning of The Seafarer and The Wanderer', MAE, XXVI (1957), 152-153. See below, pp. 82-86 for Smithers' interpretation of the poems.


7 MLN, IX, 402-407.
The Wanderer, \(^8\) and to the custom of burning the dead in The Seafarer (lines 113-115a, an obscure reference to burning in the fire, which, as Mrs. Gordon notes, \(^9\) may well be the fire of Hell rather than the funeral pyre). He points to the strong impression made by nature, and especially the sea, on the Anglo-Saxon mind. While this observation is correct, it should be noted that, as mentioned in Chapter I, natural description is very stylised and serves a largely symbolic function. More significant are Ferrell's remarks on the social background of the two poems. He draws attention to the social framework of the comitatus which lies behind the two poems, particularly The Wanderer, stresses the closeness of the relationship between man and lord, and the pain of separation from the close-knit group formed by lord and fellow-warriors, and refers to the traditional fatalism and stoicism which pervade the poems. The Wanderer, of course, gains most of its force from the strength of the speaker's feeling for the lord and companions he has lost. The Seafarer deals less directly with this topic, but, still, a contrast with the man who lives happily in burgum (line 28) is used to point up the loneliness and hardships of the seafarer's life.

\(^8\)For a further discussion of wyrd in The Wanderer see below pp.112-113. The word occurs in the singular in lines 5 and 15 of the poem, and in the plural in line 107.

\(^9\)The Seafarer, pp. 47-48, note.
The view of the poems as representative of the early Germanic outlook on life still holds good, to a certain extent, but later critics have tended to qualify this view by stressing the essential Christianity of both poems. Critics of *The Wanderer* usually see in the poem the insufficiency of the heroic ethic, and the need to turn to God. Thus, Dunn- ing and Bliss, in their recent edition, include a section on 'The Wanderer and Heroic Tradition' (pp. 94-102), but they regard the poem as a criticism of the heroic ethic, which glorifies boasting rather than Christian humility (the making of a *bött* in the meadhall to perform brave deeds in battle was one of the traditions of heroic society, but *The Wanderer* advocates prudence in boasting, lines 69-72), and which offers no solution to evil fortune but endurance, while Christianity holds out the heavenly reward.

A common assumption which lay behind many of the critical interpretation of the last century (it is reflected in Ferrell's article), and which continued well into the present, was that Old English poetry consisted of an early pagan, and later Christian stratum, which could be separated one from another. Some of the poetry was regarded as wholly pagan, some Christian, and some as a combination of both. Into this last category came *Beowulf* and certain of the elegies, notably *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*. It was believed that the Christian passages in these poems were the work of later interpolators. This assumption was so much taken for granted that critics could refer to it, without explanation, as something
'settled'. Thus, in 1877, Ten Brink says of Deor: 'Excluding an interpolation of some length, the poem is run off in six strophes of six lines or less. He does not even state the lines referred to; presumably he means 28-34, which describe the unfortunate man's reflection on God's varying dispensations of good and bad fortune. This passage contains the only piece of general reflection and the only reference to the Deity in the poem. In 1905 Edith Rickert mentions in passing 'the originally pagan but much edited epic Beowulf. The 'interpolations' approach has not, as far as I know, been applied to The Ruin, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, and Wulf and Eadwacer, probably because these poems contain very little that is specifically Christian and nothing that can be called didactic. However, The Seafarer and The Wanderer contain prominent Christian elements. The whole of the latter half of the Seafarer text is Christian, and the endings of both poems are homiletic. Also, the reference to God's mercy in the opening lines of The Wanderer makes the introduction to this poem specifically Christian.

Ten Brink states:

The epic introduction to the Wanderer, as well as the close, may be additions of a later time;


11 'The Old English Offa Saga', MP, II (1904-05), 369.

12 See above, Chap. I, pp. 39-42.
because in them is expressed a Christian sentiment and view of life, with a distinctness quite absent from the body of the poem.

(p. 61)

This statement is in fact more moderate than some. Ten Brink accepts the latter part of The Seafarer, regarding the contrast between earthly tribulation and heavenly joys in the second part as deliberately balanced against the varying attitudes of repulsion from and attraction to the sea in the first.\(^{13}\)

Stopford Brooke, in 1892\(^{14}\), rejects the beginning and end of The Wanderer, since the body of the poem seems to be composed by someone "who thought more of the goddess Wyrd than of God."\(^{15}\) He also rejects the latter half of The Seafarer, although he is not sure whether the poem is to be stopped at line 64 (64b is generally regarded as the major transition: for bon mē hātran sind / Dryhtnes dreamas bonne bis dēade līf)\(^{16}\) or line 71 (Line 72 commences another shift in thought beginning with For bon: For bon bip eorla gehwām æftercwēbendra / lōf lifgendra lāstworda betst). Of the second half of The Seafarer he says disparagingly, it has neither intelligence, passion, nor imagination'.\(^{17}\)

\(^{13}\) Ten Brink, p. 63.

\(^{14}\) The History of Early English Literature (London and New York), Vol. II.

\(^{15}\) Brooke, p. 171.

\(^{16}\) See above, Chap. I, pp. 38-39, and note (n. 44).

\(^{17}\) Brooke, p. 180.
Ferrell also regards the poems as pagan, with Christian additions:

The 'Wanderer', with the exception of a half-dozen verses at the beginning and as many at the close, is heathen to the core and shows almost no trace of Christian influence, and the same may be said of the first half of the 'Seafarer'.

(p. 402)

However, he somewhat contradicts himself by pointing to one or two supposed traces of paganism in the second half of The Seafarer, e.g., the mention of burning in the fire. Also, it is noteworthy that he is quite vague about the extent of the additions to The Wanderer. I assume he means the first five and last five lines.

These conjectures as to Christian interpolations persist, and appear later. In 1935, Miss Wardale,¹⁸ whose view of the poems is conservative says:

If the view is accepted that the Prologue and Epilogue of the Wanderer are later additions and that the real Seafarer consists of the first sixty-four lines only, it is clear that the outlook on life in both is purely pagan. Any Christian touches which appear in either are quite out of character and must be looked upon as later insertions, probably due to the scribe who added the continuation of the Seafarer.

(p. 61)

This view of the poems fails to take into account a number of factors. For one thing, the general reflections in the latter half of The Seafarer have the same effect,

¹⁸E. Wardale, Chapters on Old English Literature (London, 1935).
structurally, as the less explicitly Christian reflections in the second half of *The Wanderer*. In both poems the first half describes personal experience, while the second half meditates on life in general. Further, this tendency to generalisation in the later part (if not throughout the second half) of an elegiac poem may also be shown in poems like *The Wife's Lament*, which critics of this school would regard as entirely pagan. The homiletic ending used in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* is closely linked with the gnomic ending (seen, for instance, in the last line and a half of *The Wife's Lament*), and can be seen to be part of a tradition.\(^{19}\) Most important of all, the 'interpolation' theory is based on the erroneous assumption that we can separate out the original 'poem'. Poetry in the oral tradition (and all Old English poetry is heavily indebted to such a tradition) necessarily incorporates material from earlier and later periods. But, as the formulaic studies of Old English poetry have shown,\(^ {20}\) oral poetry is very fluid. In Magoun's words, 'an oral poem, until written down, has not and cannot have a fixed text'.\(^{21}\) In assuming such a fixed text, these critics, who had not been influenced by the later formulaic analyses of the poetry, made their most serious mistake.

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\(^{19}\) The observations made thus far in the paragraph are based on evidence presented and conclusions drawn in Chap. I, pp. 39-42.

\(^{20}\) See below, Chap. III, pp. 221-227.

\(^{21}\) See Magoun, Jr., 'Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry', *Speculum*, XXVIII (1953), 447.
The assumption of an original section, beginning and ending at a certain point, to which a later addition with equally well defined limits is tacked on, leads Miss Wardale into deep water when she is discussing the introduction to *The Wanderer*. *Wyrd bǣful āræd* in line 5b strikes her as distinctly pagan, yet by her reasoning it is part of the Christian introduction:

The sentiment is purely heathen and the scribe's object was to introduce some Christian element. The poem cannot, however, have begun in the middle of a line. The scribe may have worked over an existing passage, leaving, in a surprising way, this definitely heathen half-line.

(p. 59, note)

In 1902 a blow was struck at the 'interpolation' theory by W. W. Lawrence. He argued that, though the Christian passages in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* might be regarded as a blemish, it was just as likely that they were an integral part of the text as that they were later additions, and that if such additions existed it was impossible to decide with any certainty just what they were (pp. 478-80). It should be noted, however, that Lawrence still rejected the whole second half of *The Seafarer* as a 'homiletic addition' (see p. 462).

The fact that he makes a distinction between lines 64b-102 and lines 103-124 (end) has led a number of critics to believe that it is to the latter section only that he refers by the words 'homiletic addition' in his summary of his own conclusions: 'there seems to be no reason to assume that the *Wanderer*

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22 *The Wanderer and The Seafarer*, JEGP, IV, 460-480.
and the Seafarer are not preserved in essentially their original form, with the exception of the homiletic addition to the latter poem* (p. 480). On page 471 he expresses the opinion that lines 103-124 are part of a different piece from what precedes them. He sees a deterioration in style in this final section, and points out that line 103 begins a new leaf in the manuscript. He therefore thinks it likely that lines 103 ff. have no connection with what precedes them. Miss Kerhsaw\(^2\) and Krapp-Dobbie\(^2\) believe that they are following Lawrence in rejecting lines 103 ff. and ending the poem at line 102.

However, Lawrence certainly initiated a change of approach to The Wanderer and The Seafarer, although he did not depart entirely from the 'interpolations' theory. Scholars become more chary of writing off sections of the poems as additions. Miss Kershaw rejects the close of The Seafarer, and, more tentatively, that of The Wanderer, but she bases her decision on stylistic considerations, rather than on the distinction between Christian and pagan. Thus, she states that she sees 'a marked change in the character of the poem' (The Seafarer) after line 102, and continues, 'the passage is verbose and lacking in coherence, and the sentiments expressed have no obvious connection with the rest of the poem' (pp. 18-19).

\(^{23}\)N. Kershaw, Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 18-19.

\(^{24}\)The Exeter Book, pp. xxxviii-xxxix. Further references to Krapp-Dobbie are also to their edition of The Exeter Book, unless otherwise stated.
She mentions in a footnote that this remark also applies to the last section of *The Wanderer*. Krapp and Dobbie say prudently that

> in the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*, in spite of the minor inconsistencies and the abrupt transitions which we find, structural dissection must be accepted with caution as a formula for the establishment of the text.

(p. xxxix)

Few critics would now make a sharp distinction between pagan and Christian material. However, one does occasionally find reflections of the earlier attitude. T.M. Davis, for instance, in 1965, in an article on *The Wife's Lament*, refers to 'Christian additions' in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* (p. 300). The school which advocated excising the beginning and end of *The Wanderer* and the second half of *The Seafarer* as Christian additions began to go out of favour after the publication of Lawrence's article. Yet, as we have seen, it was still common to reject parts of the poems as different from or inferior to the rest. Structural dissection on stylistic grounds makes a stronger case than rejection of material because of its Christian content. This is particularly true with regard to the final section of *The Seafarer* (from line 103), which does show corruption. Also, the fact that this section commences a new folio makes it easier to argue that the passage may not belong in the poem, but even this does not amount to proof. It is true that the endings of *The Wanderer*

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25 *Papers on English Language and Literature*, I, 291-305.
and *The Seafarer* are somewhat different from what precedes them and rather less poetically inspired, but such endings appear to be traditional, and in any case the stylistic difference is not a valid reason for rejecting them. Most poems are 'good in parts', and many poems end more weakly than they begin.

The old theory that *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* consisted of original material plus later additions was revived, in a modified form, in 1960, by J.J. Campbell.\(^2\) He did not make a case for *The Wanderer*, but 'proved' statistically that the second half of *The Seafarer* was less formulaic and therefore later than the first. Campbell did not propose to split the poem in two, since he regarded it as well integrated by the later compiler, but he argued that the later section of the poem contained a comparatively high percentage of prosaic words, and belonged to a type of didactic poetry for which the formulaic language of the oral tradition was not suited. It is true that poetry of this type has affinities with the prose of the homilies, but so does, for instance, the *ubi sunt* passage of *The Wanderer* (lines 92ff.),\(^2\) and the Christian didactic poetry merges into an older tradition of sententious poetry. Also as Wayne O'Neil pointed out in his article criticising Campbell,\(^2\) statistical

\(^2\) Oral Poetry in *The Seafarer*, *Speculum*, XXXV, 87-96.

\(^2\) See below, pp. 105-107.

judgements on formulas and poetic or non-poetic words are necessarily somewhat arbitrary, and depend upon an individual decision as to whether a given expression is, or is not, a formula or poeticism. By discovering ten more formulas in the second half of The Seafarer, and so reversing the decision arrived at by Campbell, O'Neil demonstrated the weakness of a statistically-based argument.

Structural dissection of a different kind was that of Sir William Craigie, who, in 1923, proposed that the logical breaks which he found after line 57 in The Wanderer and line 64a in The Seafarer were attributable to the Exeter Book scribe's use of a defective original. Craigie regarded the first sections of The Wanderer and The Seafarer as representing incomplete poems, which the scribe filled out by inserting portions of another poem on the transience of things. He considered lines 103-124 of The Seafarer and lines 111-115 of The Wanderer to be different again. In his edition, Specimens of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, III, Craigie stops The Wanderer at line 57 and The Seafarer at line 64a. Lines 58-110 of The Wanderer and 64b-102 of The Seafarer are printed consecutively and entitled The Vanity of Earthly Things. Lines 111-115 of The Wanderer and 103-124 of The Seafarer are given, but cited as additions and not printed as part of the main poem.

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The Vanity of Earthly Things. Craigie regards this hypothetical poem as consisting of the continuations of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* with a short break between *Wanderer*, 110 and *Seafarer*, 64b.

Craigie's rather elaborate reconstruction was based on a belief that damaged originals were responsible for errors, not only in the Exeter Book, but also in the Junius and Beowulf manuscripts. He accepted a Northumbrian origin for the bulk of Old English poetry, which he regarded as dating from a period two to three centuries prior to the date of the extant manuscripts, and hence from before or during the time of the Scandinavian invasions. He assumed that the books from which the above manuscripts were copied had been damaged in raids. He found evidence for such damage in missing portions of the text (sometimes filled up with wrongly inserted interpolations), indications of leaves lost, incorrectly inserted, or replaced back to front, etc. To argue the existence of logical breaks in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* is not unreasonable, but it will be seen that this argument is backed up by a number of assumptions based on nothing more than guesswork. The dates of Old English poems are extremely difficult to determine, and the Northumbrian origin which Craigie takes for granted is certainly questionable.\(^31\) Also, the places Craigie regards as logical breaks in *The Wanderer*

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\(^{31}\)See above, p. 54 n. 1.
and *The Seafarer* are in fact turning points. They introduce the more general sections of the poems, but they arise naturally out of what precedes them. Thus, in line 58, after describing his own troubles, the wanderer says that therefore (*forpon*) he cannot think of any reason why his mind should not be saddened when he contemplates all the life of men, and the seafarer says that he has no thought for the pleasures of life on land and is drawn to the sea, and accordingly (*forpon*, line 64b) the joys of the lord are warmer to him than this dead life.

In 1964, A.A. Prins, working along the same lines as Craigie, suggested that 'the second half of *The Exile [Resignation]* as from line 84 is the sequel to *The Wanderer* line 57' (p. 243), and that *The Seafarer* lines 64b-124 should be rejected as not part of the original poem (p. 247). He did not suggest what the sequel, if any, to the latter poem might be, but his very specific suggestion as to the 'missing' section of *The Wanderer* can hardly be regarded as very likely. The way in which he binds together *The Wanderer* and *Resignation* is not quite satisfactory:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{Cearo } \text{bif } \text{gentwad} \\
& \text{pam } \text{be sendan sceal } \text{swepe geneahhe} \\
& \text{ofer wapema gebind } \text{werigne sefan} \\
& \text{fus on ferpe, swa me on frymoe gelomp}
\end{align*}
\]

(Prins, p. 243)

The final line is from *Resignation*. One wonders why the speaker should be 'eager of heart' when he has just described his spirit

\[32\text{'}The Wanderer and The Seafarer', Neophil, XLVII, 237-251.\]
as 'weary'. In the poem Resignation this line is well integrated, and the sense is that the speaker is 'eager in heart' to tell his troubles:

\[
\text{forp}on \text{ ic } \text{ þæs word } \text{ spræce}
\]
\[
\text{fūs } \text{ on } \text{ ferþe, swā } \text{ mē } \text{ on } \text{ frymē } \text{ gelomp}
\]
\[
yrmpu \text{ ofer } \text{ eorpan . . .}
\]

(Resignation, 83b-85a)

The hypothetical poem constructed by Prins might have been accepted if it had been found in this state in the manuscript, but actually it does not hang together as well as either The Wanderer or Resignation in their original form.

All those critical theories which reject some part of the extant text necessarily involve conjecture. They are based on subjective decisions of one kind or another, often on aesthetic considerations which vary from person to person and age to age. Every reader is entitled to regard a section of a poem as unsatisfactory. Unless he has firm linguistic evidence based on distinctive verbal and syntactical usage, or external corroboration, for instance a personal statement by the poet, he is not entitled to dismiss it as not part of the original poem. If he goes yet further, and proposes actually to supply a missing part, he is on very shaky ground indeed. Certain themes and expressions in The Wanderer and The Seafarer must have existed in Old English before others, but we can have no definite idea of the form in which they existed. In fact, until they were written down they probably had no well-defined form. All that is certain is that at one time the poems were written out in their present form. Minor
textual errors apart, most modern critics now wisely accept the poems in the form in which they have been handed down to us.\textsuperscript{33}

As for the actual meaning of the two poems, the most distinctive and widely differing interpretations have been those of \textit{The Seafarer}, which, by presenting a very large section of didactic material (lines 64b-124), and also by describing the sea at times with fear and at times with desire, offers considerable problems to those seeking thematic unity. None of the more definite interpretations can be accepted as unquestionably the right one. Each imposes too rigid a scheme, from which, on reading, the poem elusively slips away.

A favoured nineteenth-century interpretation was the dialogue theory, first put forward in 1869 by Rieger,\textsuperscript{34} who suggested that the poem was a dialogue between an old man relating his sufferings at sea, and a young man eager to go voyaging. Rieger assigned 1-33a, 39-47, 53-57, and 72-124 to the old sailor. The first passage describes the hardships that the seafarer has endured at sea. The second expresses his anxiety about his voyage. It could also be taken to show a preoccupation with the sea (if the word \textit{longunge} in

\textsuperscript{33}I use the word 'modern' to cover, roughly, the period from 1940 on. By this time structural dissection, even of the moderate kind allowed by Miss Kershaw and by Krapp and Dobbie, was not widely advocated.

\textsuperscript{34}M. Rieger, 'Seefahrer als Dialog hergestellt', \textit{ZDP}, I, 334-339. See Krapp-Dobbie, p. xxxvii.
line 47 is allowed to have the sense 'yearning'), in which case its ascription to a man with a negative attitude towards the sea is inappropriate. Lines 53-57 contain the reference to the call of the cuckoo, which bodes care, and another brief mention of suffering at sea. The final passage is homiletic, and rather different from the others. The intervening portions of the poem are assigned to the young man. Lines 33b-38 and 48-52 express eagerness to go to sea. Lines 58-71 contain the same idea, but add to it the moral:

\[
\text{Ic gelyfe no}
\begin{align*}
\text{pæth him eorðwelan} & \quad \text{ēce stondað.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Seafarer, 66b-67)

It will be seen that Rieger's divisions bypass the central transition of the poem at line 64b. Some of the homiletic material is assigned to one speaker, some to the other. Also, although one would accept that different attitudes to the sea are expressed in the poem, they cannot conveniently be divided into two. Line 53, in particular, is a bad point at which to make a transition. The reference to the cuckoo belongs with the coming of spring described in lines 48 ff. In short, the text shows no obvious dialogue divisions.

Nevertheless, the theory that the poem was a dialogue came to be widely accepted. Ten Brink (1877) says that the poem 'seems to have been written in the form of a dialogue' (p. 61), but does not specify where he would make the necessary divisions. Kluge, in 1883, while accepting the dialogue
interpretation, proposed a simpler division of the poem, assigning 1-33a to the old man, 33b-64a to the young man, and rejecting the rest. All the same, lines 33b-64a still contain a reference to the troubles of a seafaring life (55b-57) and the inability of the land-dweller to understand them, and this reference parallels those of 12b ff. and 27 ff., which Kluge assigns to the other speaker. Wülcker (1885) regards the poem as ending at line 64a, but accepts Rieger's division of the speeches. Stopford Brooke (1892) allows that the poem may be dialogue, and Ferrell (1894), by his references to 'the old man' and 'the young man' (p. 405) makes it clear that he accepts the dialogue interpretation. Neither states the points at which the poem should be divided.

The dialogue theory finds an explanation for the poem's conflicting attitudes to the sea, although when critics come actually to divide up the poem they fail to separate out these different attitudes with complete consistency. Also, the dialogue approach fails to explain the juxtaposition of realistic description in the first half of the poem with didactic material in the second. In fact, most of the early critics, with the notable exception of

35 F. Kluge, 'Zu altenglischen Dichtungen', E. St., VI, 322-327. See Krapp-Dobbie, loc. cit.

36 See also pp. 92-93 below.

37 R. Wülcker, Grundriss zur Geschichte der angelsächsischen Litteratur (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 210-211.
Ten Brink, attempt no explanation of the second half. Frequently they solve the problem by simply cutting off the poem at line 64a.

In 1902, R.C. Boer proposed rather a complicated explanation of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. He suggested that these poems represented the remains of an original three, of which one was a dialogue. *The Seafarer* incorporated two of them, including the dialogue. Both poems contained additional material. The very complexity of this interpretation makes it suspect if a simpler one can be found. It was, in fact, vigorously attacked in Lawrence's article of the same year. Lawrence rejected the dialogue theory out of hand. He regarded *The Seafarer* as a monologue, arguing that its character as a lyric precluded it from being dialogue (pp. 468-469). Whether 'lyric' and 'dialogue' are mutually incompatible forms is perhaps debatable, but certainly the term 'lyric' is usually associated with a poem representing a single subjective viewpoint. Also, monologue is a common form in Old English elegiac poetry. Lawrence showed the dialogue interpretation to be a doubtful one, and it subsequently began to lose support. Miss Kershaw (p. 17) and Krapp and Dobbie (p. xxxviii) both reject it quite firmly. Edith Wardale still allows it as a possibility, although she

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39 See note 22, above.
herself does not favour it (p. 45).

The dialogue theory has not received much support among recent scholars, but in 1956 E.G. Stanley suggested that it might perhaps 'be resurrected in a modified form'. He continues:

there are two speakers speaking in the first person, the ethopoeic exile (lines 1-33a), and the wise, pious man eager to go on pilgrimage (33b-end). . . . the speaker who says (33b-35b) that he himself is now eager to make trial of seafaring cannot be the man who has just told of the hardships he has experienced in seafaring. 41

Stanley, however, was more concerned with the use of ethopoeia in The Seafarer and with its supposed penitential significance 42 than with emphasizing a dialogue interpretation of the poem.

Another modification of the dialogue theory, which has been much more influential, is that presented very forcefully in a 1965 article by J.C. Pope. 43 Pope proposed a 'dramatic voices' interpretation of The Wanderer and The Seafarer. In each poem he detects two speakers in addition to the poet. Thus, in The Wanderer, he distinguishes the eardstapa (lines 1-5 and 8-57) and the snottor on mode


42 See below, pp. 88-89.

(lines 58-110), with the poet intervening at lines 6-7, 111, and 112-115. In The Seafarer, he assigns 1-33a to the first speaker, 33b-102 to the second speaker, and 103-124 to the poet. Pope regards the poems not so much as dialogues as dramatic representations of different viewpoints, the second speech in each case being a comment on the first. The eardstapa in The Wanderer speaks from experience, the snottor from wisdom. The former represents the Old Germanic, the latter the superceding Christian point of view. In The Seafarer, Pope believes, the second speaker is inspired by the account of the hardships of the first to give expression to the conflict in his own mind between the religious and the secular ideal. It will be seen from the rest of this chapter that Pope's interpretation of the poems, though different in its structural divisions, has affinities with the interpretations of a number of present-century critics.

The major objection to the dialogue theory has always been that there is no clear indication in the text of the necessary changes in speaker. Pope, however, professes to find such indications. He argues that the words min in line 59 of The Wanderer and sylf in line 35 of The Seafarer are emphatic and indicate that a new speaker has been introduced. Pope's case with regard to The Wanderer is the weaker, since this poem does not present such sharply differing attitudes as The Seafarer, and the word min in line 59 of the former

44See Pope, pp. 166-167 and 180-181.
poem, though alliterated, need not be especially emphatic. It is natural to take lines 58 ff. as the wanderer's own reflection, the conclusions drawn after he has relived in thought his own past troubles. It is his own suffering which makes him say:

Forbon ic gebencan ne mæg geond þæs worúld
for hwan módsefa mīn ne gesweorc.

(Wanderer, 58-59)

Sylf in The Seafarer is certainly emphatic in some way, and the words

þætic hēan streamas,
sealtýba gelāc sylf cunnige

(Seafarer, 34b-35)

could easily be taken out of context to imply that the speaker has never been to sea before (Pope argues that the words in fact have this meaning). On the other hand, the transitional Forbon at line 33b is one of many, and need not indicate a new speaker. It is more likely that lines 33b ff. are a comment on the preceding description of hardship at sea in hostile winter weather (lines 27-33a). The seafarer's thoughts 'dash against his heart', i.e., are violently disturbed (For bon cnyssað nū/ heortan gebōhtas, lines 33b-34a) because of his intimate knowledge of the sea, its hardships, which he has just related, and its compelling attraction, which he is about to relate (lines 36-38). Accordingly, it seems to me best to translate lines 34b-35 as 'because I have personal experience of the high streams, the play of the salt waves', rather than the usual 'that I personally make trial of the high streams . . .', with a sense of purpose. The general meaning would now be that the seafarer's
thoughts trouble him because he already knows the sea, with sylf emphasising the immediacy of this knowledge. Lines 33b-35 look both backwards and forwards. They express the turbulent emotion of a man who knows the misery of life at sea but is still irresistibly drawn towards it.

A number of the twentieth-century critics of The Seafarer have interpreted it as allegory. This takes into account the serious tone of the poem and provides a structural link between the personal narrative in the first half, and the general, didactic remarks in the second. On the other hand, it is not necessary or desirable to pin the poem down to a specific allegorical interpretation in order to admit its symbolic overtones. An allegorical reading was first suggested in 1909 by G. Ehrismann, whose view of The Seafarer is clearly indebted to that of Ten Brink. I quote Kennedy's summary of Ehrismann's interpretation:

Ehrismann regards The Seafarer as an allegorical rendering of the transient joy and pain of the earth in sea imagery, with this presentment set in contrast to the everlasting bliss of the heavenly kingdom.

He sees the first part of the poem (up to line 64a) as an allegorical representation of the life of man. The hardships endured at sea represent, he believes, the pains embraced by the ascetic, in contrast with the pleasures enjoyed by the worldly man (the land-dweller of the poem). These pleasures

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45 See above, p. 60.

are rejected by the pious ascetic, who longs instead for the joys of heaven. To see this symbolism in the poem certainly gives a deeper significance to the first part of it, but it is not necessary to regard this section as actual allegory.

Ehrismann's interpretation was taken up and extended by L.L. Schücking in 1917. Schücking suggested that the säföre (sea voyage) of line 42, about which a man cannot help but feel anxiety, not only represented the life of the pious on earth, but also the journey to eternity; i.e., death. Schücking cited as a parallel the word nyðfaru in Bede's Death Song. The poem, which expresses the need for a man to ponder how he will be judged after death, contains sentiments which Schücking appears to find in lines 42-43 of The Seafarer (bæthē ē his säföre sorge nœbbe, / tō hwon hine Dryhten gedōn wille).

The following is the Northumbrian version of the Death Song:

Fore thaēm nēidfaerae  næning uuururhith
thoncsnotturra,  than him tharf sē
 tô ymbhycggannaē  ðēr his hiniongæ
huæt his gæstæ  gōdaes æsththæ yflæs
aēfter dēothdaæге  dōmid uuæorthæ.

However, as pointed out by O.S. Anderson, rather to the detriment of his own argument, since he follows Schücking, there is no complete parallel between säföre and nēidfaer, since the former must have possessed its literal meaning, at least when

47The above account of Ehrismann's interpretation is substantially that given by O.S. Anderson, "The Seafarer": An Interpretation," _KHWL, Årsberättelse i Lund_, 1937-38, 9-10.

taken alone, whereas nydfaru cannot mean anything else than 'final journey' (literally, 'necessary journey(s)'). In fact there is no clear evidence that the literal meaning of sæfere is not all that was intended in The Seafarer.

In 1938, Anderson published an interpretation of The Seafarer based on those of Ehrismann and Schücking. He viewed the poem as depicting two kinds of voyage, the earlier hazardous inshore voyage representing the troubles of life, and the voyage which the seafarer is eager to make over the deep ocean representing his wished-for departure to his heavenly home. It will be seen that the two aspects of the poem more or less correspond to those picked out by the proponents of the dialogue theory. Like Shücking, Anderson cites the rather doubtful parallel between sæfere in The Seafarer and nydfaru in Bede's Death Song. He attempts to meet the objection that the concreteness and detail in the descriptions of the sea are too vivid to have a merely allegorical significance, by arguing that it is the sea-shore rather than the sea that the poet describes. This argument is beside the point, since the vivid descriptions of both land and sea do make the reader feel that these things exist in their own right, and not merely, as Anderson indicates, as symbols.

There is one place in Old English poetry where the figure of life as a sea-voyage is definitely used, but here it takes the form of an extended simile and so is rather

\[\text{KHVL Årsberättelse i Lund, pp. 1-50.}\]
different from any such image in *The Seafarer*, where it would be a metaphor. The sea-voyage image occurs in a passage at the end of Cynewulf's *Christ* (*Christ II*), where life is compared to the sailing of ships over the tossing sea until the heavenly haven is eventually reached. But here the image is made quite explicit, being introduced by the words *gelTcost swā*:

\[
Nū is þon gelTcost swā wē on laguflōde \\
ofer cald wæter cōlum liðan \\
geōnd stīne sǣ sundhengestum.
\]

(Christ II, 850-853)

There is no such explicit indication of a parallel in *The Seafarer*.

A detail which is used by Anderson to support his argument for a death-metaphor in *The Seafarer* is the cuckoo, which he believes is intended as the presager of death: 'The idea which *sorge bitter in brōosthord* [*Seafarer*, 54b-55a] is logically taken to imply in this connexion is that of death' (pp. 25-26). This is how Anderson explains the apparent contradiction between the fact that the cuckoo bodes care and that it is the summoner to a voyage which the seafarer intensely desires. Anderson's evidence here is rather stronger than the supposed parallel in the word *nyðfaru*. He mentions a Swedish proverb: 'if the note of the cuckoo is heard for the first time from the north it means sorrow, if from the south it means death' (p. 23). He also notes that Celtic parallels have been pointed out, but, as we have seen, in the Old Welsh poems the cuckoos increase the speaker's misery by contrast
with their own joyfulness. Thus, the unhappy associations attached to the cuckoo's call in these poems are quite different in kind from the ominous associations which Anderson detects in *The Seafarer*. The evidence of the poem and the parallels cited by Anderson are not sufficient to substantiate his argument for an allegorical interpretation, particularly not in the rather special sense of a 'voyage of death'.

G.V. Smithers, in his articles of 1957 and 1959,\(^5^0\) also suggested an allegorical reading of *The Seafarer*, and at the same time extended this interpretation to *The Wanderer*. He bases his interpretation on the manuscript reading *waelweg* (*Seafarer*, 63), which he understands as the 'road taken by the dead'. The manuscript reading is usually emended to *hwaelweg* to give the line the proper alliteration: *hwetē on hwaelweg hreber unwearnum*. *Hwaelweg* is not found elsewhere in Old English, but it does make excellent sense in the context (describing the seafarer's eagerness to set out on his voyage), and is well supported by other compounds referring to the sea as the abode of a sea-creature. The word *neostē* 'death' (from *Vainglory*: *sæ sceal hēan wesan / æfter neostīnum*, (lines 54b-55a) given by Smithers as a parallel offers no support for the first half of the compound *waelweg*. Also, *wæl* means not just the dead, but those slain in battle. Such a sense would introduce an inappropriate element at this point in *The Seafarer*.

Smithers relates the exile and seafaring imagery in both

\(^{50}\) *The Meaning of The Seafarer and The Wanderer*, *MÆ*, XXVI, 137-53; XXVIII, 1-22.
The Wanderer and The Seafarer to the patristic image of man in the world as an exile from his heavenly patria, a concept stemming from the expulsion of Adam from Paradise. In interpreting the poem in this way, Smithers is using an exegetical approach similar to, but less extreme than, that employed by Robertson. The exegetical technique of finding a specific Christian moral significance behind narrative detail was, of course, the regular approach of mediaeval scholars to the Old Testament. However, the fact that the image of man as a spiritual exile was a familiar one does not necessarily prove its presence in The Wanderer and The Seafarer. There is no suggestion in either poem that the speaker is an exile from anything more than an earthly home and earthly friends, although certainly the concomitant of this exile is the fact that a permanent spiritual home will be found at last in heaven, hwær we ham ðegen (Seafarer, 117b) and bærus eal seo fæstung stondæ (Wanderer, 115b). Smithers does not cite any evidence for this particular use of the exile image in other Old English poetry, although he gives plenty of examples from Latin patristic prose, and one from an Anglo-Latin poem, Alcuin's Lament for the sack of Lindisfarne: De rerum humanarum vicissitudine et clade Lindisfarnensis monasterii. In spite of Smithers' evidence from Latin, it seems that the patristic image was not carried over into the vernacular poetry, where

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51 See pp. 94-95 below.

52 ME, XXVI, p. 148.
exile already had a well-developed frame of reference of a different kind.

The view expressed by Smithers that the latter parts of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* refer to death and the Day of Judgement is more acceptable. It seems reasonable to take *Wanderer*, 73-74 in this sense:

"Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hū gæstlic bið bonne eall pisse worulde, wela wæste stonde."  

Similarly, lines 100-101 of *The Seafarer* are naturally taken as a reference to the awe inspired by God on the Day of Judgement:

"ne mæg þære sêâlge þe biþ synna ful gold þe Gode ðe geoge for Godes eg san."  

The second parts of both poems are avowedly moralistic and we are not surprised to find in them sentiments, such as these, which are common in the homilies. Smithers is probably right too in seeing in *The Seafarer* a reference to the belief 'that the world was to come to an end in the sixth age of its history, and that age was already in progress and indeed far gone.' The passage in *The Seafarer* describing the decay of the world (lines 80b ff.) seems to have this reference. The description of ruins in *The Wanderer* (lines 75-87) seems to me to refer to the poet's own time ("nu missenlice geond bisne middangeard") rather than the end of the world, but the mention of the world falling and failing in lines 62a-63 seems to imply the belief that the world is drawing to its close. This concept is a familiar one in the homilies. Smithers mentions

Blickling Homily XI, and one might also cite the opening of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*, which states that the world is in haste and approaching its end. However, to show that the two poems contain references to religious concepts and usages of material found in the homilies, is not to demonstrate that they are religious allegories. Smithers' observations in this context reveal added depths in the poems but do not prove the existence of symbolism.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* should contain exactly the same progression in thought, as Smithers implies when he states that they both represent the four stages of man's spiritual history. These stages, he says, are as follows: 1) man's exit from Paradise as an exile, 2) his *peregrinatio* in the world, 3) his death, the end of the world and Judgement Day, 4) his return to the heavenly home. The poems, though similar, are not parallel. The exile theme is developed (not, of course, in the patristic sense) much more fully in *The Wanderer* than *The Seafarer*.

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54 J.E. Cross ('Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm in Old English Literature,' *CL*, XIV [1962], 1-22) points to the homiletic concept of the decay of each man showing in miniature the decay of the world. He refers to *The Seafarer*, and also to *The Rhyming Poem*. In another article ('On the Allegory in "The Seafarer"—Illustrative Notes,' *M*, XXVIII [1959], 104-106) he suggests that the difficult word *wordul onette* in line 49b of *The Seafarer* is a reference to the coming end of the world. The word literally means 'makes haste', but here *wordul onette* is usually translated as 'the world is in motion', i.e., full of the burgeoning of spring. Cross suggests it actually means 'the world hastens to its end', and that the description of the blooming of spring in lines 48-49 is actually a reference to the fact that the world *crescit ut cadat*. 
Also, the more consistently Christian tone of the second half of the latter poem makes it somewhat different from The Wanderer and more susceptible to an allegorical interpretation. J.E. Cross, who accepts Smithers' interpretation of The Seafarer, rejects the application of it to The Wanderer. Cross states: '... if The Wanderer is to be interpreted as allegory, we might reasonably assume that the dead lord was a type' and also the other lord 'so desperately sought.' He points out that this is absurd, 'for a Christian's lord is Christ whose death is not the cause of a Christian's exile in the world, and what Christian would seek another lord if his lord Christ were dead?' Smithers in fact goes so far as to suggest common authorship for the poems. But actually the pattern he detects behind both poems fits neither completely, and is particularly inappropriate to The Wanderer.

An approach to The Seafarer which allows both a literal validity and a deeper significance in the first part is that put forward by Dorothy Whitelock in 1950. Miss Whitelock suggests that the seafarer is a voluntary exile, a peregrinus, who cuts himself off from the comforts of his native land for the sake of his spiritual welfare. She believes that the voyage is a means not an end.

56 See above, p. 56.
He is not going seafaring for its own sake, but, as an islander, he cannot reach the land of foreigners except across the sea, and when we remember the conditions of early voyaging we need not wonder that this part of his journey should occupy so much of his thought. (p. 267)

She argues that voluntary exile was a recognised type of pilgrimage in Anglo-Saxon times, and thinks that the words elpēodigra eard (line 38) have this significance, pointing to the use of on elpēodignesse lifian to translate such expressions as peregrinam ducere vitam in the Old English rendering of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. That such an expression could be used to render the idea of voluntary exile for penitential reasons, may be true, but it does not prove that the expression has that sense in *The Seafarer*. Miss Whitelock gives ample evidence that the practice of peregrinatio in this sense was a familiar one, being especially associated with the Irish monastic tradition (p. 271).

Her choice of a middle road between a simply literal and an allegorical interpretation is a clever one. Nevertheless, her reading fails to take account of the emphasis of the poem. If the narrative section has the deeper significance of spiritual trial, this significance must be contained in the powerful and extended descriptions of suffering at sea and not in any mention of voluntary exile abroad, which, if referred to at all, only occurs very briefly with the words elpēodigra eard gesēce in line 38.

See Whitelock, pp. 267-268.
Miss Whitelock's interpretation was extended by E.G. Stanley in 1956 to *The Wanderer* and *Resignation*, which he renamed *The Penitent's Prayer*. Stanley regarded these three poems as consciously using the rhetorical device of ethopoeia for didactic purposes. He linked this usage with that of prosopopoeia in *The Dream of the Rood*. He believed that *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Resignation* all used the idea of exile in a penitential sense. The last poem he considered especially valuable in this connection, since it explicitly took the form of a prayer, and linked the themes of confession and exile. However, a distinction should be made between this poem and the other two. Neither the wanderer nor the seafarer makes any mention of sins committed, but the speaker in *Resignation* emphasises his sins and his eagerness to attain a state of grace. There is no indication that the other two poems are penitential in this way. Further, the image of exile in *Resignation* is introduced as a conventional way of expressing the idea of wretchedness. There is no indication that the speaker's desire to purchase a boat implies a projected *peregrinatio* of the kind Miss Whitelock sees in *The Seafarer*. In *The Wanderer* the theme of exile is certainly prominent, but, as it is anything but voluntary, it seems highly inappropriate to regard it as a willingly undertaken


60 See Margaret Schlauch, 'The "Dream of the Rood" as Prosopopoeia,' in Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown (New York, 1940), 23-34.
pilgrimage.

There are numerous commentaries on individual words and passages in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. These can in the main be passed over. However, the 1960 article of Vivian Salmon is worthy of mention in that it deals with the passage in each poem which has probably caused the most difficulty. Mrs. Salmon suggests that each poem contains a reference to the concept of the free-ranging soul, which takes flight in the form of a bird. She finds this reference in *The Seafarer*, lines 58-63 (expressing the compulsive attraction of the seafarer's spirit to the sea), and in *The Wanderer*, lines 50-57 (a difficult passage describing the misery of the wanderer when the image of his former companions passes through his mind).

Mrs. Salmon takes the word *anfloga* (*Seafarer*, 62) as a reference to the seafarer's spirit, which has just been described as ranging over the ocean. She proposes that *anfloga* (literally, 'solitary flier') means the soul in bird-shape. An immediate objection to this view is the use of the verb *gielleft*, an undignified and inappropriate word to use in conjunction with *anfloga* if the latter means the soul. The seafarer's soul would not admonish him by screaming. The same objection applies to the interpretation of Sievers, followed

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by Mrs. Gordon,\textsuperscript{62} which takes \textit{anfloga} as the cuckoo mentioned in line 53. The call of the cuckoo cannot by any stretch of the imagination be conceived of as a scream. But \textit{giellef} is appropriate to the cry of a sea-bird, and, given the context, this is a more likely meaning for \textit{anfloga}. Mrs. Salmon herself states that there is no evidence for the concept of the bird-soul in Old English, and that in the Latin writers of the time such an image is largely used in connection with a saint's journey to heaven.

The expression \textit{secga geseldan}, 'companions of men', in \textit{The Wanderer} (line 53) is taken by Mrs. Salmon to have the same reference to the bird-soul. In this passage, she believes it is applied to the spirits of the wanderer's dead friends, who appear before him in the form of birds floating on the waves. She relates the phrase \textit{secga geseldan} to the Old Icelandic \textit{fyljur manna}, 'associates of men', which refers to the \textit{hugr}, the Scandinavian free-soul (in Old Norse the concept has a malevolent association). She does not say, however, that the \textit{hugr} is ever mentioned as taking the form of a bird. \textit{Secga geseldan} is certainly obscure in this passage. I would take it as an ironic reference to the sea-birds of line 47,\textsuperscript{63} but it has been variously interpreted as referring to the image of his friends in the seafarer's mind (it would then be parallel with \textit{maga gemynd} in line 51), to seabirds, and to sailors in a

\textsuperscript{62}\textit{The Seafarer}, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{63}This is Graham Midgely's interpretation. See "'The Wanderer", lines 49-55," \textit{RES}, X (1959), 53-54."
passing ship. The meaning of the passage is further complicated by flœotendra ferð (line 54). 'Host of floating ones', i.e., sea-birds, seems to me the best translation, but this is not the usual meaning of ferð. The alternative is 'the mind(s) of floating ones', with varying views as to whether the 'floating ones' are sea-birds, travellers on the sea, or the vision of the wanderer's dead friends.

Each passage, in The Seafarer and in The Wanderer, describes a moment of emotional disturbance, and this may well have something to do with the obscure language in which it is couched. The urgency with which the seafarer is drawn to the sea is expressed in language approaching violence (gifre ond grêdig and gielleð in line 62). The wanderer has awakened from a dream in which the happiness of the past was revived for him, only to return to the reality of dull waves and sea-birds, which intensify his misery by being the ironic counterpart of hall and friends. Mrs. Salmon's suggestion offers an interesting background of primitive belief for two rather striking passages. There is not, however, sufficient external evidence that such a belief was current among the Anglo-Saxons, for us to accept her theory.

The interpretation of The Seafarer which Lawrence advanced in his 1902 article still has much to be said for it. He saw three main ideas in the poet's mind: the sea's fascination, its hardships, and the inability of land-dwellers to

64 Again, Midgely's reading.
appreciate these things. Lawrence states: 'It is precisely the antithesis between the first and second of these ideas which gives the poem its greatest power' (p. 466). This view of the poem is shared by Kennedy, who believes that the seafarer's attitude towards the sea shows a 'fusion ... of fear and fascination' (p. 13). But Kennedy ventures too far into the field of hypothesis when he says later that 'Conversion to the Christian faith may well have separated adventurous, sea-faring years from a later period of religious devotion' (p. 17). The seafarer speaks of the sea in terms of intense emotion, and the lines

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For bon cynssað nū
heortan gepūtas þætic hēan strēamas,
sealtypa gelāc sylf cunnige
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(Seafarer, 33b-35)

have already been mentioned as forming a bridge between the suffering described in the preceding lines and the compulsive attraction towards the sea expressed in the following.

Unfortunately, Lawrence takes no account of the second half of the poem. But there is a link between the narrative and didactic sections and a deeper significance to be found in the former, even if we do not accept either the allegorical or the peregrinus interpretations. It is because of the seafarer's trials at sea that he has gained the wisdom expressed in the second half of the poem. Three times in the first half he exclaims that the land-dweller, whose life is

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65 Old English Elegies (Princeton, 1936).
easy, cannot understand the tribulations which he himself has
gone through. I quote an example:

For þon him gelyfeð lyt sæ þe æh lifes wyn
gebiden in burgum, bealosþpa hwon,
wlonc ond wingāl, hü ic wērig oft
in brimlāde bfrdan sceolde.

(Seafarer, 26-30)

There follows a description of the hostile elements: darkness,
snow frost, and hail. Each time the seafarer mentions the
land-dweller's ignorance, this statement is made in close
association with the descriptions of his own suffering which
precede and/or follow. Bearing this in mind, the lines

Ic gelyfe nō
þæt him eorþwelan ece stondsē

(Seafarer, 66b-67)

are seen to express a knowledge based on experience. Because
the seafarer knows what it is to be without earthly comfort,
he realises that earthly prosperity is a fleeting thing.
Only by deprivation of it has he arrived at this understanding.
Thus he is drawn to the sea although he regards it as hostile
and forbidding. He embraces its hardships with passionate
eagerness because they have made the comfort and security of
life on land seem puny and contemptible:

for þon me hātran sind
Dryhtnes drēamas þonne þis dēads lif
ūne on londe.

(Seafarer, 64b-66a)

66 The description is of winter on land, but undoubtedly
the application is to the seafarer. It is characteristic of
Old English poetry to employ suggestive description which is
inappropriate on a literal level. See below Chap. III, pp. 215-
216 and 227-228.
On londe has the double meaning of 'on land' (as opposed to 'at sea') and 'in the world' in a general sense.

The interpretations which regard the poem as an allegory, and those which take the seafarer to be a real peregrinus, have the value of taking into account both parts of the poem, but they read too much into it, and impose too rigid an explanation of its meaning. Stanley, though wrong in his overall argument, was closer to the truth when he stated that the poem was 'neither realism nor allegory' (p. 453). Mrs. Gordon, in her edition of the poem, favours an approach which accepts the seafaring theme on the literal level but allows for a deeper significance in it:

... the sea-journey becomes not only the personal act of one who prefers the difficulties and dangers of the sea to the comforts and pleasures of life on land, but also an act symbolic of the renunciation of worldly life generally and the ready acceptance of the struggles and sufferings involved in the quest for eternal bliss.

(pp. 6-7)

This approach is, I think, the right one.

On the whole, the interpretations of The Wanderer have been less controversial than those of The Seafarer. Most critics have not favoured an allegorical reading, although Smithers, as we have seen, linked The Wanderer with The Seafarer in an interpretation of this kind. There has been one allegorical interpretation of The Wanderer rather different from that of Smithers. In 1951, D.W. Robertson, Jr., using the exegetical method of interpretation, offered a reading of the poem which explained every facet of it by means of
allegory. Like Smithers, Robertson regards The Wanderer as representing man's exile in the world. He describes the poem as 'the advice of ... [a] wise contemplative to his wayfaring and warfaring fellow Christians' (p.19). The references to battle represent, he believes, the concept of the Christian soldier. The lord who died at the beginning of the poem is Christ. The theme of the poem is that which Robertson finds behind all serious mediaeval works: caritas versus cupiditas (See pp. 4-7). 'The poet has commended the proper love, the love of the gold-friend, Christ, and condemned as foolish the improper love of the world' (p. 22).

Some of these statements are true: the poem is the advice of a wise contemplative (but this is not all it is), and it does condemn the love of the world, although the implied equation of 'improper love' with cupiditas does not necessarily apply. Nonetheless, there is no positive evidence that the poem is allegory, particularly allegory of the very detailed kind that Robertson finds. When he states that the dawn in which the wanderer laments represents the light of God's grace, and that the burial of his lord refers to the rite of baptism, 'a participation in the burial of Christ', one can only say that such equations are not even remotely suggested by the poem itself.

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67 'Historical Criticism,' English Institute Essays, 1950 (1951), 3-31. Only pages 18-22 are directly concerned with The Wanderer.

68 Cross disposes of this equation in a reductio ad absurdum. See p. 86, above.
Critical discussion of The Wanderer has largely centered on the number of speakers and the points at which their speeches begin and end. Since 1940 or so little has been heard of the 'interpolation' approach, and it has been fairly generally accepted that the poem consists of traditional wisdom with a specifically Christian opening and close. There has been a tendency, however, to make some formal distinction between the beginning and end of the poem on one hand, and the body of it on the other. In 1943, Bernard Huppé set the tone of modern criticism when he stated his belief that The Wanderer was 'an original Old English poem, reflective in tone, Christian in purpose, and complete in the form in which we now have it' (p. 516). Most critics would accept this. However, Huppé's more detailed interpretation has not achieved general acceptance. He states that the poem consists of 'two contrasting and complementary pagan monologues, framed and bound together by a Christian introduction, conclusion, and "bridge passage" [62b-87]' (pp. 529-530). The introduction and conclusion are the five lines at the beginning and end of the poem. The 'bridge passage' contains a section of advice as to appropriate conduct, i.e., moderation and prudence, and the meditation on ruins which follows this section.

The objections to Huppé's view of the poem's structure are several. In the first place, although the words Swæ cwæð

69See above, pp.70-71 and note (n.33).
70'The "Wanderer": Theme and Structure,' JEGP, XLII, 516-38.
suggest either that someone is about to speak or has commenced to speak, there is no indication of this person ceasing to speak until line 111, where another Swa may be taken either as the poet's interpolation of a line or as marking the end of a speech, at line 110. The only formal indication of another speaker appears with ond pās word ācwīð in line 91. Since the previous speech seems to be still in progress, this must introduce a speech within a speech. Further, the supposed 'bridge passage' cannot well be detached from the sections before and after it. As Leslie says,

The particular reflection in lines 61-62a prompts the general one in lines 62b-63; the connection of ideas is indicated by swa, for as individuals perish, so does the world.

In the same way, the idea of the ruins gives rise to the concept of an imaginary figure who has contemplated them. The figure (Sā be . . . bisne wealstēal . . . geondbenceō) is introduced in line 88 and begins to speak in line 92. Huppé's designation of the 'bridge passage' as 'Christian' in contradistinction to the 'pagan' monologues is inappropriate. The 'bridge passage', with its rather gloomy reflections on life, is of the same tenor as the whole latter half of the poem up to line 110. The only distinctively Christian reference is

As pointed out previously (p. 76), the main objection to all the two-speaker theories is the lack of formal indications in the text. The disagreement among the advocates of such theories as to where The Seafarer or The Wanderer is to be subdivided does not strengthen the case of any of them.

The Wanderer, p. 12.
ælfa Scyppend in line 85, but, as Greenfield points out, 'the power of God mentioned . . . [here] is a destructive power, and as such is synonymous with Fate.' Line 85 is very like line 107, where the destructive force is wyrdą gesceaf. Huppé's division of the poem into two monologues and a 'bridge passage' cannot, therefore, be accepted. His sub-divisions are, indeed, less convincing than those of Pope, who at least takes a point of transition (line 58) for the introduction of his second speaker.

Huppé was attacked in an article published in 1951 by Greenfield, whose interpretation of the poem represents the view most widely accepted at present, and that which is, on the whole, the most satisfactory. Greenfield considers the poem to consist largely of a monologue, extending from line 8 to line 110. We can accept that monologue is the form of the poem, but the exact length of the monologue is hard to determine, since it is not clear whether Swā cweā in lines 6 and 111 is to be taken to refer to the sections before (1-5) and after (112-115) these lines, as well as to the material in between them (8-110. Line 7 is clearly to be taken with line 6 as the words of the poet). Greenfield's decision on this point is open to question. However, his view of the meaning of the poem is a perceptive one, and satisfies the demands of the poem's structure, with its

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74 See previous note.
introduction and conclusion, and its transition at line 58 from personal lament to general reflection.

Greenfield sees the poem as the speech of 'an eardstapa who has with the passage of time become a snottor,' (p. 464), these being the epithets applied to the wanderer before and after his speech, as punctuated by Greenfield. He regards the speaker as a man who has gradually learned wisdom, managed to rise above his troubles, and has learned the lesson that his only sustenance is to be found in God. Lines 92 ff. are considered the speech of a fictitious character created by the wanderer. This view fits the evidence of the poem. Greenfield is probably wrong, however, in regarding lines 29 ff. as referring to a similarly fictitious character. The later passage can be assigned to another figure since this figure is visualised with sufficient concreteness as actually to speak. In lines 29-57 the wanderer seems to be referring to himself in the third person. The situation of lonely exile is his own, and the dream of the lost lord also applies to himself.

It is worth noting that Greenfield's interpretation of the thought-progression in the poem is quite similar to Huppm's. Greenfield sees in the poem an introduction in which there is the suggestion that God is superior to wyrd, a middle section in which the theme is the relentlessness of fate and the utmost man can do unaided, and a conclusion in which the advice is to do one's human best but also to seek God's mercy.
His disagreement with Huppé is chiefly with regard to structure, not theme. On the theme of the poem critics show surprising unanimity.

It is not, therefore, necessary to deal fully with the other modern interpretations of the poem, but some indication will be given of the points in which other critics have something to add to the common view as presented by Greenfield. In 1950, Lumiansky, like Greenfield a year later, published an article offering an alternative to Huppé's explanation of *The Wanderer.*

Lumiansky's interpretation of the poem resembles Greenfield's in the main, but, unlike Greenfield, he gives only lines 6-7 and 111 to the poet, assigning all the rest to the wanderer. Lumiansky also makes one or two specific suggestions which are of interest. In the first place, he reads lines 58-59 as meaning that the wanderer, in spite of what one would expect, is not saddened when he reflects on the life of men. His argument is that the wanderer is not saddened because he has gained wisdom. But it is much more natural to take these lines

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For bon 1c gebencan ne mæg  geond þæs woruld
for hwan mōdsefa  mīn ne gesweorc
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as meaning that the speaker's mind *does* grow dark.  

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75R.M. Lumiansky, 'The Dramatic Structure of the Old English Wanderer,' *Neophil.,* XXXIV, 104-12.

76Mrs. Gordon ('Traditional Themes in "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer."' *RES, n.s.,* v [1954], 6) and Cross (*Neophil.,* XLV, 67) interpret the lines in this way. Leslie (*The Wanderer,* pp. 79-80) is undecided. Bruce Mitchell ('More Musings on OE Syntax,' *NM,* LXIX, [1968], 56-59), followed by Dunning and Bliss (*The Wanderer,* p. 116, note) argues that the wanderer's mind does not grow dark.
the lines in this way is much more in keeping with the
account of suffering that precedes them and the gloomy re-
fections which follow. Lumiansky also offers an explana-
tion for the fact that, in uttering his monologue, the wan-
derer is breaking the prescription of stoic silence which
he gives in lines 9-21. He argues that the later lines,
ll2b-113 (**ne sceal næfre his torn tō rycene, / beorn of his**
**brōostum æcyban nempe hē ærēs bōte cunne**) indicate that
a man may break silence and tell his troubles if he knows
the remedy, and that the wanderer does now know the remedy,
which is to seek comfort from God. This is a thoughtful
suggestion, which gives an added depth to the poem. But it
is not essential to accept it. The fact that the wanderer
is acting in opposition to his own advice of lines 9-21, in
delivering his monologue, can simply be taken as an example
of the same kind of literary contradiction by which Coleridge
in Dejection and Musset in La Nuit de Mai compose fine poems
expressing their inability to compose. In those cases, as
in the present, the very existence of the poem depends on a
contradiction.

In Section II of his article (pp. 109-111), Lumiansky
suggests that The Wanderer was inspired by the Consolation of
Philosophy of Boethius, which (like The Wanderer) expresses
the idea that happiness in worldly things is false felicity,
and finds true felicity in practising goodness and virtue.
Lumiansky believes that wyrd in the poem represents the
Boethian Fortuna. This last suggestion was also made, appa-
rently independently, by Robertson, who states that wyrd is
Fortuna, 'The Boethian personification of the inexorable instability of the world' (p. 19). The idea of a connection between *The Wanderer* and *The Consolation of Philosophy* was developed more fully by Erzgräber in 1961. There is certainly a similarity in theme between the two works. The *Consolation* is not specifically Christian, but it would be natural for an Old English poet to make it so, as Alfred did when he translated it into Old English prose. Undoubtedly, there is a possibility of influence, but if such an influence exists it is of a very general kind. The idea of *wyrd* existed among the Anglo-Saxons before they knew about Fortuna, and Fortuna appears in many other places than Boethius' *Consolation*. Also, the moral of both works is quite broad enough to have occurred independently.

In 1958 Ralph Elliott offered the suggestion that the personal narrative in *The Wanderer* was to be taken on a literal level, representing the situation of a guilt-ridden man who is now an outcast because he has failed to make good the traditional vow to fight to the death for his lord. The wanderer then turns to Christianity for comfort because it shows that the heroic road to fame is not the only one. Thus, now that he has failed to live up to the heroic ideal, in his disgrace he seeks a code that values humility. Elliott regards his warning against making the traditional boasts (lines


78'The Wanderer's Conscience,' *ES*, XXXIX, 193-200.
69-72) as a reflection of his emphasis on humility and of his awareness that he failed to put his own boast into effect. This is an interesting reading of the poem, but to regard the wanderer's situation as one of guilt is not strictly necessary. When he speaks of having lost his friends in battle and of having buried his lord, there is no indication that he was blameworthy in this connection. The words hrēo (line 16) and torn (line 112) do suggest turbulent emotion, as Elliott points out, but not necessarily emotion springing from guilt. It is sufficient to believe that the wanderer seeks comfort from his religion because he has learned that all earthly comfort is transient.

In the same year that Elliott suggested the existence in The Wanderer of a sequence of events to be taken on a literal level, T.C. Rumble took up the opposite position and put forward an interpretation in which the events were regarded as purely imaginary. As is indicated by the title of his article, "From "Eardstapa" to "Snottor on Möde": The Structural Principle of "The Wanderer", Rumble's view of the poem is very similar to Greenfield's. The difference is, that instead of assuming that the wanderer has learned wisdom by experience, Rumble believes that this wisdom is attained in a single act of meditation:

By means of the introspective experience of which the central part of the poem consists, the speaker has progressed from warrior to philosopher—has been able . . . to reach a conclusive solution to the problem with which he began:

how to achieve an understanding of 
metudes miltse—God’s way to man. (p. 230)

Although Rumble’s modification of the common interpretation is not a very great one, it still seems best to accept the narrative section of the poem on a literal level. It is true that this part of the poem is expressed in 'dreamlike fragments', but this is due to the Old English elegiac technique of indirect allusion to events and concentration on emotional situation rather than narrative. The poem is more convincing if we believe the speaker to have really suffered bereavement and loneliness, and to have learned wisdom over the years, rather than having achieved it at one sitting, so to speak.

In 1961, J.E. Cross proposed that The Wanderer belonged to the genre of consolatio. He does not link the poem with Boethius, but rather with a more general tradition of consolation dating from the time of classical Latin. Cross states:

To my mind the progress of the poem is best explained in terms of a consolatio where topics of the genre are used first to intensify the lament; then to attempt some measure of consolation by generalisation which is yet unsatisfactory, in order

80 Rumble, p. 230.
81 Cf. p. 134, below.
82 Lines 64-65a, Forbon ne mæg wearban wēs wer āer he age / wintra ðælin woruldrfœ, suggest that experience is the qualification for wisdom, and imply that the speaker has gained it by the necessary wintra ðælin woruldrfœ.
83 Neophil, XLV, 63-75. See note 55.
to emphasise the supreme consolation of security in the next life. (p. 71)

Cross's analysis of the thought-sequence in the poem is sound, but there is no need to assume that the author was deliberately composing on a classical model. The suggestion that the poem is a consolation is also made by Dunning and Bliss who refer in a footnote to Cross's article, in their edition of the poem:

We believe that the poem is an example, rather general in character, of the genre consolatio, and that the wisdom achieved by the anhoga, strikingly expressed in the final lines,84 is the consolation the poem provides. (p. 80)

Cross and those who share his views are correct in so far as that the ultimate message of the poem, conveyed in its ending, is one of consolation. However, the general tone of the poem is too dark for one to regard it, taken entire, as a consolatory work.

Two more articles published by Cross should be mentioned in connection with The Wanderer. In his "Ubi Sunt" Passages in Old English--Sources and Relationships' (1956),85 he makes a study of those formal passages on the theme of transience which resemble similar passages in Latin and which are part of a homiletic tradition. Ubi sunt begins the question Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt?, which, with

84Dunning and Bliss assign the last four lines of the poem to the wanderer, not the poet.

85 Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund, Årsbok, 23-44.
variations, is the characteristic expression of such passages. It appears later as the title of the Middle English poem on the same theme, which begins 'Were bith they biforen us weren', Lines 92 ff. in The Wanderer contain what is probably the most famous expression of this theme in Old English:

Hwær cwóm mearg? Hwær cwóm mago? Hwær cwóm mæþþungyfa?
Hwær cwóm symblæ gesetu? Hwær sindon seledræmas?
Eala beorht bûne! Eala byrnwiga!
Eala þæodnes þrym! Hû sêo þræg gewât,
genâp under nihthelm swâ hēo nû wære

(Wanderer, 92-96)

Cross cites Isidore of Seville's Synonyma de lamentatione animae peccatoris as the favourite individual source for such passages in Old English prose and poetry. He quotes the relevant section from Isodore, notably *Dic ubi sunt reges? Ubi principes. Ubi imperatores?* . . . quasi umbra transierunt; velut somnium evanuerunt. The similarity to the lines quoted from The Wanderer is immediately apparent, although the objects/persons chosen as symbols of vanished glory are different. Cross does not, therefore, derive the Wanderer passage directly from Isidore, or, for that matter, from any particular source, but he does associate it with the Latin tradition. Miss Kershaw had questioned whether this passage actually was of Latin derivation, since *hwær cwóm* does not directly translate *ubi sunt*, but Cross points out that in the Pseudo-Augustinian Sermo LVII ad Fratres in Eremo, translated in Blâckling Homily VIII, *ubi sunt* is varied by *ubi abierunt*, rendered in the Old English by *hwýder gewítôn*. He suggests

86 Kershaw, p. 166.
that *cuman* in the *Wanderer* passage might similarly be the equivalent of *abire*.

Cross points to a similar passage in *The Seafarer*:

\[
\text{nearon nū cyningas ne ēāseras ne goldgiefan swylce in wæron} \quad (\text{Seafarer, 82-83})
\]

which he regards as markedly Isodorean. These lines do not contain the characteristic question form, but the *cyningas, ēāseras, and goldgiefan* correspond fairly closely to the *reges, principes, and imperatores* quoted above, so Cross is probably right in deriving the passage from Isidore. He allows that there may be an intermediary between the two. He notes that *swylce in wæron* probably corresponds to *qui ante nos fuerunt* in the familiar question *ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt?*

Thus, Cross argues that not only the passages in the Old English homilies which show close correspondencies to patristic writings, but also homiletic passages in the lyrical poems, can be seen to be derived from Latin.

Another passage in *The Wanderer* which Cross associates with a Latin tradition is the *sum*-series found in lines 80-84:

\[
\text{Sume wig fornōm, ferede in forōwege; sumne fugel opbær ofer hōanne holm; sumne sē hāra wulf dēæge gedālde; sumne dreorighlēor in eordōscrēfe eorl gehýdde.}
\]

Cross rejects the association of this passage with the 'beasts of battle' theme, and connects it instead with the Christian

87 On "The Wanderer" lines 80-84: A Study of a Figure and a Theme," *Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund, Årsbok* (1958-9), 75-110.

dogma of the resurrection of the body, though fragmented: 'We may suspect that such a list is an almost instinctive reaction to the idea of resurrection and judgement in the minds of Christians' (p. 87). He believes that the ultimate source of such lists is the Apocalypse of John, XX, 13. He does not quote, but the relevant passage is, in the Authorised Version:

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works.

There is little apparent relation to the above passage from The Wanderer. Cross gives numerous parallels of lists of the ways of destruction from Latin and Old English homiletic works. One can accept that these, or some of them, have the ultimate derivation which he postulates. However, there is not the slightest reference to the resurrection in the Wanderer passage. The emphasis is on death. Moreover, the sum-series is found elsewhere in Old English poetry, especially in The Fortunes of Men and The Gifts of Men. The former, to be sure, deals with the ways of death, but, again, there is no mention of resurrection, and the latter is not concerned with death at all, but with the different talents bestowed on different persons. The sum-series does appear to be a conscious rhetorical device of repetition, but it need not be Latin-based, and there is no evidence for the specific Latin Christian derivation proposed for it in The Wanderer passage, by Cross.
The work of Cross as a whole represents a tendency, increasingly strong in recent years, to link Old English poetry with Latin models, classical and patristic. He shows a fondness for Latin rhetorical terms, designating the sum-series repetitio, and the ubi sunt passages interrogatio. Such terms are convenient, in that they imply a conscious use of rhetorical techniques, but, in also implying a conscious reference to Latin models, they beg the question of Latin influence, which, as we have seen, is not indubitably established in all cases. The trend towards Latin terms is taken further by Dunning and Bliss, who, in their edition of The Wanderer, feel free (since 'rhetorical figures in the poem are now so well recognized', p. 81, n.l) to speak of the poem's structure as its dispositio, the introduction of its theme as the propositio, and the qualification of it as the contraposition. This is unnecessary, since perfectly good English terms are available, and there is no proof that the poet was deliberately using these particular rhetorical forms. The classification of The Wanderer as consolatio, proposed by Cross and accepted by Dunning and Bliss, has been mentioned above. The interpretation of The Wanderer put forward by Robertson can also be seen as part of the trend to stress the Latin Christian background of the poem, rather

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89I refer in particular to the articles by Cross mentioned in the preceding pages, 104-108 and also to his article, 'Microcosm and Macrocosm', mentioned in note 54.

9See 'On "The Wanderer" lines 80-84,' pp. 81-2; 'On the Genre of "The Wanderer",' p. 63.
than, as the earlier critics tended to do, the Germanic background. Also, Smithers' interpretation of The Wanderer and The Seafarer relates the poems to Latin patristic writings. The earlier tendency, which preferred to ignore all in the poems that was not pagan, certainly needed to be re-dressed, but it seems to me that these critics have gone too far in the other direction.

Mention has already been made in various contexts of the work of the most recent editors of The Wanderer: Leslie (1966), and Dunning and Bliss (1969). Neither edition offers any revolutionary interpretation, but the sub-divisions of the poem proposed by each are worthy of comment. Both editions present the poem as monologue, and both suggest that the wanderer's speech begins at line 1, instead of line 8, which is where Greenfield places its opening. Lines 6-7 only are assigned to the poet at this point. Leslie sees only one further interpolation by the poet: at line 111. He cuts off the speech beginning at line 92 (which, in common with Greenfield, he assigns to an imaginary figure introduced by the wanderer) at line 96, instead of continuing it to line 110, like Greenfield (who thus ends it at the same point as the enclosing monologue of the wanderer). Leslie reasons, convincingly, that lines 95b and 96 of The Wanderer resemble the conclusion of Isidore's prototype (quasi umbra transierunt, velut somnium evanuerunt; quaeruntur et non sunt) and are

91 Leslie assigns the same lines to the poet as Lumiansky does. See above, p. 100.
therefore probably intended as a rounding off (pp. 19-20). Dunning and Bliss assign lines 88-91 to the poet, and regard lines 92-110 as spoken directly by the wanderer. Like Leslie, they assign line 111 to the poet, and the ending to the wanderer again. Until Leslie's edition it was common to regard the whole section 111-115 as the poet's epilogue (as Greenfield does).

There can be no final decision as to which lines in the poem are spoken by the poet and which by the persona he introduces. It seems likely that the Old English poet himself made no firm decision. I would assign lines 6-7 and 111-115 to the poet, and the rest to the wanderer, with lines 92-76 spoken by an imaginary figure. But it is impossible to be dogmatic. Speaker and poet merge, and points of view shift. The sentiments at the end of the poem express a wisdom such as that gained by the wanderer. It seems to me that they should be assigned to the poet because their completely general application and consolatory tone make them somewhat different from the rest of the poem, and, perhaps more importantly, because, along with line 111 (Swa cwaed snottor on mōde; gesæt him sundor aet rūne) which must clearly be given to the poet, they form a hypermetric group. The opening section, which is also often given to the poet, refers specifically to a situation which is that of the wanderer himself: the loneliness, albeit relieved by the grace of God, of an ānhaga. Here, it seems to me, the wanderer is speaking of himself in the third person, as he does later, in lines 29b ff. It is
particularly difficult to decide where the speech of lines 92 ff. ends. Leslie's argument seems the best one, but, as a person who contemplates ruins and thinks of those who once inhabited them the imaginary fröd in ferðe is in exactly the same position as the wanderer himself, and lines 97 ff. (Stondeð nū on læste læofre dugube/weal wundrum hēah, etc) could express the sentiments of either or both of them. It is likely that the poet himself drew no sharp distinction between the two. The figure who utters the ubi sunt lament fades out and blends into the wanderer himself.

The earlier critics regarded The Wanderer as a largely non-Christian poem, and some later critics, such as Humpé, have made a distinction between a pagan viewpoint presented in the body of the poem, and a Christian one in the introduction and conclusion. Actually, there is no conflict between the middle of the poem and its opening and close. The moral attitude of the former, though it shows the gloomy fatalism dating from pagan times, is secular rather than pagan, and the Christian teaching is of a pretty general kind. Therefore, the view of the poem as a pagan monologue or monologues in a Christian frame rather misses the point. Mrs. Gordon was right in regarding the references to wyrd as no proof of paganism:

Wyrd was not a sort of pagan god: it was a poetic term, often personified, for what is a timeless concept, pagan only in its associations, the concept of inescapable event.92

Susie Tucker says that Fate and Providence probably meant much

the same thing to the Anglo-Saxon mind: 'Wyrdæ gesceaf't [Wanderer, 107] is the equivalent of Godes gesceaf't in undoubtedly Christian poems.'93 It would probably be a little more accurate to say that wyrd was felt to be a destructive force, but subject to, and not at variance with, God's providence. Few would now accept the view, advanced by Edith Wardale that the plural wyrdæ must be a reference to the Norns and is therefore proof that this section of the poem is pagan.94 Ferrell, it will be remembered, regarded wyrd in the singular as a Norn.95 Miss Wardale does not go as far as this, but the plural usage tended to be seen by critics as evidence of personification. Probably there is no more significance in it than in the poetic plural bræostum in line 113. The body of the poem is certainly less directly Christian than its opening and particularly its close, but, as Leslie points out, references throughout the poem to this world imply the existence of the next.96 There is a blending of, not a conflict between, the old and the new outlook on moral and spiritual matters.

Like The Seafarer, The Wanderer should be read so as to allow for deeper meanings and a broader frame of reference without discounting the literal level. The Wanderer has a

93 'Return to "The Wanderer",' EIC, VIII, 230.
94 Wardale, p. 59.
95 See p. 56, above.
96 The Wanderer, p. 4.
significance greater than its specific reference to a heroic society still found in Anglo-Saxon England. In this poem, as in *The Seafarer*, there is the theme of wisdom gained through the experience and contemplation of suffering and loss. Wordsworth expressed a similar idea in rather triter fashion when he spoke of finding strength

> In the soothing thoughts that spring
> Out of human suffering,
> In the faith that looks through death,
> In years that bring the philosophic mind.

The difference between the two Old English poems is that in *The Wanderer* pain is more severe—its cause is actual bereavement, not just loneliness and hardship—and it is unwillingly accepted rather than actively sought. In *The Wanderer*, as in the *Immortality Ode*, the sense of what is lost is conveyed with greater poetic power than the consolation for it.

Scholarly investigation of *The Ruin* can be dealt with much more summarily than that of the preceding poems, since it has been mainly confined to a discussion of the location of the ruins described. The references to hot springs and baths (lines 38 ff.) have led to the suggestion of Bath as the likely location. This idea was arrived at independently by Leo in 1865 and Earle a few years later. Most critics take it that the ruins referred to are Roman; the impressive


architecture described makes this likely. The ruins are of stone (wealstān, line 1), and there is mention of towers (torras, line 3), of a wall which is stēap ond geap (line 11), and of an arch with tiles (pāes tēaforgēapa tigelum sceadēg, line 30).\(^{99}\) And, of course, the hot baths are typically Roman. The expression enta geweorc (line 2) also appears to be applied to Roman ruins in The Wanderer (line 87), and in Maxims II (line 2). However, the ascription to Bath has been challenged. Stephen Herben\(^{100}\) believes that a more substantial and military setting is indicated by the description in the poem. Nevertheless, the description of the site as a fortress need not argue against Bath as the location, since the Anglo-Saxons are likely to attach heroic and military associations to any ruins. Herben proposes, instead of Bath, the complex along Hadrian's Wall, and maintains that the baths need not have been heated by hot springs. But the Anglo-Saxons probably would not have recognised the hypocaust system of heating, whereas hot springs are unmistakable. Also, the wording of the poem suggests water welling up: strēam hāte wearp / wīdan wylme (lines 38b-39a).

Dunleavy\(^{101}\) favours Chester, and thinks that the poem may

\(^{99}\)It is not clear whether tēaforgēapa is an adjective or a noun. Leslie takes it to be the former (See Three O.E. Elegies, pp. 73-74). The first element of the compound refers to red colouring, and the second to a curved structure.

\(^{100}\)The Ruin,' MLN, LIV (1939), 37-39; 'The Ruin Again,' MLN, LIX (1944), 72-74.

\(^{101}\)G.W. Dunleavy, 'A "De Excidio" Tradition in the Old English "Ruin"?' PQ, XXXVIII (1959), 112-118.
have been inspired by the massacre of monks from the nearby monastery of Bangor-on-Dee, which took place in 613. There is no indication of any such association in the poem. Hugh Keenan, approaching the poem somewhat differently, regards it as an account of the wicked city, Babylon. Krapp-and Dobbie think it likely that the poet has no particular site in mind, but that he may have 'introduced the mention of hot baths from his own knowledge, or from hearsay, to give more concreteness to his picture' (p. lxv).

In 1939 Cecilia Hotchner made a strong case for Bath as the site of the ruins in the poem. Using archaeological and geographical evidence, she shows that the description of the ruins is applicable to those excavated at Bath, and excludes all other British locations possessing thermal springs on the grounds that the temperature of the water in them is not hot enough to be described at hēt (pp. 9-59). She also proposes a West Saxon composition for The Ruin and the other elegies, rather than the traditionally favoured Northumbrian origin. Only in the case of The Ruin is her argument based on linguistic evidence. She states that there are approximately three non-West-Saxon characteristics in the poem, and that 'These are probably Kentish, or less plausibly, Mercian' (p. 86). The examples she gives are æeldo (line 6), with æ

102 'The Ruin as Babylon,' TSL, II (1966), 109-117.
103 Wessex and Old English Poetry, with Special Consideration of 'The Ruin' (Lancaster, Pa. 1939).
instead of West Saxon ie; *undereotone* (line 6) and *forweorone* (line 7), with back mutation of e to eo; and *hwætræd* (line 19), with ẹ instead of ǣ (pp. 84-85). In fact, the dialect origin of variant forms is highly debatable. 104

Miss Hotchner takes up the suggestion made by Alois Brandl 105 that the description of ruins in this poem and *The Wanderer* is inspired by the *De Excidio Thoringiae* of Venantius Fortunatus. The early lines of the *De Excidio* do show similarities with *The Ruin*:

> The royal dwelling which flourished formerly  
> with a regal splendor.  
> Is no longer covered with a roof but instead with  
> gloomy ashes.  
> The lofty, gleaming roofs, which shone adorned  
> with golden metal  
> Have been overwhelmed by the pale ashes. 106

But Fortunatus' poem is a lament of a personal kind, composed for Queen Radegunde, who had lost all her kinsmen in battle, except the cousin to whom the poem was addressed. The sense of personal loss is quite absent from *The Ruin*, and in *The Wanderer* is is only indirectly associated with the passage (lines 75-87) describing ruins.

Malone also thinks that the poem is in a classical

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104 Cf. Dr. Sisam's statement, p. 54, n. 1, above. Leslie, in his edition, points out quite a few more non-West-Saxon forms than Miss Hotchner, among them a instead ea before ld (walendwyrhtan, line 7); cnēa instead of cnēowa (line 8); and *tigelum*, with retention of intervocalic ę (line 30). Leslie concludes that the poem shows definite Anglian characteristcistics, but Mercian rather than Northumbrian (Three Old English Elegies, pp. 31-34).

105 Venantius Fortunatus und die ags. Elegien Wanderer und Ruine,' Archiv., CXXXIX (1919), 84. See Leslie, *The Wanderer*, p. 34.

106 Hotchner, p. 123.
de excidio urbis tradition, and mentions the resemblance to Fortunatus, but does not expand on the idea. Dunleavy sees the same connection, as the title of his article, 'A "De Excidio" Tradition in the Old English "Ruin",?' indicates. He relates the poem to the De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae of Gildas, and to Alcuin's Lament for the sack of Lindisfarne. Dunleavy suggests that The Ruin may have been inspired by an act of violence similar to that which inspired Alcuin. But the only reference to violence in The Ruin is contained in the word walo (line 25). Wöldagas in the same line suggests that the inhabitants of the city may just as well have died of disease:

Crungon walo wīde, cwǭman wōldagas; 
swylt eall fornǭm secgrǭf[ra] wera.  
(Ruin, 25-26)

Further, the works of Gildas and Alcuin mentioned by Dunleavy stress that the devastation they describe is God's punishment for sin. No such idea appears in The Ruin.

Because The Ruin offers no great challenge as far as theme and structure are concerned, there has been little further interpretation of it on a literary level. The poem is damaged, and its ending is incomplete, but it seems unlikely that it could have been more than an impersonal description. There is no indication that the scene would have

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been related to a particular individual, or that a moral would have been drawn. Nevertheless, the description in the poem is highly evocative, and more important as far as the poem's quality is concerned than the question of the site to which it refers. The Roman remains and the hot springs make it very likely that the poem was inspired by the ruins of Bath, but this is not of great importance, since, as in The Wanderer and The Seafarer, it is the fact of human impermanence that intrigues the poet, and when he visualises the scene in its heyday, he imagines it as the typical Germanic hall.

The Wife's Lament is a poem that has caused considerable difficulties of interpretation. It has sometimes been linked with external material, i.e., with The Husband's Message and with heroic cycles. Theories which make connections of this kind will be dealt with after the discussion of The Husband's Message. The earliest editors of The Wife's Lament, J.J. Conybeare (1926)\textsuperscript{108} and Thorpe (1842)\textsuperscript{109} assumed the poem to be the utterance of a man. Ettmüller (1850)\textsuperscript{110} was the first to realise that the feminine inflexions of the first two lines point unmistakably to a woman. These forms are geômorre (line 1) and mInre sylfre (line 2). Both forms must refer to


\textsuperscript{109}B. Thorpe, Codex Exciensis (London, 1842).

\textsuperscript{110}L. Ettmüller, Engla and Seaxna Scopas and Böceras (Quedlinburg and Leipzig, 1850), p. 214 ff. See Kershaw, Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems, p. 28.
the speaker. The latter qualifies the word stā in line two, but takes its feminine agreement, not from stā, a masculine noun, but from the feminine possessor.

The view that the narrator is a man has been returned to from time to time. Schücking, in 1906, proposed to reject the first two lines as a later addition. The poem could then be taken as the speech of a man, the geong mon of line 42.111 Schücking retracted this opinion later.112 Bambas, in 1963, also argued for a male narrator, on the grounds that a poem about sexual love, with a female speaker, would be an anachronism in Anglo-Saxon England.113 He argues that the passionate words of the poem 'suit the fierce loyalty that existed between a chief and his follower,' and that they would not be an indication of a sexual relationship until the time of courtly love: 'for a wife in the Teutonic culture of the eighth century to boast of her intended fidelity would be gratuitous' (p. 305). Bambas suggests that the feminine forms of the opening lines are either an addition or due to scribal error. In 1968, Martin Stevens attempted to explain

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111 L.L. Schücking, 'Das angelsächsische Gedicht von der Klage der Frau,' ZDA, XLVIII, 436-49. See Krapp-Dobbie, p. lviii. (The dating of Schücking's article by Krapp-Dobbie on this page is incorrect).

112 Kleines angelsächsisches Dichterbuch, Göthen, 1919. See Krapp-Dobbie, loc. cit.

113 R.C. Bambas, 'Another View of the Old English "Wife's Lament",' JEGP, LXII, 303-9.
away the the crucial feminine forms as not really feminine at all. He proposed to emend *sīj to *sīje and take it as a feminine noun, which would then explain the feminine agreement of minre sylfre, and to read geōmorre as an adverb formed by adding e to the adjective geōmor, the extra r being a variant spelling. These arguments are forced, to say the least. Neither Bambas nor Stevens considers the evidence of Wulf and Eadwacer, which, by also being a love-poem spoken by a woman, makes The Wife's Lament, though still unusual in representing this type of poetry in Anglo-Saxon times, not unique. Bambas dismisses Wulf and Eadwacer in a footnote as 'cryptic' (p. 308). Stevens briefly describes it as 'reputedly also spoken by a woman' (p. 81). Schücking, Bambas, and Stevens all base their opinion that The Wife's Lament is the speech of a man on a priori assumptions, and are obliged to manipulate the text of the poem to fit them.

As pointed out by Jane Curry, and by Angela Lucas in her refutation of Stevens' article, the poem contains evidence of a woman speaker other than that provided by the feminine inflexions. Miss Curry draws attention (p. 189) to lines 33b ff., where the reference to 'friends' keeping their beds together in contrast with the speaker's loneliness,


suggests envy of a specifically sexual kind. Angela Lucas picks out the same passage. She adds that, although the wife uses terms which a retainer might use to refer to his lord (hlaford, lines 6 and 15; lāodfruma, line 8; frēan, line 33) these terms 'only convey the notion of an intensely personal relationship based on love and respect.'\textsuperscript{117} She points out that there is no mention of the social relationship between retainer and lord, no words like beahgifa in The Battle of Maldon and goldwine in The Wanderer [lines 22 and 35], which contain the idea of the lord as the giver of treasure.\textsuperscript{118} This observation provides an answer to Bambas' remark about the fierce loyalty between chief and follower. That such a loyalty could be expressed in passionate language is shown by The Wanderer, but The Wanderer does not contain sexual implications, and it does stress the social relation.

Most critics agree that the speaker in The Wife's Lament is female, but there are still many area of disagreement. One thing is clear: the woman speaker is separated from her husband and forced to live alone in an 'earth-cave' in the wilderness. In the poem she expresses her misery and 'longing'.

\textsuperscript{117}Toller's Supplement (J. Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary [Oxford, 1898]; Supplement, 1921) gives as one definition of hlaford 'the master of a wife, a wife's lord and master, the husband' and cites several instances. In the same way, the words frēa (lord) and lāodfruma (prince) could be used by a wife in that she regarded herself as her husband's subject. The use of the words frōnd (line 47) and frōondsceipe (line 25) in a sexual sense is paralleled in The Husband's Message, where we find frōondsceype (line 19) with the same meaning.

\textsuperscript{118}Lucas, p. 292.
There is no consensus of opinion as to the number of persons referred to in the poem. The prevailing view is that there are two: the speaker and her husband. But Grein,\(^{119}\) whose suggestion was more fully developed by Roeder,\(^{120}\) and also adopted by Brandl\(^{121}\) and Sieper,\(^{122}\) considered that the geong mon of line 42 was a third party, a man responsible for the husband's alienation from his wife and cursed by her in lines 42 ff. Among recent critics, Ward\(^{123}\) has followed this opinion. But there is no indubitable indication of such a third party. Geong mon could as well be a reference to the husband, or mean 'young person' in a general sense. To assume the existence of such a third person unnecessarily complicates the poem, introducing another facet to it without sufficient evidence.

Two modifications of the 'three-person' theory should be


\(^{120}\)F. Roeder, Die Familie bei den Angelsachsen, Halle, (1899), 113 ff. See Davies, pp. 292-293.

\(^{121}\)Angelsächsische Literatur,' in Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, ed. H. Paul, 2nd ed. (Strassburg, 1900-09), II, 977.

\(^{122}\)E. Sieper, Die altenglische Elegie (Strassburg, 1915), p. 223. See Krapp-Dobbie, p. lvi.

mentioned. Greenfield\textsuperscript{124} takes lines 42 ff. as a curse, but applies them to the husband, thus cutting out the 'young man'. Bouman\textsuperscript{125} proposes that the speaker has had two husbands, the first one, whom she loved, and who died (he takes the departure over the waves, referred to in lines 6-7, as symbolising death), and a second husband, socially equal--ful gemæene (line 18), but cruel. It is the second husband who banishes her to the cave. To regard the first husband as dead involves reading too much into the poem to be an acceptable interpretation.

Those who believe in the separate existence of the 'young man' usually consider that the husband is referred to in lines 19-21a and the 'young man' in lines 42-45a. But the two sets of lines, both of which describe a troubled state of mind concealed under a blithe demeanour, are very similar:

\begin{verbatim}
heardsælligne, hygegeðorme,
möd mifþende, mormor hycgend[ne],
blīne gebēro.
\end{verbatim}  
(Wife's Lament, 19-21a)

\begin{verbatim}
A scyle geong mon wesan geðormōd,
heard heortan gekōht; swylce habban sceal
blīne gebēro, ðæc þon brōstceare,
sinsorgna gedreag
\end{verbatim}  
(Wife's Lament, 42-45a)

The interpretation of these passages has depended on the view the critic takes of the poem in general. Setting aside, for

\textsuperscript{124} "The Wife's Lament": Reconsidered," PMLA, LXVIII, (1953), 907-908. Greenfield's interpretation will be discussed in more detail later.

\textsuperscript{125} A.C. Bouman, Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature, Leiden, 1962, Chap. III, pp. 43-60.
the present, the exact meaning of these lines, we may note that the parallelism in them is a strong argument for taking them to refer to the same person. Norah Kershaw\textsuperscript{126} and Jane Curry\textsuperscript{127} have both drawn attention to this, and suggested that both sets of lines refer to the husband. This seems sensible, and is a further argument for the exclusion of a third person. Not all scholars have preserved this parallelism. Krapp and Dobbie break it by placing a period before \textit{bltbe gebæro} in line 21, so that these words are taken with what follows, instead of what precedes them.\textsuperscript{128} Greenfield accepts this punctuation,\textsuperscript{129} and so does Bouman.\textsuperscript{130} But it is better to punctuate so as to bring out a parallelism that must have been intended. Leslie places the period after \textit{bltbe gebæro}, but does not cite the analogy with the later passage as a reason for doing so.\textsuperscript{131}

The critics who take lines 42 ff. as a curse argue that three of the verbs in lines 42-46 (\textit{scyle}, line 42; \textit{Sy}, line 45; \textit{Sy}, line 46) are optative. The translation of the passage in accordance with an interpretation of this kind would

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126}Kershaw, pp. 30 and 173, note to line 21.
\item \textsuperscript{127}Curry, p. 194.
\item \textsuperscript{128}Krapp-Dobbie, p. 210.
\item \textsuperscript{129}WL Reconsidered,' pp. 909-910.
\item \textsuperscript{130}Bouman, p. 51.
\item \textsuperscript{131}Three Q.E.Elegies, pp. 47 and 55, note to line 21.
\end{itemize}
be as follows (I quote from Greenfield):

Ever may a young man . . . be sad of mind; just as he has a pleasing appearance, let him also have breast-care . . . ; may his joy in the world be dependent on himself alone . . . 132 [i.e., let him have no friends]

At this point Greenfield indicates that he applies the curse to the husband: 'may it be that banished far from his native land . . . my friend shall sit.' Otherwise, the reading would be: 'may he [the third person] be banished far from his native land, because my friend [i.e., her husband] is sitting under a rocky cliff, frosted with the storm . . . '

Many scholars do not interpret lines 42 ff. as a curse, but consider that the words  schyle introduce a pronouncement of the gnomic type. This is the view taken by Lawrence.133 It is followed by, among others, Kennedy,134 Leslie, in his edition of the poem,135 and Bouman.136 Though all agree that lines 42 ff. express gnomic wisdom, there is disagreement as to whether the application is completely general (Bouman's view—taking geong mon as 'young person', male or female), refers more particularly to the husband (Kennedy), or has an especial reference to the wife (Leslie). Norah Kershaw and Jane Curry, who both see a reference to the husband here, do

132 WL Reconsidered,' pp. 911-12.
133 'The Banished Wife's Lament,' MP, V (1907-8), 387-405.
134 The Earliest English Poetry, p. 119.
136 Bouman, p. 56.
not expressly designate the lines as gnomic. The link with the gnomic tradition is convincingly demonstrated by Leslie (pp. 8 and 57), who cites as a comparison *Maxims I*, 177-178:

\[ \text{A scyle \textit{pæ rincas} geraedan lædan ond him ætsonne swefan.} \]

He takes the \textit{Sví} . . . \textit{sý} . . . clauses of lines 45b-47a as alternatives rather than optatives. This is in keeping with the view that the preceding lines are a gnomic statement, not a curse. A translation of lines 45b ff, in accordance with Leslie's syntax would be:

Whether all his joy in the world be at his own disposal, or whether it be banished full far from his distant homeland that my friend is sitting under a rocky cliff . . . my friend endures great care of spirit.\(^{*137}\)

(lines 45b-51a)

The following appears to be the sense of the whole passage from line 42: the wife expresses the opinion that a young person (she is thinking of her husband especially) is obliged to be gloomy-minded, etc; she then states that whether her husband's situation is fortunate or unfortunate (she expands the latter hypothesis), he is bound to be unhappy; she ends the poem by exclaiming (once more in gnomic style): 'Woe to him who must with longing wait for his dear one.' Clearly, the last line applies to herself as well as her husband.

Some critics, following Lawrence, have taken a lenient view of the husband as pictured in lines 19-21a. At the other

\(^{137}\)This is my own translation, based on the poem as given in Leslie's edition.
extreme, Greenfield finds him depicted in a decidedly unpleasant light. Lawrence translates \textit{morbhycgend[\textit{n}]e} (line 20) as 'mindful of death'. On the other hand, Greenfield believes that the husband is full of enmity towards his wife, and translates \textit{morbhycgend[\textit{n}]e} as 'plotting a crime', i.e., the wife's imprisonment. Greenfield also takes \textit{fæhōu} (line 26) to refer to the husband's hostility towards his wife, but, as Leslie points out (pp. 6-7), the word means 'feud', and is better taken in this context as a feud in which the husband is involved. He departed overseas (lines 5-6), probably because he was forced into exile by his kinsmen. This is Leslie's suggestion (p. 5). It would be in keeping with the plotting of the \textit{monnes māgās} (line 11), and the rather exilic description in lines 46b-50a. Therefore, when the wife says:

\begin{equation}
\text{scelíc feor ge nēah mīnes felāsōfan  fæhōudrōgan, (Wife's Lament, 25b-26)}
\end{equation}

she means that she must suffer the consequences of her husband's feud. Greenfield's unfavourable view of the husband is further shown by his explanation of line 15:

\begin{equation}
\text{hēt mec hāford mīn hūr eard niman,}
\end{equation}

\textit{138} Greenfield later departed from the rather extreme position taken up in his 1953 article. In his 1966 chapter on 'The Old English Elegies' in \textit{Continuations and Beginnings}, (ed. E.G. Stanley, London) although he still assumes an estrangement between the husband and wife he does not paint the latter as a cruel person. Also, lines 42 ff. are no longer taken as a curse (See 'The O.E.Elegies,' pp. 165-169 for the section on The Wife's Lament).
which he takes as meaning that the husband cruelly ordered his wife to be seized.\textsuperscript{139} It seems best to take the lenient view, and to regard lines 19-21a as describing an unhappy, but not a vindictive, state of mind. For one thing, the wife shows a longing and affection for her husband throughout the poem, reaching a climax in the last one and a half lines. Also, she herself places the blame for her unfortunate position on the kinsmen, who plotted to separate her and her husband (lines 11-12a). It is not clear whether or not her husband ordered her into exile\textsuperscript{140} to protect her from his kinsmen (Ward's view). Such an order may have been given at their instigation. However, it appears that they, rather than he, are ultimately responsible.

It is impossible to reconstruct with any certainty the events behind the poem, and almost every critic offers different suggestions. Two controversial details will be given as examples. The word \textit{fölgað} (line 9) has been picked out by those critics who think the narrator a man, as a reference to the position of a retainer. Among those who are not of this opinion, Malone\textsuperscript{141} has taken line 9 (\textit{ðæ ic mæ færan gewæt fölgað secan}) to mean that the wife entered the household of

\textsuperscript{139}He reads \textit{hær heard niman} (line 15). See pp. 130-1, below.

\textsuperscript{140}This is the sense in which I take line 15. See p. 131 below.

\textsuperscript{141}'Two English \textit{Frauenlieder},' \textit{CL}, XIV (1962), 113.
a protector, Bouman has interpreted this line as a reference to her second marriage,142 and Leslie and Jane Curry believe it indicates that she followed her husband when he went abroad.143 All that we can say with certainty, is that she felt the need of security, and of someone to attach herself to. Her words in lines 9-10:

De igas feran gewat folgað sēcan,
wineleas wraecta for mīnre wēaparfe

are highly reminiscent of lines 25-29a in The Wanderer, in which the ānhaga, describes how, having lost his lord, he tried to find another treasure-giver, who would 'show me love'.

Again, lines 15-16 are variously interpreted. I quote the text as printed by Leslie:

Het mec hláford mīn hēr eard niman;
ēhte ic lēofra lýt on þissum londstede.

Grein took the manuscript reading her heard as a compound word, which he interpreted as 'grove-dwelling', a place with pagan associations.144 By this interpretation these lines would refer to the cave beneath the oak-tree. Kemp Malone and Bouman145 follow this interpretation. Norah Kershaw reads hēr heard, with the adjective referring to hláford,146 thus giving

142 Bouman, p. 49.
143 Leslie, Three O. E. Elegies, p. 7; Curry, p. 191.
146 Kershaw, p. 173.
the sense, 'My husband in his cruelty ordered to me take up my dwelling here;' Greenfield follows this reading. He regards her as referring to the country to which the wife voluntarily exiled herself, where, at the husband's orders, she is taken (niman) and consigned to the cave. Leslie takes these lines as a reference to the husband's own country, to which his wife came when she married him. But the wife's emphasis on her own solitude and helplessness is clear enough, and, as in the previous example, represents a common elegiac theme. Once again, one is reminded of The Wanderer: bām be him lāt hafað læofra geholena (line 31). The parallel suggests a reference to exile. Thus, Leslie, at least, is probably wrong. We cannot, with any safety, attach a more specific meaning to the lines. Her eard seems a better reading than either herheard or hér heard, since herheard is an unsubstantiated word and hér heard involves an unnatural separation of adjective from noun.

One or two of the more distinctive interpretations of the poem should be treated here. Thomas Davis suggests that the husband was banished for murder in 'the deadly vendetta waged in Anglo-Saxon tribes' (p. 301). He regards morbor hycgend[ne] as referring to contemplated violence, not towards


148 Three O.E. Elegies, pp. 5-6

149 "Another View of the "Wife's Lament"," Papers on English Language and Literature, (1965), 291-305.
the wife but the tribe of the slain man. The monnes māgas
are, he believes, not the relatives of the husband, but of
the person who has been killed. The objections to this in-
terpretation are the same as those to the three-person theory:
namely that the existence of another person is unsubstantiated
and adds unnecessary complications. Dunleavy proposes that
the poem may have been inspired by Irish monastic poems on the
test of female consort.¹⁵⁰ As there is no indication of monas-
ticism in the poem, this view is rather improbable. In his
section of Baugh's Literary History of England, Malone says of
this poem and Wulf and Eadwacer that 'one is tempted to look
to classical antiquity for models.'¹⁵¹ He suggests a comparison
with the story of Dido in the Aeneid, and with Ovid, although
he does not believe that these are sources in a strict sense.
In his 1962 article,¹⁵² he proposes that the poems are both
Frauenlieder: love-poems put in the mouths of women, and of
popular rather than aristocratic origin. This is a valuable
suggestion. It acknowledges the difference between these
poems and most of the rest of Old English poetry, and does
not attempt to explain away this difference, as do those
scholars who argue for a male narrator in The Wife's Lament.
However, Malone overstresses the resemblance between the two

¹⁵¹ 'The Old English Period,' pp. 90-91.
poems. A.N. Doane advances the suggestion that in The Wife's Lament we have the curse of a female heathen spirit on her priest who has turned to the new religion (Christianity). This interpretation is an extreme one. There is no indication in the text that the persons referred to are anything other than woman and man in a normal, human relation. There may be pagan associations in the cave beneath the oak, but there is no reason why the cave-dweller should be anything other than a human exile. Moreover, Doane regards only the 'curse' as the crucial part of the poem, and this involves writing off the greater part of it as mere prelude.

To sum up, it seems best to treat the poem as concerned with two main figures only. The speaker expresses bitterness at her situation, but her affection and longing for her husband are deeply felt. They find expression in ful gemaecne monnan (line 18), mines felalæofan (line 24), min freond (line 47), and min wine (line 50), as well as in lines 33b-35, where they are implied by the wife's envy of those who have the companionship she lacks. In view of her continuing love for her husband, it is inappropriate to take any part of the poem as portraying him in an ugly light, or expressing animosity towards him. It seems likely that the husband is in exile too. In lines 42-45a the wife is expressing gnomic reflections, but she is thinking particularly of her husband. There is also a

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153See below, Chap. III, pp. 172-173.

connection with herself, because all of the final section of the poem (from line 42 on) is inspired by the woman's own situation. She ascribes to her husband her own misery and an abode as dreary as her own. The last line and a half is a climactic generalisation, but it applies especially to him—and to herself. Miss Kershaw points to the most important factor in understanding the poem, when she offers an explanation of its problems: 'an ambitious attempt to portray excited feelings ... causes the difficulty ...' (p. 31). J.A. Ward, A.C. Bouman, and Jane Curry all stress the fact that the poem is narrated from the point of view of a person who is concerned more with her own emotions than with the events which gave rise to them.

The Husband's Message is a less complex poem than The Wife's Lament. It represents the message of a husband to his wife, asking her to join him now that he is comfortably settled in a new land overseas. He appears to be a king or prince, and to have been driven out of his own country. The poem does present two difficulties: there is a disagreement among scholars as to where it begins, and, also, the cryptic runes at the end of it have given rise to a variety of interpretations. When Thorpe published his edition of the Exeter Book in 1842, he

155 Ward, p. 27.
156 Bouman, p. 44.
157 Curry, p. 193.
assumed four separate pieces between Homiletic Fragment II and The Ruin. There are in fact five sectional divisions in the manuscript here, each beginning with a large capital. Grein was the first to realise that Thorpe's latter two pieces (corresponding to the last three manuscript sections) formed one poem, which he called "Botschaft des Gemahls an Seine Frau". He also realised that the first of these pieces was a variant of a riddle which occurs earlier in the Exeter Book; this is Riddle 30 in Krapp and Dobbie's edition. Since then, a number of scholars have seen a connection between the second piece and The Husband's Message. Strobł, in 1887, was the first to suggest such a connection. He proposed that the second piece, beginning Ic was be sonde, was a riddle, and The Husband's Message an answer to it. In 1901, F.A. Blackburn argued that Ic was be sonde was actually a part of The Husband's Message, being, like the rest of that poem, the speech of a piece of wood with a message engraved upon it in runes. Blackburn has been followed by Sedgefield (1922), Kennedy (1936), Malone (1948), Elliott (1955), and Kaske (1967), who all take Ic was be sonde as the opening of

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158 These are Krapp-Dobbie's titles, and not Thorpe's.
159 Bibliothek I, 246 f., 363 f. See Kershaw, p. 37.
163 Old English Elegies, pp. 32-34
164 "The Old English Period," p. 91.
The Husband's Message, although they do not all interpret the poem(s) in the same way.

In support of this view, the arguments have been advanced that *Ic waes be sonde* is not enigmatic, and that lines 14-16a (\textit{pætic wip ðæ sceolde} / for unc ðænum twæm ærendspæc / abædan bealdfæce . . .) suggest a private message and a connection with the opening line of The Husband's Message as conventionally printed (*Nū ic onsundran be secgan wille*). The first of these arguments does not absolutely preclude *Ic waes be sonde* from being a riddle. The Storm Riddles are not enigmatic either. The poem does have the character of the Old English Riddles: that is, to describe an object indirectly, by means of its attributes. The second argument is a stronger one. It is true that *Ic waes be sonde* has a personal quality and resembles the opening of the following piece. However, there is one factor which makes it unlikely that *Ic waes be sonde* is a part of the following poem: it shows evidence of being based on the Latin riddle 'Reed' of Symphosius. This resemblance was pointed out by Tupper who, in his edition of the Riddles, printed *Ic waes be sonde* as one. The resemblance of the Old English riddle, in its double solution of 'flute' and 'pen', to its Latin original is shown by F.A. Whitman. The

\begin{itemize}
  \item 167 Blackburn, p. 2; Elliott, 'The Runes in HM,' p. 1.
  \item 168 Elliott, 'The Runes in HM,' pp. 1-2.
  \item 169 F. Tupper, Jr., The Riddles of the Exeter Book, Boston, 1910, pp. 198-201.
  \item 170 Unpublished article (PQ, 1971).
\end{itemize}
correspondence strongly militates against the inclusion of
the piece as part of The Husband's Message. Further, the
solution of the riddle as 'reed' fits well the features of
the object as described in the poem. Its characteristics
are that it was once lapped by the sea and can now communi-
cate words. These qualities apply better to a reed (pen/
flute) than to a rune-stave, which fulfils the latter re-
quisite, but is unlikely in its tree-state to have been ac-
tually embraced by water (line 7).

What appears to have happened is that the compiler of
the Exeter Book anthology grouped together all the pieces
between Homiletic Fragment II and The Ruin because he thought
their subjects were related. This suggestion is made by Miss
Kershaw (p. 40). As Blackburn points out, the subject of
Riddle 30 appears to be bæam in all its Old English senses
(p. 4). Riddle 60 (i.e., Ic wæs be sonde as in Krapp and
Dobbie's edition) refers to a reed, and The Husband's Message
has to do with a rune-stave cut from a tree. The compiler
appears to have thought that he was dealing with a series
of tree- or plant-poems. The Exeter Book scribe (and possibly
the original compiler) does not seem to be clear as to their
exact nature. His five divisions do not correspond to the
number of poems seen here by any nineteenth- or twentieth-
century editor. 171

171 Sectional divisions in the manuscript of the Exeter
Book do not always indicate breaks between separate poems. The
longer poems are divided into sections by the scribe, but as most
of the shorter poems (i.e. of less than 150 lines or so) are not
so divided, with the exception of Deor, where sectional division
shows the strophic structure, and Judgement Day I, it seems likely
that breaks among short pieces are intended to distinguish com-
plete poems.
Not all critics believe that The Husband’s Message is in fact the speech of a rune-stave on which the poem purports to be inscribed. Elliott suggests that only the five runes at the end, and not the whole poem, are inscribed on the rune-stave (p. 113). Sieper prefers to regard the speaker as a messenger\(^1\) and, among others, Leslie\(^2\) and Greenfield\(^3\) are of this opinion. In view of the damaged opening of the poem, it is impossible to say with certainty, but lines 1 and 2 appear to suggest that the speaker is about to relate its history as a tree:

\[
\text{NU ic onsundran þē secgan wille} \\
\ldots (n) trēocyn. Ìc ðūdre ðweox. 
\]

Such a reading would give us an opening similar to the beginning of the Cross’s speech in The Dream of the Rood.

The runes of The Husband’s Message have provided a field-day for scholarly ingenuity. The passage which contains them runs as follows:

\[
\text{gehyre}^{175} \text{ ic ætsomne .S.R. geador} \\
.ÆA. W. ond .M. ñe benemnan} \\
beæ hē þā wāre ond þā winētrēowe, \\
be him lifgendum læstan wolde, \\
be git on ærdagum oft gesprēconn. 
\]

\[\text{ (Husband’s Message, 50-53) }\]

\(^1\)Die altenglische Elegie, p. 211. See Kershaw, p. 39.

\(^2\)Three O.E.Elegies, pp. 13-14.

\(^3\)The O.E.Elegies, Continuations and Beginnings, 169-170.

\(^{175}\)This word is unclear. It has also been taken as gecyre (from gecēosan) and genyre (from genyrwan).
Whatever the runes may stand for, it is obvious that they are intended to reinforce the husband's pledge to his wife. The last rune is uncertain. It is sometimes taken to be D, but, as Leslie points out, it is more likely to be M, since it closely resembles the rune in line 23 of The Ruin, which is undoubtedly M.

In 1889, Hicketier suggested reading the runes in reverse order to obtain the proper name Dwears. The name is a strange one, not found in Old English, and this solution has nothing to recommend it. Trautmann, in 1894, made a more plausible suggestion. He proposed that the runes represented the initial letters of the names of the persons called upon as oath-guarantors. This is the interpretation followed by Miss Kershaw and by Kennedy. Other interpretations often involve considerable manipulation of the runes. Imelmann suggests that they spell 'Eadwacer', the name of the husband, with the vowels given only once and the S and C confused. Bradley also thinks they spell the

176Three O.E. Elegies, p. 15.
179Kershaw, p. 42, n. 2.
180O.E. Elegies, p. 35.
name of the husband, but he reads them as 'Sigeweard', with
the S standing for the whole of Sige.\textsuperscript{182} Bouman also takes
the runes in this way.\textsuperscript{183} Sieper proposes 'Sigerun' and
'Eadwine', reading 'to Sigerun pledges himself Eadwine (as
husband).\textsuperscript{184} Sedgefield believes that the runes refer to
the sword on which the oath was sworn, or possibly to the
act of swearing. He rearranges them to form sweard, a
variant of sweord.\textsuperscript{185}

The most convincing interpretations are those which
follow Kock.\textsuperscript{186} He proposes to read the runes thus: S.R.,
sigelrad 'the sun's road' (heaven); EA.W., earwynn 'the
lovely earth'; M. mann. These things, he suggests, represent
the primitive oath-guarantors condemned in Matthew, V. Leslie
accepts Kock's interpretation, relating it to the oaths sworn
by pagan Irish kings.\textsuperscript{187} It is also followed by Greenfield\textsuperscript{188}
and by Henry who further explains the primitive concept of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[182] MIR, II (1907), 365 (Review of Imelmann, \textit{Die altenglische Odoaker-Dichtung}).
\item[183] Bouman, pp. 71-2.
\item[184] \textit{Die altenglische Elegie}, p. 214. See Wardale, p. 55.
\item[185] Sedgefield, p. 159.
\item[186] E.A. Kock, 'Interpretations and Emendations of Early English Texts,' \textit{Anglia}, XLIV (1921), 122-123.
\item[187] Three \textit{O.E. Elegies}, pp. 16-17.
\item[188] 'The \textit{O.E. Elegies},' p. 171.
\end{footnotes}
elemental guarantors. \(^{189}\)

Elliott\(^{190}\) takes the EA rune as *ear* in the sense of 'sea', reading the W (*wynh*) rune as separate from it. He favours D (*daeg*), rather than M (*mann*), as the last rune. Taking S,R. together to make *sigelræd*, in the same way as Kock, he reads: 'Follow the sun's path across the ocean and ours will be joy and the happiness and prosperity of the bright day,' or, if the final rune is M: 'Follow the sun's path across the sea to find joy with the man who is waiting for you.' This solution is less satisfactory than the simpler one of Kock, which has the added support of primitive belief. Kaske follows Kock, but ingeniously uses Kock's solution to support his own argument that *The Husband's Message* is a 'poem of the Cross'. He translates 'I constrain [reading *genyre*, line 50] into unity heaven, and earth made delightful, and the Man himself [Christ] . . .' (p. 50).

Such are the interpretations of the runes. Not many attempts have been made to interpret or reinterpret the poem as a whole, since it seems fairly straightforward. But in recent years there have been one or two analyses which find a religious significance in it. Kaske views *The Husband's Message* as 'a poem in which Christ's love for the Church or the human soul is reflected by the literally developed message of a


\(^{190}\) The Runes in *HM*, pp. 3-7.
lover to his lady . . . and in which this message . . . is delivered by the Cross' (pp. 51-52). M.J. Swanton links the poem with *The Wife's Lament*. He regards both as studies of the relationship between Christ (the husband in the sense of the Heavenly Bridegroom) and His Church (the wife). It will be seen that both of these interpretations depend on the traditional exegetical interpretation of the Song of Songs. Kaske, in particular, attempts to explain exegetically the details of the poem in much the same way as Robertson attempts to explain the details in *The Wanderer*. Swanton does not specifically mention the Song of Songs, but Kaske suggests that the cuckoo in *The Husband's Message* may be associated with the turtle-dove there. However, not many scholars have suggested exegetical interpretations of *The Husband's Message* and *The Wife's Lament*. The complete absence of explicit didacticism in these poems makes a religious intention in them unlikely. The detail of the cuckoo in *The Husband's Message* is paralleled in *The Seafarer*, and has not, to my knowledge, been related to the Biblical turtle-dove in the case of the latter poem.

The fact that *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* both refer to the relationship between a man and a woman has led a number of scholars to believe that there must be a connection between them. Swanton, as we have seen, is of this

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opinion. The suggestion was first made by Grein, who thought that the two pieces might possibly be fragments of a single poem.\textsuperscript{192} Trautmann also argued for a connection between the two,\textsuperscript{193} and so did Brandl.\textsuperscript{194} But the poems themselves do not seem to me to give the impression of being related. They are quite different in tone: \textit{The Wife's Lament} is the unburdening of a troubled spirit; \textit{The Husband's Message} is formal in style and its note is optimistic. In addition, the poems are separated in the manuscript, which implies that the compiler saw no connection between them.

Most of those who believe in a connection between the two poems regard them as part of a heroic cycle. This was a view that was at its most popular in the later nineteenth, and the earlier years of the present century. As far as I am aware, only Bouman among recent scholars has formally presented a cyclical interpretation of these two poems. Trautmann believed that a cyclical background lay behind these poems, but he did not suggest any particular cycle to which they might belong. The most elaborate of the 'cyclical' theories was that advanced by Imelmann, who regarded \textit{The Husband's Message} and \textit{The Wife's Lament}, together with \textit{The Wanderer}, \textit{The Seafarer},

\textsuperscript{192}Kurzgefasste angelsächsische Grammatik (Kassel, 1880), p. 10. See Kennedy, \textit{O.E. Elegies}, p. 28, note; Leslie, Three \textit{O.E. Elegies}, p. 18, n. i.

\textsuperscript{193}Zur Botschaft des Gemahls' p. 222 ff. See Wardale, p. 55; Krapp-Dobbie, p. lviii.

\textsuperscript{194}Altenglische Literatur,' \textit{Grundiss}, II, 977.
Wulf and Eadwacer, and The Ruin, as part of a lost saga in prose and verse about the Saxon king Odoacer, who invaded France in 463. Imelmann built up his theory by stages until it embraced all the six elegiac poems mentioned above.\textsuperscript{195} I quote Miss Wardale's summary of his hypothesis:

Dr. Imelmann has brought them [the six poems] all together as follows: the speaker in Wulf and Eadwacer is the same as in the Wife's Lament; the Seafarer describes the sufferings endured by the Husband in his exile; the Wanderer is a faithful follower who has fled with his lord and who in the Message of the Husband returns to summon the Wife to join him, while the Ruin describes the forsaken home.\textsuperscript{196}

This synthesis is remarkably ingenious, but it bears little relation to the evidence provided by the poems. There are no names in any of them except Wulf and Eadwacer. The identification of Eadwacer with Odoacer is not implausible, but it is highly unreasonable to build up so elaborate a theory on the basis of one name. Also, even if Eadwacer = Odoacer, we are left with the question of which Odoacer. Other scholars favour a much better known Odoacer: the enemy of Theodoric the Goth. And it is perfectly possible that no historical reference is intended at all. Furthermore, the six poems are very different. The Wanderer and The Seafarer contain a religious element which sets them apart from the rest. The

\textsuperscript{195}Odoaker-Dichtung, 1907 (see note 181); Wanderer und Seefahrer im Rahm der altenglischen Odoaker-Dichtung (Berlin, 1908); Forschungen zur altenglischen Poesie (Berlin, 1920), pp. 73 ff. See Wardale, pp. 49 and 50; Krapp-Dobbie, pp. lvi and lvii.

\textsuperscript{196}Wardale, p. 49.
difference between The Husband's Message and The Wife's Lament has already been pointed out. Wulf and Eadwacer, with its suggestions of strophic structure and its very free metre,\textsuperscript{197} is different again. The Ruin is impersonal, and its penchant for rhyme makes it quite unlike the other poems in style.

Fairly recently, Bouman suggested that The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message were connected with an early version of the Sigurd legend, the wife being Guðrun and the husband Sigurd.\textsuperscript{198} He professed to find the latter name, in its Old English form of Sigeweard, in the runes at the end of The Husband's Message. Bouman does not establish that Sigurd, as distinct from Sigmund, was known in Anglo-Saxon England. Sigmund, together with his son/nephew Fitela, corresponding with the Norse Sinfjötli, is mentioned in Beowulf. One of the panels on the Franks Casket contains a scene which may depict Sigurd. It is possible that he was known by the Anglo-Saxons, but by no means certain. Another, stronger, objection to Bouman's theory is that it involves a highly unorthodox reading of both poems, the most noteworthy point being that the husband, in each poem, is regarded as dead (in the Norse legend Sigurd is murdered by Guðrun's brothers).\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{197}See below, Chap. III, pp. 169-171.

\textsuperscript{198}Bouman, Chapter III, pp. 43-91.

\textsuperscript{199}See Bouman, Chap III, Sections A, B, and C, for Bouman's interpretation of the poems per se. See Bouman, Chap. III, Section D, for his relating of them to Norse legend. He sets out the supposed points of resemblance to the Sigurd story on p. 82.
The two poems have also been linked separately with heroic cycles. The favourite type of story as far as *The Wife's Lament* is concerned is that of the wrongly punished wife.

Grein, in his collected edition of Old English poetry, suggested that *The Wife's Lament* was connected with the Genoveva legend. He later abandoned this theory in favour of a connection between *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*. In the Genoveva tale (found in *L'Innocence Reconnue, ou Vie de Sainte Geneviève de Brabant*, c. 1638, by René de Cérisier), the heroine, wife of Siegfried of Treves, is falsely accused by an enemy of infidelity to her husband. She is sentenced to death, but spared by the executioner, and lives for six years in a cave in the Ardennes with her son, until she is discovered by her husband and reinstated. Apart from the possibility of the same reason for the heroine's banishment (infidelity), the main resemblance to *The Wife's Lament* lies in the cave-dwelling. But the Genoveva story may have a historical origin in the Marie de Brabant who was unjustly beheaded for infidelity in 1256. Also, the very late date of the works which narrate this tale argue against its connection with the Old English poem.

Wülcker thought that *The Wife's Lament* might be connected with the Offa saga. His suggestion was taken up and

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201 See note 192, above.

developed much more fully by Edith Rickert, who related the poem to a legend found in the *Vitae Duorum Offarum*, a work written by a monk of St. Albans circa 1200. The legend is attached to Offa I, a figure who ultimately represents Offa the king of the Continental Angles in the fifth century. Offa of *Ongle* was undoubtedly known to the Anglo-Saxons, because he is mentioned in *Widsith* and *Beowulf*. The *Vitae* tells how, by trickery, the wife of Offa was caused to be accused of witchcraft, and banished to the woods with her children. She was finally discovered by her husband, and all ended well. The story of Constance is similar, and Miss Rickert mentions it as belonging to the same class of folk-tale (pp. 360-361). Although Offa was familiar to the Anglo-Saxons, we cannot assume that the 'injured wife' story attached to him in the *Vitae* was necessarily associated with him in the Old English period.

The presence of children in the Genoveva tale and the Offa/Constance tale, whereas there is no mention of children in *The Wife's Lament*, leads Stefanovic to put forward another legend as the basis for the Old English poem. He favours the Crescentia story. In this tale a queen is desired by her husband's brother. When she repulses him, he accuses her to her husband, of unfaithfulness. This results in her banishment

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203 'The Old English Offa Saga,' *MP*, II (1904-05), 29-76; 321-376.

204 Angel, the Continental home of the Angles. See *Widsith*, line 8. (The reference to Offa occurs later, in lines 35-44).

and subsequent murder. However, there is no evidence that Crescentia, or a corresponding figure, was known to the Anglo-Saxons.

In fact, there is nothing to suggest that any of the above tales would have been known to the composer of The Wife's Lament. It is true that in their most elemental form they probably represent world-wide folk themes (the Crescentia tale, for instance, is reminiscent of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, with the male and female roles reversed), but that is not a reason for attaching any of them, in a particularised form found in later times, to this poem. Further, the narrative background of The Wife's Lament is left vague. It is not clear that she has been formally accused at all, of infidelity, witchcraft, or anything else.

A cyclical background for The Husband's Message was proposed by Schofield, who related the poem to the Tristan legend. He suggested that The Husband's Message represented an early form of the tale told by Marie de France in Chevrefoil. In the French lay Tristan carves a message on a piece of wood and leaves it in the road along which Isolt will pass.

The same general objections apply to all the 'cyclical' interpretations. The most formidable is the absence of names in the Old English poems. A further objection is that there is no evidence that the legends with which The Husband's Message

and *The Wife's Lament* have been linked were current at the time. Finally, there is no need to relate these poems to heroic or folklore. Their aim is to present a personal situation, not to tell a tale. They make reference to events only obliquely, and any sequence of events which we reconstruct for them is bound to be arbitrary.

*Wulf and Eadwacer* is one of the most obscure poems in Old English. The earlier scholars misunderstood it entirely, assuming that it was a riddle. This was a natural mistake. The language of the poem is very difficult and might lead the reader to assume a deliberate enigma. Also, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, like the Riddles, is a short poem, and it immediately precedes the first group of them in the Exeter Book, while its initial capitalisation and end punctuation are similar to those used in the Riddles, i.e., initial capitals and final punctuation marks are more sparing than those used by the scribe to indicate major divisions in the manuscript. In 1842, Thorpe printed the poem as a riddle, but offered no solution.\(^\text{207}\) In 1857, Leo, by manipulating the text very freely, managed to find the name 'Cynewulf' hidden in it, and concluded that this was the solution of the supposed riddle.\(^\text{208}\) Cynewulf was accordingly regarded as the author of it. Indeed, after

\(^{207}\) *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 380. See Krapp-Dobbie, p. lv.

\(^{208}\) H. Leo, *Quae de se ipso Cynevulfus . . . tradiderit* (Halle, 1857). See Krapp-Dobbie, loc. cit.
Dietrich proposed that the solution of Riddle 95 was 'wandering minstrel' (1859), and that the lupus of the Latin Riddle was also Cynewulf (1865). Cynewulf came to be generally accepted as the author of all the Riddles.

In 1883, Trautmann attacked Leo's solution, but still accepted that Wulf and Eadwacer was a charade, and solved is as 'riddle'. Henry Morley, in 1888, offered the solution 'the Christian preacher', Wulf being the Devil, and the 'charade' representing the triumph of the former over the latter.

The poem is in fact the passionate lament of a woman separated from her lover. It has strong affinities with The Wife's Lament. The first critic to propose the interpretation now most widely adopted was Henry Bradley, who, in 1888, in a review of Morley's book, put forward the view that 'the so-called riddle is not a riddle at all but a fragment of a dramatic soliloquy. He added: 'The speaker is shown by the grammar to be a woman. . . . Wulf is her


210 'Cynewulf und die Rätsel,' Anglia, VI, 158-169. See Krapp-Dobbie, loc. cit. (the date is incorrectly given by Krapp-Dobbie at this point) as 1884); A.J. Wyatt, Old English Riddles (Boston and London, 1912), pp. xxiii-xxiv.


212 See previous note.

213Academy, XXXIII, 197-8.
lover and an outlaw and Eadwacer is her tyrant husband' (p. 198). Bradley's explanation of the poem is the most satisfactory, except that Wulf and Eadwacer cannot be said with any certainty to be a fragment. The poem's close has a sense of completion, but its opening:

Leodum is mënum swylce him mon læc gife; willað hy hine æpecgan, gif he on þrœat cymod is so obscure as to make it not improbable that something has been lost here. Lawrence suggested a lacuna between the first and second lines. Others, including Ruth Lehmann, think it likely that two lines have been lost before the opening. However, in the absence of unmistakable evidence to the contrary, it is better to take the poem as complete.

Some scholars continued to regard Wulf and Eadwacer as a riddle, although the view became less popular. The specific ascription to Cynewulf was now very much questioned. Leo's solution of the 'First Riddle' as 'Cynewulf' was heavily attacked by Sievers in 1891, and shown to have no sound linguistic basis. Sievers also argued that the Riddles as a whole probably antedated Cynewulf. Nevertheless, the old view was once more put forward by Tupper. Although Tupper, P

214The name 'Wulf' may well suggest an outlaw, since the term 'wolfshead' was used in connection with outlaws in Anglo-Saxon law.

215'The First Riddle of Cynewulf,' PMLA, XVII (1902), 251.

216'The Metrics and Structure of "Wulf and Eadwacer"," PQ, XLVIII (1969), 164-165.

217E. Sievers, 'Zu Cynewulf,' Anglia, XIII, 1-25. See Wyatt, p. XXV.
following Bradley, had stated the poem to be a lyrical monologue when he printed it in his edition of the Riddles, in an article published slightly later he returned to the older opinion, that it was a riddle by Cynewulf. He added that, as such, it supported the ascription of at least the majority of the Exeter Book Riddles to Cynewulf. The 1923 interpretation of Patzig still treats the poem as a riddle, and solves it as 'millstone'. But the theory that Wulf and Eadwacer was a riddle, whether of Cynewulfian authorship or not, gradually lost support, and has not, as far as I am aware, been put forward recently. The very variety of solutions was an argument against it.

Even among those critics who follow Bradley's interpretation in the main, there have still been significant differences of opinion. The poem presents considerable linguistic problems. It is not proposed to undertake a textual analysis here, but one or two of the major cruxes might be mentioned. Line 2, repeated in line 7, is especially difficult:

willæ hû hine æpecgan, gef hē on bræat cymeð.

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218 The Riddles of the Exeter Book, p. liv.

219 'The Cynewulfian Runes of the First Riddle,' MLN, XXV (1910), 235-241. Tupper discovered in the poem a highly obscure runic signature, not in the form of runes (there are none in the poem), Æt-synonyms for the names of runes.

Abecgan is an unknown word. It may be connected with bićgan, meaning 'to take in', often used of food. The likelihood of such a connection has given rise to widely differing translations of Abecgan: 'kill' (devour), 'welcome' (take in), and 'give food to' (causative of bićgan. Breat may mean either 'troop' or 'dire straits'. And it is not clear whether the line expresses a question or a statement. Thus, at one extreme we can translate, 'Will they feed him if he should come to want?' following Bradley, or, at the other, 'They will kill him if he comes into their company,' which is Whitbread's translation. It is generally agreed that the hine of this line is Wulf, but there is total disagreement as to whether he is expected to prosper or perish. However, the poem does offer clues. The tone of this line seems to be one of anxiety, and since there is a reference to wælreowe wera in line 6, it seems that the woman is fearful of violence towards Wulf. Therefore, 'Will they kill him?' is probably the better reading. Dogode (line 9) and earne (line 16) are problematic words. There is no verb dogian in extant Old English. The general sense of the line (Wulfs ic mınns wîdlástum wênum dogode) is that the speaker followed in thought the far wanderings of her lover. Dogode is therefore sometimes emended to hogode (thought about), but one would not expect the use of

221 Academy, XXXIII, 198.

222 L. Whitbread, 'A Note on "Wulf and Eadwacer",' MÆ, X (1961), 150-154.
hogian with the genitive. The poet's exact intention re­
mains uncertain. Earne has been derived from earh (cowardly),
and from earo (swift), or has been emended to earmâ (wret­
ched). The first and third alternatives are more likely,
since a child referred to as a hwelp (the context is Uncerne
earne hwelp) is probably being thought of with either contempt
or pity.

The above examples will serve to show that on a lin­
guistic level alone the poem is highly difficult. In addi­
tion, it is impossible to say with certainty what is the ex­
act situation behind the poem. Bradley's interpretation seems
to establish the main facts, but there have been one or two
scholars who, while accepting that Wulf and Eadwacer is a
love-poem, not a riddle, have diverged considerably from
Bradley. In 1931, Sedgefield, in an article that was surely
not meant to be taken seriously, suggested that the poem was
spoken by 'a female dog of a romantic temperament . . . dream­
ing . . . of a wolf with whom she has . . . had . . . a love­
affair.'223 J.F. Adams agrees with the prevailing view that
the poem is about a woman and her lover, but does not believe
that there is a third person in it.224 He argues that
Eadwacer is not a proper noun but an ironic epithet 'property­
watcher' applied to Wulf. He states: 'the speaker is

223 'Wulf and Eadwacer,' MLR, XXVI, 74-75.
224 "Wulf and Eadwacer": An Interpretation,' MLN, LXXIII
(1958), 1-5.
ironically bestowing on the man a character which the context implies most emphatically he lacks, that of being a protector and guardian of his home' (p. 2). He regards the poem as 'an appeal for Wulf to settle down' (p. 4). But it is better to take Eadwacer as the person, probably the husband, who comes between the speaker and Wulf. This is more in keeping with the sense she gives of being irrevocably separated from her lover. Another point in Adams' reading of the poem which might be noted is that he makes a bow to the old theory that Wulf and Eadwacer was a riddle. He translates giedd in the final line (unser giedd geador, line 19) as 'riddle', and thinks it possible that the composer deliberately used the riddle form. But it seems more likely that, as in the case of The Wife's Lament, the poem's enigmatic nature arises from its attempt to present emotions which are both subtle and intense, rather than to outline events and personages.

The interpretations of Sedgefield and Adams differ rather markedly from the others. Most recent critics differ from one another in detail, rather than in overall view. There is no general agreement as to whether the beaducafa of line 11 is Eadwacer or Wulf. The woman speaks of his embracing her (mec . . . bögum bilegde), and says that this gave her both joy and pain (wäes më wyn to bon, wäes më

225W.S. Mackie, The Exeter Book, Part II (London E.E.T.S, 1934), translates line 11 as 'when the man brave in battle gave me shelter,' presumably taking mec . . . bögum bilegde as 'laid boughs about me' rather than 'laid his arms about me' (p. 87). This weakens the meaning, and gives a much poorer reason for the woman's wyn and læg.
hwæbre ēac lāf, line 12). Malone believes that Eadwacer is referred to here, but Whitbread and Miss Lehmann favour Wulf. The former view is preferable because of the speaker's mixed feelings about the beadcāfa's embraces. Also, lines 10 and 11 can well be taken as dependent on line 9, which implies the absence of Wulf. The question of whether the hwælp in line 16 is the child of Eadwacer or Wulf is similarly undecided. Whitbread and Miss Lehmann are probably right in regarding the child as Wulf's because of the pun hwælp. This would support the emendation of earne to earmne, giving the meaning 'our wretched cub' for Uncerne ear[m]ne hwælp. Lines 16b-17 could then be translated: 'Wulf [rather than a wolf] is carrying our wretched cub to the forest.' This is how Whitbread takes these lines. Ruth Lehmann translates in the same way but allows the possibility of the other alternative. Malone also thinks that Wulf in lines 16 is the man, not an animal, but is undecided as to whether the child is the son of the speaker's lover or her husband.


228 Krapp-Dobbie (pp. 179-180) capitalise Wulf elsewhere, but not at this point, thus indicating a common noun, not a proper noun.


231 'Frauenlieder,' p. 108.
There have been a number of attempts to relate the poem to heroic material. The earliest suggestion, that *Wulf and Eadwacer* was connected with the story of Sigmund and Signy, was made after Lawrence had proposed that the poem was a translation from Old Norse. In 1902, Lawrence put forward the theory that the poem had markedly Scandinavian characteristics. One of these was its strophic form, with the refrain

\[
\text{willad by hine æpecgan, gif he on breaet cymeS.}
\]

Ungelt is us

occurring in lines 2-3 and again in lines 7-8. Lawrence points out that *Deor*, the only Old English poem with true refrain, 'stands in close relation to sagas with which we are familiar through Scandinavian sources' (p. 255). He also suggests, somewhat tentatively, that there may be significance in the juxtaposition of *Deor* and the 'First Riddle' in the Exeter Book. Lawrence draws attention to certain linguistic features which are suggestive of Old Norse, notably the use of *on breaet cuman* in the sense of 'come into heavy straits'. The expression is not found elsewhere in Old English, but is common in Old Norse. Lawrence concluded that the poem must be an actual translation from an Old Norse original. The evidence is not strong enough to warrant such a conclusion, but it may be that the poet had some connection with Scandinavia, and came under the influence of Old Norse idiom.

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232 'The First Riddle of Cynewulf,' *PMLA*, XVII, 247-261.

233 If Lawrence is right in seeing Old Norse influence, this is an argument for translating the phrase in this way. See above, p. 153.
In a companion article to that of Lawrence, W.H. Schofield took up his suggestion, and went on to link Wulf and Eadwacer with the Sigmund legend.\(^{234}\) He regards the poem as a soliloquy uttered just after Signy learns that Sinfjóðli, having valiantly submitted to the various tests of his worth by her and her brother, is being taken to the woods for the training that Sigmund thought the boy needed before he could undertake the Völsungs' revenge.

(p. 270)

Schofield accordingly proposed to rename the poem 'Signy's Lament'. The weakest point in his argument is that the names 'Wulf' and 'Eadwacer' do not correspond to any names in the Sigmund tale. His suggestion that Sigmund is called Wulf because he was head of the race of the Wolfings is rather strained, and his further point that Sigmund is an outlaw, though true, is not especially useful, since the same could apply to an infinite number of persons. Moreover, his reading of Eadwacer as 'very vigilant one', based on a hypothetical Old Norse auðvakr is even more strained. Apart from the lack of correspondence in the names, the passionate tone of the poem is out of keeping with an incestuous relationship entered into out of a sense of duty. This is pointed out by Miss Lehmann (p. 154).

Schofield's hypothesis failed to achieve anything like general acceptance. More popular, was the view that Eadwacer must be the Old English equivalent of Odoacer.\(^{235}\) This was

\(^{234}\) 'Signy's Lament,' *PMLA*, XVII, 262-295.

\(^{235}\) Cf. Imelmann's theory. See above, p. 144.
proposed, apparently independently, by Israel Gollancz\textsuperscript{236} and Henry Bradley,\textsuperscript{237} in articles criticising Schofield. Both suggested that the Eadwacer of the poem was Odoacer, the enemy of Theodoric the Goth (c.454-526), the Dietrich von Bern of German legend. Gollancz believes that Wulf is Theodoric, and that the name 'Wulf' is applied to him because of his exile: 'in the "Hildebrandslied" . . . Dietrich fled into exile owing to Odoacer's enmity.' (p. 552). Bradley does not venture to identify Wulf with Theodoric, and allows for the possibility that the poem may refer to another enemy of Odoacer.

Braendl also equates Eadwacer with Odoacer.\textsuperscript{238} He suggests a possible connection with the Wolfdietrich story (presumably by confusion of Wolfdietrich with Dietrich von Bern), but thinks it equally possible that the poem is based on a quite different 'outlaw tale'. Schücking, too, favours a connection with Wolfdietrich.\textsuperscript{239} The Wolfdietrich of Middle High German legend seems to represent a fusion of the historical Theodoric the Frank (HGuddietrich) and his son Theodebert (Wolfdietrich), who died in 548. The legendary Wolfdietrich was driven out of his inheritance by his brothers, but after a long exile returned and regained his kingdom. In connection with the name

\textsuperscript{236} 'The Sigurd Cycle and Britain,' \textit{Athenaeum}, 1902, 551-552.

\textsuperscript{237} 'The Sigurd Cycle and Britain,' \textit{Athenaeum}, 1902, 758.

\textsuperscript{238} 'Altenglische Literatur,' \textit{Grundriss}, II, 976.

\textsuperscript{239} \textit{Dichterbuch}, pp. 16 ff. See Krapp-Dobbie, pp. lvi-lvii.
'Wolfdietrich', Miss Lehmann notes that it 'seems an epithet for an exile', although in the legend it is explained by the hero having been carried away by wolves when an infant (p.156). It is this epithet which provides the basis for the proposed connection with Wulf, who may well be an outlaw, in the poem. The story of Wolfdietrich shows similarity with that of Dietrich von Bern, who was also forced into exile.

Imelmann, as we have seen, related the poem to another Odoacer. Bouman thinks that Eadwacer/Odoacer is a stock character who always takes the role of villain. He associates him with Deor by virtue of his connection with Theodoric (Deodric) and Ermanaric (Eormanric), who are mentioned in that poem. Having somewhat dubiously linked Eadwacer with Deor, he proceeds to point out the connection of that poem, and hence of Wulf and Eadwacer, with the persons in the Völundarkvöla, and concludes that the speaker is Beaduhild. The poem could, he thinks, be entitled 'Beaduhild's Complaint'. Bouman makes Eadwacer, as villain, the person who carries off the child (Wulf being Völundr), and places a period after bu in line 16, translating: 'Do you hear me? Eadwacer carries our poor whelp as an outcast to the woods' (pp.104-105). Such a reading puts a heavy strain on the syntax of lines 16-17.

240 Miss Lehmann herself suggests a connection with the Wolfdietrich story. See pp.162-163, below.

241 Bouman's argument is decidedly tortuous. See Patterns in O.E. and O.I. Lit., Chap. IV, pp. 95-106.
In 1962, Frankis suggested that Wulf and Eadwacer should be taken with Deor, since it immediately follows the latter poem in the manuscript and also employs strophes and a refrain.\(^{242}\) He believes that both poems refer to some version of the Hild story, and that the hero of both, Wulf (Deor = 'an animal') loves the daughter of the king of the Heodenings and conceives a child by her, whereupon he is forced to flee. Heorrenda then takes over his position as court scop. The Hild story is found in Old Norse. There are also other versions of it, particularly that in the Middle High German Kudrun. In the Norse, Hildr is the daughter of Hōgni. She is loved by Heðinn, King of the Hjaðningar and son of Hjarrandi. Heðinn steals away Hildr, and in the resulting battle between the armies of Heðinn and Hōgni, Hildr heals the slain each night, so that the fight will go on until the end of the world. In Kudrun, Horant (Heorrenda) is a marvellously talented minstrel who assists Hēdin in wooing Hild. In Deor, as in the Norse, the hero is associated with the Heodenings (Hjaðningar), but the relationship between Deor and Heorrenda is quite different from the relationships between their equivalents in both versions of the Hild story. There is no hint in Deor of the love-theme and the ensuing battle. It seems likely that the Deor poet was merely attempting to give his

\(^{242}\)P. J. Frankis, "Deor" and "Wulf and Eadwacer": Some Conjectures," MÆ, XXXI, 161-175. In suggesting a connection between Wulf and Eadwacer and Deor, and between these poems and Old Norse legend, Frankis shows similar reasoning to Lawrence. See above, p. 157.
hero status by associating him with well-known legendary figures, and with Heorrenda, especially because he was famous in tradition as a singer. Wulf and Eadwacer shows no correspondence with the Hild story, except in so far as the poem refers to the love between a woman and a man who is, apparently, the enemy of her tribe. Frankis relies on Deor to make a connection between Wulf and Eadwacer and the Hild legend, but there is no explicit indication in either Deor or Wulf and Eadwacer that the poems are to be taken together, although the compiler of the Exeter Book may have placed them next to one another because of their similar structure.

The last cyclical interpretation to be treated here is that of Miss Lehmann. She advances a hypothesis whose very complexity is an argument against it. Miss Lehmann proposes that the two Theodorics (the Goth and the Frank) have been confused, and a story from the Frankish Dietrich legend fitted into that of the enmity between Theodoric the Goth and Odoacer. She suggests that Wulf's 'rare visits' (seldcymas, line 14) refer to the visits of Hugdietrich (father of Wolfdietrich) to Hild, the bride of Siggeir. This is weak, since one would expect Wulf to correspond with

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244 I would take this as an example of understatement, meaning that Wulf does not come at all. See below, Chap. III p. 189.

245 Not the same as the Hild of Frankis' theory.
Wolfdietrich. Apparently Miss Lehmann sees a further confusion here.

As in the case of The Husband's Message and The Wife's Lament, we find a variety of cyclical interpretations, none of which is lent much support by the text of the poem. The existence of names in Wulf and Eadwacer makes the argument for its connection with a heroic cycle stronger than the case for such a connection with respect to the other two poems. If an identification with real or legendary persons is to be made, Odoacer seems a likely candidate as the equivalent of Eadwacer. But here the same objection applies as that made to Imelmann's theory, namely that we have no means of knowing which Odoacer is referred to, or whether a specific person is intended at all. Wulf' seems more like an epithet than a real name. The association with outlawry suggests such an epithet. Also, on an analogy with other Old English names we should expect 'Wulf' to form one element of a double-barrelled compound (as in 'Cynewulf' and 'Wulfstan'). Finally, the technique of the poem does not give the impression of deliberate 'name-dropping', as in Deor. The use of names in Wulf and Eadwacer is more casual. It seems best to take the view stated by Pilch, that the names are fictitious.246

Wulf and Eadwacer is, admittedly, a difficult poem, but it is not made simpler or more effective by being related to a heroic cycle, or by being fitted to a well-worked-out scheme of events. Even if the reader fails to understand the poem

completely, the force of its concentrated emotion is impressive. There has been an increasing tendency in recent years to avoid dogmatic assertions about its contents.

Alain Renoir, in a very sensitive study which he significantly entitles 'a non-interpretation', examines the poem as the expression of 'suffering through separation' (p. 153), and Ruth Lehmann concludes her article with the statement that the importance of the poem is not determined 'by a legend we can only guess at, but rather by its effectiveness as the cry of a woman for her wandering lover' (p. 165).

This brings us to an end of the critical interpretations of the six elegies, to date. The overall changes in critical trends have been largely associated with an increasing emphasis on the sophistication, rather than the primitivism of the poetry. Also, investigation of the poems has become more detailed. At the present time, there seem to be two major trends in interpretation of the elegies: one which seeks to relate them to Latin influence, and another which examines the poems, often as psychological studies, without regard to sources and analogues. The work of J.E. Cross is particularly representative of the first school. Recent articles have pressed further the trend to relate the poems to Latin, and have sometimes pointed out resemblances in quite small

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particulars. Thus, Peter Clemoes suggests that the concept of the mind's ability to think of absent things in *Sea­farer* 58-64a and *Wanderer* 29b-57 is derived from a passage in the *Hexaemeron* of Ambrose. The other critical approach is seen in Elliott's article on *The Wanderer* and Renoir's on *Wulf and Eadwacer*. On the whole, the increasingly closer investigation of the poems, even when one would not agree with its conclusions, has shed valuable light on them. However, the danger in these more detailed interpretations is a tendency to find what is not there. The fact that Clemoes detects the same theme in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as in Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* does not necessarily prove that the latter is a source, especially when, as in this case, the theme is a fairly obvious one. Similarly, Elliott may be reading too much into the poem when he decides that the wanderer has a guilty conscience. The 'psychological' approach can also lead, in a certain kind of criticism, to a confusing, if not meaningless, use of jargon. This is seen in J.L. Rosier's article on *The Wanderer*, in which he speaks of the wanderer's thought-processes in terms of a 'conical spiral' (p. 366). All these articles contrast sharply with, for

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249 See above, pp. 102-103.
instance, the article of Ferrell in 1894, which speaks of The Wanderer and The Seafarer in very general terms. By and large, one might say that critical interpretations have come to give more credit to the Anglo-Saxon poet as a person of intelligence and education, but they are now subject to the accusation of finding too much sophistication in the poems, rather than too little.
CHAPTER III

Stylistic Comment on the Elegies

In its more formal aspects, the style of Old English poetry is more or less a unity throughout the various types and genres of poetic composition. Thus, there has been very little commentary on the style of the elegies, or of any other specific branch of Old English poetry as such. This chapter will therefore treat critical comments on the formal aspects of Old English style and prosody as a whole as well as particular comments on the elegies. The illustrations given by critics from the elegiac poems will be given where these exist, and supplied where they are lacking. In less formal matters, such as the structure and imagery of individual poems, more has been said that pertains to the elegies in particular. However, almost the only area in which stylistic study has been devoted to elegiac poetry as a type is that of formulaic diction. This, then, is probably the field in which stylistic appraisal has shed most light on the elegiac genre.

Critical comment on the metre of the elegies has tended to concentrate on those points in which they diverge from the norm. For the purposes of this study, the validity of Sievers' five types will be assumed as a basis, since, in spite of the

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1 I include alliteration under the heading of 'metre' although in its strict usage the latter term refers only to stress.

disagreement among scholars as to the principles of Old English versification, his five-fold classification is generally accepted and referred to.\(^3\) As far as I am aware, there has been no study specifically directed to the metre of elegiac poetry. Metrical comment has been incidental to studies of theme or source. Some of the six elegies under consideration do not differ markedly from the 'classical' metre as seen in *Beowulf*. The *Wanderer*, The *Seafarer*, and The *Husband's Message* are all metrically unremarkable, although Dunning and Bliss point out two minor features in which *The Wanderer* differs from *Beowulf*. These features are the use of a single compound to form a complete verse, and the use of type D in the b-verse. Dunning and Bliss point out that instances of this usage are found in *The Seafarer*. They do not quote examples, but *earfoðhwīle* from line 3 might be cited as illustrating the first usage, and *hægl scūrum flǣg* (line 17) the second. There are some defective lines in *The Seafarer*: line 16, where the b-verse is missing (this may be deliberate); and lines 112-115a:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wib lēofne ond wið lāþne} & \quad \ast \ast \ast \text{ bealō.} \\
\text{þēah þehē ne wille fyrres fulne} & \\
\text{þopp on bæle forbærendne} & \\
\text{his geworhtne wine.}
\end{align*}
\]

This latter case, where the meaning is also obscure, fairly clearly shows corruption in transmission.\(^4\) Otherwise, the

\(^3\)Among those who disagree with Sievers, one of the most influential has been Pope, who advocates a system of scansion using isonochrous measures instead of Sievers' feet. See *The Rhythm of Beowulf* (New Haven, 1942).

\(^4\)The corruption in the last section of *The Seafarer* (lines 103-124) has been one of the arguments for rejecting this part of the poem. See Chap. II, pp. 63-64.
poem is metrically regular. The same is true of The Husband's Message, although the damage to the manuscript here makes the evidence incomplete. The peculiarities noted in The Wanderer are idiosyncrasies rather than irregularities, and may well be coincidental.

The most noteworthy of the elegies as far as metre is concerned is Wulf and Eadwacer. The metrical irregularity of this poem has been commented on tersely by Kemp Malone, and rather more fully by Ruth Lehmann. Malone notes irregular alliteration in line 4 (Wulf is on lege, ic on Öberre) and 18 (bet man ępbe tōslītē bette næfre gesomnad wæs). In both of these lines, contrary to standard metrical practice, the second main stress of the b-verse is alliterated. Miss Lehmann speaks of an absence of alliteration in line 18, but clearly the s's of the second and fourth main stresses (in tōslītē and gesomnad) are intended to alliterate. The positions of the two critics are reversed with regard to line 12, where Miss Lehmann speaks of irregular alliteration and Malone finds none at all: wæs mē wyn tō pon, wæs mē hwæpre sæc læs.

Again, the w-hw alliteration seems to be intended, but it is not an alliteration allowable in classical verse. Malone states further 'Three of the on-verses (lines 9, 13, 14) go

5i.e., the most noteworthy of the typical six. The Rhyming Poem is, of course, remarkable.

6'Two English Frauenlieder,' CL, XIV (1962), 110.

against classical metrics, each in its own way. Line 9 (Wulfes ic mǐnes widlāstum wēnum dogode) shows a break between verses which does not, if we take widlāstum as an adjective qualifying wēnum, correspond with the syntactical break, as is usually the case. The striking Wulf, mǐn Wulf in line 13a is also pointed out by Miss Lehmann. The verse has only three syllables instead of the usual minimum of four. Editors do not usually emend this verse because, as she says 'the emotional impact is greatest in it simplest form' (p. 153). Line 14, also cited as irregular by Malone, seems to be unobjectionable. Miss Lehmann notes the frequency of unusually long lines (though not expanded in the sense of having an extra stress), pointing out that seven are of more than twelve syllables. She observes that 'The four half-lines with double alliteration [2, 8, 17, 19] that take the place of full lines are in each instance preceded by one of these longer lines' (p. 152). From all these observations it is clear that the poem makes no attempt to adhere to a rigid pattern. Miss Lehmann describes it as 'metrically unique' (p. 152), which is probably not an overstatement. It is significant that some of the most irregular lines are also the most poignant. This is true of line 12, and especially line 13, where the emphatic cry breaks the bounds

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8Pope (Seven O.E. Poems, p. 99, n. 6) points out that Wanderer, 64b breaks this rule. In the present case, widlāstum would fit into the syntactical group of the a-verse if taken as a noun 'wide wanderings' as is done by some scholars. Still, the a-verse, like some of the other verses of the poem, has an unusually large number of weak syllables.
of metrical restraint. The short lines also have a special quality of their own. Each has the effect of completing the previous line, to which it adds a surcharge of feeling. Both Kemp Malone and Ruth Lehmann rightly regard the poem very highly. Its metrical freedom is a strength, not a weakness.

Malone may well be right in believing that the poem's irregularity points to a popular, rather than an aristocratic origin. Certainly, *Wulf and Eadwacer* has little in common with *Beowulf*, or even with the metrically looser *Battle of Maldon*. It is a private poem, whereas they are public poems, and also it has no direct connection with a heroic society. Some of the elegies, *The Wanderer*, for instance, indubitably have.\(^9\) The end-stopped lines,\(^10\) the fluctuation in line-length, and the general irregularity of *Wulf and Eadwacer* are reminiscent of popular poetry as seen in the Charms, although the latter show distinctly less poetic ability.

Malone believes that *The Wife's Lament*, like *Wulf and Eadwacer*, stands outside the classical tradition of poetry and shows a similar freedom in its metre,\(^11\) although he admits that the former poem is more indebted to that tradition. *The Wife's Lament* is in fact much less free metrically than *Wulf and Eadwacer*. Malone picks out three examples of

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\(^10\)The run-on style, with thought-breaks between the verses rather than at the end of lines is a characteristic of classical poetry, as seen in *Beowulf*, although it is not a metrical requirement.

irregular alliteration, acknowledging that two of these can be corrected by emendation:

hwætic yrmpa gebæd sibpän ic Ûp [a]\ñox

(Wife's Lament, 3)

and

is nû [fornumen] swä hit nô wære.12

(Wife's Lament, 24)

Line 4 is definitely irregular (having double alliteration in the b-verse):

ntwes oppe ealdes, nô më ponne nû.

The emendation in line 3 is a very simple one and should, I think, be accepted, since there appears to be no good reason for irregularity. Line 24 is a rather more difficult case. Editors usually assume that something is missing in the a-verse. Miss Lehmann, however, suggests that we may have here something like the short lines in Wulf and Eadwacer. The line makes sense and is effective as it stands. But swä hit nô wære is a conventional verse. Wanderer, 96b (swä hëo nô wære) is almost identical, and line 96 has a full a-verse of normal type. The case must remain undecided. There is, then, a little irregularity in the alliteration of The Wife's Lament, the exact extent being uncertain, but there is not enough to separate the poem from the classical tradition. There are no further conspicuous irregularities in the matters of stress and line length to support Malone's case. It is, of course, true, that in subject-matter and quality of feeling the poem

12Emendations by Leslie.
is like *Wulf and Eadwacer* and unlike most of the rest of Old English verse.

The other formal features in which the elegies show themselves to be different from most Old English poetry are largely structural and syntactic rather than metrical, although these categories overlap. It has already been remarked that *Wulf and Eadwacer* shows traces of stanzaic structure, and the use of a refrain consisting of a full line followed by a short line caused Lawrence to link it with Old Norse. Some critics have even detected something akin to stanzaic structure in *The Wife's Lament*. T.M. Davis finds the units into which this poem breaks down sufficiently marked to be referred to as stanzas. He regards lines 1-5 as a Prologue (pp. 296-297), after which the first 'stanza' begins:

In the first stanza (ll. 6-10) her lord leaves and the wife is forced to seek protection; in the second stanza (ll. 11-26) the kinsmen plot against her and she is forced to endure *fæhōu* . . . ; in the third stanza (ll. 27-41) someone commands her to live in the oak-grove and she is *mū* the loneliest of human beings. Each unit begins with a statement of the source of her grief, and each unit ends with a first-person expression of her sorrow.

(PP. 299-300)

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14Another View of the "Wife's Lament",* Papers on English Language and Literature*, I (1965), 291-305.
He presumably sees lines 42- end as a fourth 'stanza'. Herbert Pilch, who believes the Old English elegies to be modelled on Welsh poems of a similar type, suggests that 'the traces of refrain ... found specifically in the Old English elegy' (presumably he is thinking of Deor and Wulf and Eadwacer) and the use of rhyme in The Rhyming Poem represent an attempt to recreate in Old English the close-knit structure of the Welsh englyn. The connection with Old Welsh proposed by Pilch need not necessarily be accepted, but certainly the consistent use of refrain or rhyme is not found outside the elegiac poems. Deor is highly unusual in having distinct stanzas, of uneven length, to be sure. In its use of a refrain to mark the end of every stanza it is unique. Rhyme is the salient device of The Rhyming Poem and makes it also, in its different way, unique, although intermittent rhyme appears elsewhere in Old English verse. In the Old

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15 This description of the 'stanzas' in the poem resembles the structural analyses to be discussed later. See pp. 203-206, below.

16 The Elegiac Genre in Old English and Early Welsh Poetry,' ZCP, XIX (1964), 221. See also Chap. I, pp.33-34, above. Englyn is the term for a type of strict form in Welsh poetry, involving internal rhyme and links between the stanzas.

17 Some editors, including Kemp Malone (Deor, 2nd ed., London, 1949), print the poem with a break after line 34, thus giving one stanza, lines 28-34, without a refrain.

18 The only other Old English poem with a fully developed stanzaic structure is 'The Seasons for Fasting' (The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, ed. E.V.K. Dobbie, New York, 1942, pp. 98-104). Here the stanzas are of fairly uniform length, but there is no refrain.
English period rhyme is an ornament added to, rather than taking the place of, alliteration, even in The Rhyming Poem. None of the six elegies that we are particularly considering employs a structural device at once so unusual and so regular as that of refrain in Deor and rhyme in The Rhyming Poem. The only one of the six to use rhyme is The Ruin. It may be seen in the following places: hrftm on l̈yme (line 4), scorene gedrorene (line 5), forweorone geleorene (line 7), stœap gœap (line 11), wong gecrong (line 31). Miss Hotchner suggested that rhyme might show Latin influence behind The Ruin. But what we have here is not end-rhyme as seen in the Latin hymns, and also occasionally in Old English poems, linking the a- and b-verse, as in The Rhyming Poem. The Ruin poet likes to rhyme adjacent, or near-adjacent, words in a way that is partly decorative, partly emphatic. The technique is similar in effect to his use of alliteration plus assonance, as in Hrof̄as sind gehrorene (line 3), ofstoden under stormum (line 11), Mœd mo[nade] (line 18).

One thing that emerges from all these comments is the very variety of the elegiac poems. We have seen that some of them correspond fairly closely to 'classical' practice in matters of prosody. On the other hand, Wulf and Eadwacer differs considerably from the classical model, and The Ruin, too, has its peculiarities. As for other poems in the

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19 Not a full rhyme, but clearly the effect is intended.

20 C. Hotchner, Wessex and Old English Poetry, with Special Consideration of The Ruin (Lancaster, Pa., 1939), pp. 113-114.
elegiac group, The Rhyming Poem is in the nature of a metrical experiment, and Deor is remarkable in its use of strophes and a refrain. It seems that, perhaps because it adopted the personal rather than the formal and public manner, the elegy was a type of poetry in which the Anglo-Saxon poets felt free to use a certain amount of licence if they so wished.

There are certain formal features of Old English poetic diction which apply to the whole of the poetry. One of the most noteworthy is the frequent use of compound words. The nature of the compounds and their usage are well described by Brodeur. His remarks are prefatory to a study of the diction of Beowulf, but are also generally applicable:

The richest and most meaningful content-words in the poetic vocabulary are the substantival and adjectival compounds; they not only express concepts, often very forcefully or imaginatively; they often contain or imply partial description of concepts as well.21

Later, he states:

The first or limiting element in compounds usually affects more or less materially the sense of the compound. Therefore we can find, among compounds made with the same base-word, a wide range of meanings on different poetic levels.

(p. 11)

An example from The Wanderer is earncearig (line 20), contrasting with wintercearig (line 24). The former, 'wretched-sad', intensifies the word within the same dimension of meaning, so to speak; the latter, 'winter-sad', suggests a whole

range of comparisons with the coldness and forlornness of winter. Although compounds are formed in traditional ways, as, for instance, here on the base -cearig, many of the poetic ones are found in only a few places, some only once. This fact is also commented upon by Brodeur, who suggests that 'individual poets allowed themselves much freedom in the formation of new compounds', and that, by substitution of synonyms, new compounds could be formed on the patterns of those already known (p. 270). Wintercearig is a hapax legomenon. It might, of course, be paralleled elsewhere if more of the poetry were still extant. But its use in line 24 of The Wanderer, although based on traditional patterns, and embodying traditional associations, still is highly imaginative, in that it imparts a vast desolation to the image of the lordless man:

wōd wintercearig ofer wape[m]a gebind.

The suggestion of winter links up with the picture of the watery expanse, also empty and sterile, and the two expressions, linked by alliteration, reinforce each other. Earmcearig is found elsewhere only in The Seafarer. Whether the compound was coined independently in each case or whether it was ready-formed, we cannot say, but in each poem the word contributes to making its context deeply pathetic:

oft earmcearig, ēðle bidæled,
frēomægum feor

(Wanderer, 20-21a)

A similar compound wintercealde, used metaphorically, is found in Deor, line 4, to describe a situation with connotations of exile and elegy. See above, Chap. I, p. 19.
and

\[
\text{hū ic earmcearig. Iscealdne sæe} \\
\text{winter wunade wræccan læstum.}
\]

(Seafarer, 14-15)

Not all the compounds contain this emotional charge. \textit{Eardstapa} in line 6 of \textit{The Wanderer}, though effective in describing the subject of the poem as a 'land-stepper' (in the same way as the hart in \textit{Beowulf}, line 1368 is described as a \textit{hæostapa} 'heath-stepper'), is not on the same poetic level. But Brodeur is right in regarding the compounds as the most significant 'content-words'. Examples of emotive compounds could be found in almost every other line of the elegies. \textit{Sumorlangne} in \textit{The Wife's Lament} is a notable instance. It suggests the endlessness of each day for the banished wife:

\[
\text{under æctrōo geond pās eorbscrafu,} \\
\text{pēric sitta[n] mōt sumorlangne daēg}
\]

(Wife's Lament, 36-37)

We find a compound of the same kind in \textit{Genesis B}, used with even greater poignancy, when Satan cries:

\[
\text{Wā lā, āhte ic mInra handa geweald} \\
\text{and mōste āne tīd ûte weordān,} \\
\text{wesan āne winterstunde.}
\]

(Genesis, 368b-370a)

He desires to be free for one briefest hour, a 'winter-hour', as the wife must sit an endless day, a 'summer-long day'.

It might be noted that \textit{Wulf and Eadwacer} contains fewer poetic compounds than the rest of the elegies, and, indeed, than most of Old English poetry. Ralph Elliott observes that ' . . . the very absence in this poem of poetic compounds or phrases
whose recurrence may make them suspect in other Old English poems is a sign of a developed, individual poetic style.\footnote{Form and Image in the Old English Lyrics, EIC, XI (1961), 4.}

The only noteworthy compounds are \textit{wælreowe} (line 6), \textit{wædlæstum} (line 9), \textit{beaducéfa} (line 11), and \textit{seldþýmas} (line 14). These are 'content-words' of the kind described above, but they are less plentiful than usual. \textit{Metełfste} (line 15) is a compound, but not an especially poetic one. This poem relies much less on compounds to gain its emotive effect, and is thus, as in its metre, rather different from the other elegies. However, the use of such compounds in other poems certainly need not be regarded as a weakness, as Elliott implies. As we have seen, although traditional in pattern, they can be quite individual.

In association with the compound should be mentioned the kenning, although this can be a phrase as well as a compound. Again, we shall find that critical commentary has been directed to the whole field of Old English poetry, or to \textit{Beowulf}, rather than to the elegies. Although critics are agreed upon the importance of the kenning and its general character as some kind of poetic periphrasis, they disagree as to whether it should be defined as a metaphor or a more general type of poetic circumlocution. Here, Brodeur's distinction between a kenning and a \textit{kent heiti} ('characterised simplex')\footnote{Both the terms 'kenning' and 'heiti' originate from Snorri Sturluson's classification of terms used by the Icelandic skalds. They are used by scholars with reference to both Old English and Old Norse poetry.} will be followed.
although it is a distinction not always made. He defines the kenning as a metaphor which 'contains an incongruity between the referent and the meaning of the base-word', adding: 'in the kenning the limiting word is essential to the figure because without it the incongruity would make any identification impossible' (pp. 250-251). There are no very striking examples in the elegies under consideration of kennings in the strict sense. Two instances might be cited from The Seafarer: cearselda (line 5) 'abodes of care', i.e., 'sufferings', and sumeres weard (line 54) 'guardian of summer', i.e., the cuckoo which has just been referred to. These are kennings because sufferings are not abodes and the cuckoo is not a guardian. In each case the first element in the periphrasis is necessary to make it clear what the significance of the kenning is. Brodeur's illustrations of kenning are rather clearer examples: bænhús (bonehouse) for 'body', and beadoleoma (battle-light) for 'sword' (p. 250). The expressions which Brodeur calls kend heiti are 'Those periphrases which are not kennings, but which possess the same structure as the kenning, and which identify the referent as something which it is' (p. 251). Kend heiti are rather more common in the elegies. The previously mentioned compound eardstæpa (Wanderer, line 6) is in fact a kend heiti. So is sinces bryttan ('breaker (i.e. distributor) of treasure') (Wanderer, line 25).

25 Klaeber gives a definition of kennings which also embraces the kend heiti. He describes them as 'picturesque circumlocutory words and phrases,' Beowulf, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1950), p. lxiii.
Many of the kend heiti in the six elegies are paraphrases for the sea: wabema gebind 'binding (i.e., 'conglomeration') of the waves' (Wanderer, 24 and 57);

\[ \text{ypa gelæc 'tumult of the waves'} (\text{Wife's Lament, 7}); \]

sealtýba gelæc 'tumult of the salt waves' (Seafarer, 35); mæwes ðpl 'homeland of the gull' (Husband's Message, 26); hwæþes ðpl 'homeland of the whale' (Seafarer, 60); hwælweg 'the whale's way' (Seafarer, 63).

27 Since seafaring is a familiar theme of elegiac poetry, it is not surprising to find all these expressions. What we do not find are the elaborate battle-kennings and kend heiti of the heroic poetry. The Battle of Brunanburh, for example, which is one of the most formal and ornate poems in Old English and rather in the nature of a set-piece, is full of them. Also, it uses these devices in a much more conscious way than the elegies, with which it provides a useful contrast. In Brunanburh we see true kenning: the sun is described as godes condel (line 15). Hamora láfan 'leavings of hammers', i.e., 'swords' (line 6) is on the borderline between kenning and kend heiti. Other circumlocutions, kend heiti rather than kennings, are bilgeslehtes 'clashing of swords' (line 45), cumbolgehnæstes 'collision of standards' (line 49), and wæpengewrixles 'exchange of weapons' (line 51)—all terms for battle. Beside these elaborate compounds, the

\[ \text{The first of these instances is thought by some scholars to refer to the 'binding' of ice.} \]

\[ \text{MS wælweg. Almost always emended, but Smithers favours the unemended version. See above, Chap. II, p. 82.} \]
circumlocutions of the elegies seem quite plain.

There has been wide divergence of critical opinion as to the effectiveness of the kennings and kend heiti in general and the circumlocutions for the sea in particular. Three kend heiti of the '−way' and '−abode' type were cited above. Robert Kissack finds in such expressions for the sea 'a highly enthusiastic and poetic feeling of pleasure.' Helen Buckhurst states: 'In this type of compound and phrase the Old English poets show little imagination, and the terms are generally used quite conventionally.' Anne Treneer believes that many of these expressions 'are almost playful.' Henry Cecil Wyld makes a distinction between expressions of this type, which he regards as trite, and others, among which he includes sealtypa gelāc in The Seafarer and wapema gebind in The Wanderer, which he finds effective.

All the above comments, none of which is later than 1929, belong to a school of criticism, less fashionable nowadays, whose approach to Old English poetic diction was to pick out the gems in it. All these critics give lists of the expressions of which they approve, and sometimes of those which they regard with disfavour. The fault of this kind of criticism is that it


30 The Sea in English Literature from Beowulf to Donne (London and Liverpool, 1926), p. 37.

fails to take account of the larger poetic context. Wyld was right in picking out sealtýpa gelāc and wabema gebind as particularly effective, but their effectiveness cannot be seen in isolation. The former expression occurs in a context of great emotional excitement:

\[
\text{For þon cnyssad nū, heortan gepōhtas ðætic hēan strēamas, sealtýpa gelāc sylf cunnige.}\]

\[(\text{Seafarer, 33b-35})\]

Here, the restlessness of the waves seems to correspond to the restlessness in the seafarer's own spirit. The effectiveness of wabema gebind in line 24 of The Wanderer has already been mentioned. Line 57 is less striking, but here, as in line 24, there is the suggestion of a great waste of water, utterly disheartening, especially at this moment, when the wanderer has just achieved a brief, illusory escape from it in dreams:

\[
\text{þām þe sendan sceal swīpe geneahhe ofer wabema gebind wērigne sefan.}\]

\[(\text{Wanderer, 55b-57})\]

As for the kend heiti of a type variously praised and condemned, they too need to be considered as a part of the poems to which they belong. The instances cited from The Seafarer and The Husband's Message all occur at points where the verse is rapid and impetuous:

\[
\text{For þon nū mīn hyge hweorfēd ofer hreþerlocan, mīn mōdsefa mid mereflōde, ofer hwæles ðpel hweorfēd wīde.}\]

\[(\text{Seafarer, 58-60})\]

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32This passage is discussed above. See Chap. II, pp. 77-78.
In the *Seafarer* passages, especially the second (the two are, of course, very close together), it is the sense of urgency that impresses itself upon the reader rather than any deliberate poeticism. This urgency is largely conveyed by the aspirate alliteration, in which *hwæles ēpel* and *hwaelweg* partake. The effect is particularly noticeable in the second passage, where the alliteration is carried over two consecutive lines. In the passage from *The Husband's Message* one is more conscious of a deliberate poetic heightening, but still there is an eager, impulsive quality in the lines. These *kend heiti* are used in a much less formal fashion than words like *hronrād* and *swanrād* in Beowulf, a difference which is in keeping with the more personal and spontaneous character of the elegies.

The poetic compounds and circumlocutions of Old English are related to the larger poetic technique of variation, which cultivates their usage. Once again, the definition given by Brodeur is helpful:

> Variation involves the repeated expression of the same concept or idea, not in identical terms, but in terms which, while they restate essentially the same concept or proposition, do so in a manner that emphasizes a somewhat different aspect of it. (p. 272)

Examples of variation may be seen in the passages just quoted.
from The Seafarer and The Husband's Message. Mödsefa (Seafarer, 59) varies hyge (line 58), and hwæles êpel (line 60) varies mereflöde (line 59). Similarly, ofer holma gelagu (line 64) varies on hwælweg (line 63). In The Husband's Message, mæwes ëpel (line 26) varies mere in the same line. Whole clauses can be varied:

bitre brœostceare gebiden hæbbe,
gecunnad in cœle cearselfa. (Seafarer, 4-5)

Variation merges into the related devices of enumeration and progression. In the opening of The Seafarer:

Maeg ic be me sylfum söögied wrecan,  
síbas secgan

what we have is enumeration, since síbas is not equivalent to söögied. Lines 26-27 of The Husband's Message show progression, i.e., Ongin mere söcan, and then onsite sànan. Brodeur makes a distinction between the three devices, but admits that it may be 'difficult to distinguish between true variation and other collocations the individual members of which show closeness of sense-relation' (See pp. 274-275).

As in the case of the other formal devices of Old English verse, few critics have made a specific study of the use of variation in the elegies. By and large the usage corresponds with that throughout the poetry. As one would expect, it is less conscious and elaborate than in some of the more public poems. Once again, Brunanburh serves to provide an extreme example of very deliberate formality. The poem opens:
Æþelstán is varied twice, and his brōbor once. The examples of variation, and its related devices, which were pointed out in The Seafarer and The Husband's Message were much less prominent.

Malone comments on the use of variation in Wulf and Eadwacer and The Wife's Lament. With regard to the former, he states: 'Repetition rather than variation is a distinctive feature of the poem.' The refrain, of course, is repeated, so is the word Wulf; and the idea of line 9 (Wulfes ic mīnes wīdlastum wēnum dogode) occurs again in lines 13-14a (Wulf, mīn Wulf, wēna mē þīnea / sēoce gedydon). There is not one single example of real variation; The closest we come to it is the enumeration of lines 13b-15:

wēna mē þīnea
sēoce gedydon, þīnea seldcymas,
murnende mōd, nales metelīste.

Malone's remarks on The Wife's Lament are fuller. He picks out the most straightforward examples of variation, terming them 'rather simpler than usual' (p. 117). The instances given by him are as follows: lēofra (16) and holdra frēonda (17); fyrīnd (33) and lēofe (34); wraecetàpas (38) and earfopa fela (39); brōostceare (44) and sinsorgna gedreag (45); frōendo (47) and wine (49). Malone then cites examples "classifiable as variations . . . of a much less rigorous kind" (p. 117): mē (1) and

33 'Frauenlieder,' p. 110.
ful geðmorre (1); hōnan (6), of lædum, and ofer ypa geląc (7); ic (9) and wineleās wræcca (10); gewidost in woruldrícce (13) and læðtocost (14). Most of these are not variations in the strict sense. However, they do show that tendency to pile up grammatically parallel expressions which is characteristic of Old English poetry, and of which variation is one aspect. In fact, the variations in the poem are still fairly plentiful, and although Malone considers them 'simple' they are merely the standard type of substantival variation seen in the examples from The Seafarer, The Husband's Message, and Brunanburh. One would not expect them to be as conspicuous as in the last poem. The Wife's Lament is no more remarkable in its formal handling of diction than it was in its use of metre. Malone appears to be straining the evidence for the sake of grouping the poem with Wulf and Eadwacer as popular Frauenlieder.  

Another general feature of Old English poetic diction is its use of understatement. This is described in an article by Frederick Brakr, in 1937. Braker points out that understatement is usually achieved in Old English verse, not by the use of a weaker term, but 'by the use of a negation: the denial of the opposite (p. 915), i.e., by the figure of litotes, although Braker does not use this term. An instance from the elegies would be no baer fela bringed / cūðra.

**Footnotes:**

34 See above, Chap. II, p. 132.

35 'Understatement in Old English Poetry,' *PMLA*, LII, 915-934.
cwídegiedda in Wanderer, lines 54b - 55a. When the poet says that not many familiar spoken tales were brought, he means in fact that there were none at all. Brac'hjer also distinguishes 'incomplete negation' with the use of words like lýt and fæa. One example of this type of understatement is seen in āhte ic lēofra lýt in line 16 of The Wife's Lament, where the wife means that she has no friends, not that she only has a few. Brac'hjer gives a table listing the frequency of understatement in the Old English poems (pp. 920-921). He lists four instances for The Wanderer, one for The Husband's Message, one for The Wife's Lament, and one for The Seafarer. He does not cite the other elegies, nor does he give quotations. He distinguishes four uses of understatement: hostile intent, humour, emphasis, and moderation. The last feature is not well substantiated by Brac'hjer, and can be left out of a consideration of the elegies. In addition to the two examples already mentioned, the instances Brac'hjer seems to have in mind are:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pám þe him lýt hafa} & \text{þ} \quad \text{lēofra geholena} \\
& \text{(Wanderer, 31)} \\
& \quad \ldots \text{nāles wunden gold,} \\
& \quad \ldots \text{nāles foldan blæd} \\
& \quad \text{(Wanderer, 32 & 33)} \\
& \quad \text{nis him wilna gād} \\
& \quad \text{(Husband's Message, 45)} \\
& \text{For þon him gelýfen lýt, sē þe āh lifes wyn} \\
& \quad \ldots \quad \text{(Seafarer, 27)}
\end{align*}
\]

I assume that the second and third examples from The Wanderer are those which would be picked out by Brac'hjer, but they are
not very good examples, since they form part of an antithesis, and their effect is not quite the same as that of simple understatement. Bruce Mitchell sees further understatement in *The Wanderer* in lines 65b - 69:

Wita sceal gepyldig;
ne sceal nō to hātheort
ne tō hrædwyrd, ne tō wāg wiga
ne tō wānhyldig,
ne tō forht, ne tō fægen, ne tō feohgtfre,
ne nēfre gielpes to georn
ær hē geare cunne.

Mitchell argues that these lines show understatement in the form of meiosis, since a man is not recommended to be 'not too wrathful nor too hasty of speech', etc., but not to be these things at all.\(^{36}\) Mitchell's point is a valid one, but there is some difficulty with *fægen*, which means 'joyful' and is not usually a pejorative word. Presumably here it has the sense of 'overconfident', and we can therefore accept that a man should not be overconfident at all, rather than not too overconfident.

To the examples of understatement cited by Brachjer I would add *seldcymas* in line 14 of *Wulf and Eadwacer*. This is sometimes taken literally as 'rare-comings', but it seems to me far more effective if taken as a euphemism for the fact that Wulf did not come at all. This would be entirely in the Old English manner, and in keeping with the theme of the poem, the woman's misery at being separated from her lover. *Hē genōh hafāf/ fōdan gold[as]*, *Husband's Message*, 35b - 36a also appears to be an example of understatement. I can find no

\(^{36}\)Some Syntactical Problems in *The Wanderer,* NM, LXIX (1968), 191.
examples in *The Ruin*. It will be seen that in most of the instances quoted, not including the rather different usage pointed out by Mitchell, the effect is one of greater poignancy. The only cases where this is not so are those in *The Husband's Message*, which would come into Brachter's category of emphasis. Doubtless, the fact that this poem is more optimistic than the others is significant here. In the elegies it is the pathetic use of understatement which is the most striking. Brachter might perhaps consider the male examples as humorous, but if there is any humour it is of a bitter kind. Rather than accepting Brachter's four uses of understatement, we might say that, as far as the elegies are concerned, it is used for emphasis, usually of a pathetic kind, and often with a flavour of irony.

The association of irony with understatement leads us to consider the subject of irony in itself. B.J. Timmer connects irony with both humour and understatement (which he refers to as litotes). Timmer takes issue with Schucking, who finds "ironic battle-humour" 'a typical feature of the Germanic heroic style'. Schucking is right as far as the epics and battle-poems are concerned. The use of understatement with this effect is observable in *The Battle of Maldon*, when

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37 'Irony in Old English Poetry,' *ES*, XXIV (1942), 171-175.
Byrhtnoð retorts to the Danish spokesman that, instead of the heriot demanded, the Danes will get a heriot which they will not like:

\[\text{ættrynne ord and ealde swêrd,}\]
\[\text{þæ heregeatu þe ðow æethilde ne dæah.}\]  
(Maldon, 47 - 48)

This type of usage is classified by Brachner as hostile rather than humorous, but there is humour of a grim kind in it. Timmer himself allows a 'grim irony' here (p. 174). However, 'ironic battle-humour' is not found in the elegies. Timmer points out that in regarding Seafarer, 20-23 as humorous, Schücking has misread the poem: the cries of the seabirds are not supposed to be likened to the laughter of men. There is still an irony, though, because the one takes the place of the other:

\[\text{Hwilum ylfete song}\]
\[\text{dyde ic mē tō gomene, ganetes hleoþor}\]
\[\text{ond huiþpan swēg fore medodrine.}\]
\[\text{Stormas þær stānclifu bōtan, þær him stēarn oncwmē 39}\]
(Seafarer, 19b-23)

Another example of irony found by Schücking and rejected by Timmer is bitre burgtūnas in line 31 of The Wife's Lament. I believe there is an irony here, since burgtūnas implies an inhabited place of some kind, and the whole cause of the wife's misery is her solitude. Timmer concludes, I think wrongly, 'there is hardly any place for irony in this or any of the other

39The punctuation of Mrs. Gordon's edition, which links line 20a with line 19b rather than line 20b, does not correspond with that implied by Timmer, but this does not affect the argument.
lyrical poems' (p. 174). His general conclusion is a little more moderate: 'The style figure of litotes may sometimes strike us as comical, but it is very doubtful indeed if it had this effect on the Anglo-Saxons. . . . there are some examples of irony, but the irony is of a grim nature.' Timmer is right in so far as there is no real comedy in Old English poetry, but there is quite a good deal of irony, and in the heroic poetry, although not in the elegiacs, this irony can contain a grim humour.

One of the major changes in critical approaches to the style of Old English poetry has been an increasing awareness of the degree of artistry in it. A step in this direction was made by Adeline Courtney Bartlett, in her book *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, of 1935. Miss Bartlett was concerned chiefly with the narrative poetry, but her observations also apply to the shorter poems, including the elegies, and some of her illustrations are taken from the latter. She aimed to show the existence of formal rhetorical patterns in the 'verse paragraphs', rather than, as had tended to be done previously, concentrating on the smaller devices, such as alliteration and kenning. She states that her purpose is 'to emphasize the dominance of the rhetorical unit over the metrical unit' (p. 6). The types of pattern which she detects are as follows: Envelope Pattern, in which the same words or idea are repeated at the beginning and end of a logical group; Parallel Pattern, i.e., a group of two or

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40 New York, 1935.
more parts showing parallel structure for the sake of comparison or contrast: Incremental Pattern, i.e., repetition of a similar idea at intervals with cumulative effect; Rhythmical Pattern, which involves the use of expanded lines for climax; Decorative Inset, in which we have the insertion of a set-piece essentially separate from the surrounding material; Conventional Device, such as introductory or concluding formula.

Miss Bartlett does not cite examples of Envelope Pattern in the elegies, but the repetition of *are* in the introduction and conclusion of *The Wanderer*, (lines 1 and 114) is something like it. She picks out *Seafarer*, 117-120 as an example of Parallel Pattern: three exhortations, each with a subordinate clause (p. 39):

> Uton we hycgan hwær wē hām āgen, ond þonne gebencan hū wē þider cumen; ond wē þonne ðac tilien þæt wē to mēten

She finds Incremental Pattern to be rarer than the previous one. She gives no examples from the elegies, and I can find none in the six under discussion. She does, however, take a very clear example from *Brunanburh* (pp. 53-54), which will once again show that the use of formal devices in the elegies, as exemplified here in the example of Parallel Pattern in *The Seafarer*, tends to be much less conspicuous:

* Brunanburh, 39b-48
In the above passage, the discomfiture of Constantinus is emphasised by the treble repetition of the fact that he (and in the third case he and his ally Anlaf) did not need to rejoice (specifically, 'exult', 'boast', 'laugh') in the results of the battle. Miss Bartlett mentions *Seafarer*, 106-109 and *Wanderer*, 111-115 as examples of Rhythmical Pattern in their use of expanded lines for climax (p. 69). Some of her examples of Decorative Inset seem to me too small to be given that name. *Wife's Lament*, 52b-53, which she characterises as inset of the gnomic type, and *Wanderer*, 114-115, distinguished as homiletic inset (both these examples conclude the poems) are simply brief, reflective comments. On the other hand, she is right to pick out the two *Beowulf* elegies as examples of Decorative Inset of the elegiac type (p. 79). She notes the openings of *The Wanderer* (especially lines 6-7), *The Seafarer*, and *The Wife's Lament* as examples of Conventional Device in the shape of introductory formula, and *Wanderer*, 111-115 and *Seafarer*, 103-124 as examples of concluding formula. 

41This passage also shows the 'battle-irony' mentioned earlier.

42Bartlett, p. 74.

43Ibid., p. 76.

44For a discussion of the Structural use of gnomic and homiletic passages in elegy, see Chap. I, pp. 39-42 above.

45See above, Chap. I, pp. 14-15 and 39-42 for a discussion of these introductions and conclusions.
In her desire to prove a point, Miss Bartlett has tended to stress patterns where they do not exist, or where their existence is not very noticeable. Her example of Parallel Pattern in *The Seafarer* is not especially striking, and what she distinguishes as 'concluding formula' in this poem and *The Wanderer* is not so sharply defined as the 'introductory formula' in these poems. Nevertheless, she has shown unmistakably that the Old English poets were aware of larger structural patterns as well as smaller devices of diction.

An important landmark in the criticism of Old English style, in prose as well as poetry, was the publication of S.O. Andrew's book *Syntax and Style in Old English*, in 1940. Andrew described his study as 'an attempt to drive a few main lines through the almost unexplored tract of Old English syntax.' The earlier critics assumed considerable naïveté in the matter of Old English syntax, especially in verse. A.H. Tolman, in 1887, quotes the French critic, Taine, as stating:

'Articles, particles, everything capable of illuminating thought, of making the connection of terms, of producing regularity of ideas, all rational and logical artifices are neglected. Passion bellows forth like a great shapeless beast; and that is all.'

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46 Cambridge, 1940.

47 Andrew, Preface (page not numbered).

Tolman goes on to indicate that he, being Germanic, finds the primitivism of Old English appealing, but he still regards its style as disconnected. Similarly, Elizabeth Hanscom, in 1905, says:

The short phrasing of the verse, the result of the analytical method of the mind by which idea is added to idea until the whole thought is attained, lends itself easily to the sequence of noun and epithet, compound noun and adjectives, and brief phrases, to the exclusion of prolonged and connected descriptions.  

Miss Hanscom's observations do describe the technique that, as we have seen, is found in variation and its related devices, but her statement is an oversimplification. It was taken for granted that the syntax of Old English verse was paratactic. Tolman states: '... the A.-S. poetry expresses paratactically, in independent clauses, those ideas of time, cause, manner, and accompaniment which we are accustomed to express syntactically, in subordinate clauses' (p. 36). Tolman believes that such parataxis explains the apparent abruptness of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and what he describes as its technique of 'return to a dropped thought' (See pp. 35-36).

It is these assumptions that Andrew is concerned to disprove. He is of the opinion that 'the supposed "paratactic" structure of Old English, whether in prose or verse, is an illusion,' that Old English syntax is much more thoroughly integrated than was supposed, and that there is a good deal

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50 Andrew, Preface (page not numbered).
more subordination than the punctuation of editors indicated.
Andrew distinguishes three kinds of word order in Old English,
and believes that the use of a particular order has a bearing
on whether a clause is subordinate or not. His three kinds of
order are: common order (subject, verb, object), conjunctive
order (with the verb at the end), and demonstrative order
(verb precedes subject). The last is found after bæ, bonne,
bær, and occasionally after other initial adverbs. Common
order is regular in principal clauses, but can occur in sub-
ordinate clauses. Conjunctive order marks a clause as sub-
ordinate or co-ordinate.\(^{51}\) Demonstrative order can occur in
either principal, co-ordinate, or subordinate clauses.\(^{52}\) In
principal clauses, in poetry, the demonstrative adverb usually
comes second, and we have the form ċom bæ . . . , or Hē bæ . . . .
When the verb comes first in such a construction, the subject,
if a pronoun, is unexpressed.\(^{53}\) Other cases in poetry where
the subject is omitted are not, Andrew believes, true principal
clauses, but examples of asyndetic co-ordination.\(^{54}\)

The above principles have been very influential. The
fact that there is more order than was thought in Old English
syntax needed to be pointed out, and Andrew's broad distinction

\(^{51}\) The preceding general observations are set forth in
Andrew, Chap. I, §§ 1-3.

\(^{52}\) See especially Andrew, Chap. II, §§ 6-19.

\(^{53}\) See § 15.

\(^{54}\) See § 91.
of three kinds of clause-structure forms a useful guide to analysis. However, he does not prove that they are used with absolute consistency in Old English verse. As is noted by Dunning and Bliss, who by and large accept the principles of Andrew, he is far too ready to sweep away all conflicting evidence by emendation.\(^55\) Mitchell states: 'It . . . seems clear to me that word-order is not conclusive in the poetry, that it cannot be used to prove that a certain clause must be subordinate and another principal.'\(^56\) This observation is made in connection with lines 37-57 of The Wanderer, which are variously punctuated by editors. Mitchell does in fact favour a punctuation which happens to be in accordance with Andrew's principles. He finds that the best punctuation 'is based on the proposition that the bonne clauses with S. . . . V. in lines 39 and 51 are subordinate, and those with V. S. in lines 45 and 49 are principal.'\(^57\) (this is the punctuation in Leslie's edition). The syntax of this entire passage, describing the wanderer's dream and awakening, is notoriously difficult, and it may well be that general agreement will never be reached.

Apart from his designation of three types of word-order, Andrew's main contention is that there is a greater degree of subordination and co-ordination in Old English syntax than was thought. This is probably true, but Andrew overstates his


\(^{56}\)Some Syntactical Problems in The Wanderer, p. 190.

\(^{57}\)Mitchell, p. 191.
case, especially in the matter of asyndeton. His distinction of asyndetic co-ordination where what might appear to be a principal clause is actually co-ordinate to another dependent clause, seems to me worth making. The following is an example (not given by Andrew, who takes most of his illustrations from Beowulf) from The Ruin:

\[ ... \text{bear is born many,} \]
\[ \text{wighystum scan;} \]
\[ \text{seah on singe, on sylfor,} \]

(Ruin, 32b-35a)

Although Leslie inserts a semi-colon after scan, the sense is surely '... where formerly many a man ... shone with war-trappings, and looked on treasure, on silver' etc. However, when Andrew makes a point of the unexpressed link between a principal clause and another that is co-ordinate to it, he is making a distinction that does not exist. An example can be taken from The Wife's Lament:

\[ \text{A scyle geong mon wesan ge\text{\oe}morm\text{\oe}d,} \]
\[ \text{heard heortan gep\text{\oe}ht; swylce habban sceal} \]
\[ \text{blipe geb\text{\oe}ro, eac \text{\p}on br\text{oostceare,} \]

(Wife's Lament, 42-44)

Here presumably Andrew would find that the lack of an expressed subject in the second clause precluded it from being a principal clause and proved it to be in asyndetic co-ordination with the first. However we take it, the second clause is parallel to the first, and assuming co-ordination does not, as in the previous example, change its function. Such a distinction between a principal and a co-ordinate clause is meaningless.

Two other points made by Andrew should be mentioned. In the first place, he adds a qualification to his rule of con-
junctive order in subordinate clauses. In poetry he finds it allowable after certain initial adverbs (not including bö, bonne, baer). No examples are given from the elegies, but the first line of The Wanderer may serve as an instance:

Oft him anhaga. åre gebideð.

The other point which should be noted is Andrew's emphasis on the importance of correlation in indicating the presence of a subordinate clause. This is particularly relevant to The Seafarer, where Andrew argues that in lines 58-64b the use of correlation proves the second forbon to be a conjunction:

For þon nú min hyge hweorfeþ ofer hreperlocañ, for þon mē hātran sind

Andrew states: 'This should be punctuated as one sentence: the poet is explaining why his restless heart is always urging him to adventure and says that it is "because the Lord's joys warm my breast more than this mortal life." The first "forbon" is an adverb, and the second a conjunction . . .' (37). Mrs. Gordon gives the same punctuation and offers the same argument, although she does not mention Andrew. It seems to me that the two for bon's are rather widely separated to be correlative, but this punctuation has the merit of showing that there need not be a break in sense at line 64b, as has so often been thought. Andrew's punctuation of this passage in The Seafarer is a significant example of the way in which the more recent approach to syntax makes for a readier acceptance of the unity of the poems.

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58 See Andrew, Chap. IX, §§ 92-95.
It is not necessary to accept Andrew's views entire in order to admit the importance of his work. The style and syntax of Old English poetry is now generally agreed to be much more sophisticated than used to be allowed. Miss Hanscom's remark that the verse style did not lend itself to 'prolonged and connected descriptions' can be seen to be inaccurate. The sentence referred to in *The Ruin* is long and periodic, and embodies an extended description:

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Hryre wong gecrong, gebrocn tō beorgum, ðærið beorn monig, glædmōd ond goldbeorht, gleoma gefrætweld, wlonc ond wɪŋgǣl, wɪghyrstum scān; seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas, on ðad, on ðēht, on eoricanstān, on ðas beorhtan burh. brōdan rīces.
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*(Ruin, 31b-37)*

Here we begin simply enough, but against the terse reference to the building's fall is piled up a most elaborate picture of the place as it was. The syntactic structure of the sentence, with its two long dependent clauses introduced by *baer* is certainly not the most simple, and the variation in rhythm as the poet builds up to a climax is impressive. The sweeping movement of this sentence, and its emotive force, contrast with the much simpler and more objective character of the next, as the poet turns to a less high-flown admiration of the Roman plumbing:

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Stānhofu stōdan; strēam hāte wearp wīdan wylme; weal eall befēng beorhtan bēōsmē; ... 
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*(Ruin, 38-40a)*

This sentence has the structure described by Miss Hanscom, but, as we have seen, this kind of simplicity is by no means all that the poet was capable of.
In 1959, R.F. Leslie published a study which aimed to illustrate the interrelationship between style and structure in Old English poetry. He criticised the concentration on the formal features of the verse, and 'the widespread belief that it contains ornate and rigid stylistic elements, into which have been fitted . . . all sorts of poetic material' (p. 255). Leslie remarked that although Miss Bartlett had attempted to move away from the study of the minutiae of style, 'in her work also, there remained the belief that the poet was . . . "more interested in the elaborate detail than the composition of the whole".' Leslie pointed out the importance of Andrew's work on syntax, which, he stated, showed that Old English verse had a closer and more unified texture than was supposed. Leslie believes that the interrelation of the whole and the part is seen in the way in which larger structural features echo the stylistic devices used in minor contexts. One illustration he gives of this is the treble use of antithesis in The Seafarer, where the sufferings of the


60 'Stylistic Devices and Effects,' Essential Articles, 255. Quoting from Bartlett, p. 7.

man at sea are contrasted with the comfort of the land-dweller's life (lines 12b-15, 27-30, 55b-57). He notes that although these instances occur in somewhat different contexts, they are linked by parallelism of expression. Thus, the contrast between the seafarer and the land-dweller becomes "a major structural element in the poem" (p. 260).  

The feature which Leslie points out in The Seafarer might be designated 'structural repetition'. There are a number of critics who draw attention to its use in the elegies. Elliott points out the structural effect of repeated words or phrases. He notes the obvious use of repetition in the refrain of Deor, and finds a more unobtrusive repetition in the other poems. He draws attention to the double occurrence of Ære in The Wanderer, stating that the poem is "a progress from the seemingly helpless "biding" for certain things and values at the beginning to a more active seeking for these things at the end."  

He also cites the repetition of the line be git on Ærdagum oft gespræcon(n) (lines 16 and 54) as a deliberate emphasis of the faith the husband and wife vowed to each other before their separation, the second instance forming the final line and culmination of the poem. Elliott comments at rather more length on Wulf and Eadwacer, in which he sees a deliberate use, not just of the refrain, but of key words. He notes that Wulf is emphasised "by its prominent position at the beginning

62 See also, Chap. II, pp. 92-93.
63 Elliott, p. 6.
of the line (4, 9, 13), the distribution itself dividing the poem into even portions,' and by its alliteration (p. 4). Miss Lehmann makes similar observations.\textsuperscript{64} Elliott also points to the repetition of \textit{Tege g\lond, Ige}, linking lines 4, 5, and 6 into a powerful image of loneliness, and to the repetition of \textit{w\e n} (in lines 9 and 13) coupled with the name 'Wulf', which 'allows the poet... to combine the nostalgic thought of past happiness with present sorrow in a moment of great lyrical intensity.'

Elliott's comments on the poems are very perceptive and valuable, especially in the case of \textit{Wulf} and \textit{Bawdacer}. It will be seen that, unlike Miss Bartlett, and, to a certain extent, Leslie, he is concerned less with formal techniques than with the structural effects of particular poems. Other critics have investigated the elegies in the same way, but have sometimes taken their search for structural patterns too far. Thus, Jane Curry, influenced by Miss Bartlett, detects some rather elaborate patterns in \textit{The Wife's Lament}. She states that the theme of the poem, the wife's misery, 'is defined and elaborated upon by a rich use in small compass of rhetorical pattern and device' with the same effect noted by Miss Bartlett in longer poems: 'a de-emphasis of narrative feeling.'\textsuperscript{65} One would accept that the poem, and the elegies as a whole, show a de-emphasis of narrative feeling, but whether the effect is

\textsuperscript{64}Lehmann, p. 163.

\textsuperscript{65}Approaches to a Translation of the Anglo-Saxon \textit{The Wife's Lament}, \textit{M \AE}, XXXV (1966), 194.
achieved by such formal techniques as Miss Curry professes to find is questionable. She feels that 'two basic motifs are used four times in an enclosing pattern which would set off four major divisions of the poem if it were not for the overlapping of the two middle patterns . . .' (p. 194). These 'enclosing' patterns she calls 'envelopes', although they do not really correspond to Miss Bartlett's Envelope Pattern since they begin with one idea and end with another. The envelopes are lines 6-14, 15-29, 27-41, and 42-53, each beginning with a line containing the word hlāford or mon and ending with a line containing a word (verb, participle, or noun) for 'longing'. It is true that the idea of longing is one of the key themes in the poem, and that words expressing it occur in strategic positions, each coming at the end of a thought-sequence, which it ends with a reiterated mournful note. Line 29 is particularly striking (eald is pes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad). Every word except one begins with a vowel, and the effect is that of a series of sighs, dragging out the line with weariness. However, Miss Curry's detection of four neat envelopes, beginning and ending with a themeword, is over-sophisticated, especially since, as she admits, the two middle ones spoil the pattern by overlapping.

Similar comments have been made on the poem by Robert Stevick,66 who states: 'The extent of repetition . . . suggests formal poetic organization of some importance' (p. 21). Again, the extent of this formal organisation is overstressed.

states that the repetition of geōmor (once more, admittedly, a key word) 'provides an iteration of the dominant mood of sadness,' and that the placing of it 'at the outset of the first and final sections of the poem [presumably, in line 1, and in line 42 in the compound gemormēd]—first in the personal statement and finally in the generalized statement—is noteworthy.' One would point out that the word or element occurs in other places, i.e., in line 17 (hyge geōmor) and line 19 (hygegeōmorne). In connection with the wife's feeling of longing, Stevick says, 'Three of the four major divisions of the poem express this in the forceful position of the final line' (pp. 21-22). He does not state which is the exception, or why the word should occur in only three of the divisions instead of all four. He continues: 'The element of aloneness and exile . . . appears to assume specific and intense form in the repetition of the dawn notion . . . ; it does not seem far-fetched to read these passages as expressions of ungratified sexual passion' (p. 22). That the wife feels 'ungratified sexual passion' is apparent, especially in lines 33b ff. (Frēnd sing on earpan, etc.), but there is no need to regard the dawn-motif as especially associated with it. Rather, the dawn image is more annally mormful connotations.

Stanley B. Greenfield finds evidence for his interpretation of The Seafarer in its repetition of certain words and ideas, associated on one level with earthly, and on another

67See above, Chap. I, pp. 35-36.
with heavenly, glory. 68 He regards the speaker as still uncer
certain about his peregrination, 69 and casting 'envious or
wistful glances at the fortunate on earth' (i.e., in his refer-
ences to the land-dweller), which are reinforced by his later
lament for vanished earthly magnificence. He states: 'So
striking are these "backward glances" in both halves of the
poem, that they become a significant unifying feature of The
Seafarer' (p. 17). Later, he demonstrates how 'The poet puns
... so as to emphasize the similar yet different values in
the heavenly and earthly worlds between which his peregrinus
must choose' (pp. 18-19), and points out the double-entendre
in the use of the words dream, blead, duguð, which have the
sense of heavenly joys in lines 64b-80a, and of departed
social joys in lines 80b-88a. Greenfield's earlier observa-
tions are less apt than his later. The land-dweller is
referred to almost with contempt, while the reflections on the
vanished kings and emperors are nostalgic, so it is not really
valid to regard the two as parallel. But he is correct in
noting a punning effect in the use of the same words with
different meanings in two juxtaposed passages, although 'word-
play,' might be a better description of this technique than
'pun'. It seems to me, however, that this juxtaposition has
the purpose, not of bringing out an ambivalence in the seafarer's


69 Greenfield accepts Miss Whitelock's interpretation in
the main. See above, Chap. II, pp. 86-87.
attitude, but of giving rather a hollow ring to the words dream, blæd, and duguð, as a better 'joy', 'glory', and 'company' (of warriors) have just been described.

The change of critical approach in the matters of syntax and structure can also be seen in another feature of Old English poetic style: the use of figurative language. Tolman, in 1887, states categorically: '... simile and allegory are too conscious and elaborate for the Anglo-Saxon mind' (p. 28). He observes that the Anglo-Saxons are fond of metaphors and similar figures, and that they use them unconsciously. He adds that they favour '... those figures which can be completed in a single word.' There is some truth in this. Old English diction does, as we have seen, rely heavily on the poetic compound. Many of the kennings and kend heiti are compounds, and, if not compounds, they tend to be brief phrases which come very close to being compounds. As for whether the Old English metaphors are unconscious, sometimes, as in the kenning cited from Brunanburh in which the sun is called 'God's candle', they are clearly very conscious indeed. Wyld, in 1925, also finds metaphor to be more natural than simile to the Anglo-Saxon mind, although he expresses the reasons for this rather differently: 'Simile ... is a very rare ornament of our old poetry. The poet does not merely feel that things are like something else, his mind bridges the gulf, and he sees the two things as identical' (p. 83). In fact, there are no similes in the six elegies under consideration, unless the mysterious Lēodom is mīnum swylce him mon lac gife ('It is to my people as if one gave them a gift'), the first line of Wulf and
Eadwacer, is to be regarded as a simile. Wyld's comment on the Anglo-Saxon tendency to see things as identical rather than like is apt, and highly important. It may be illustrated by the image of binding one's thoughts with fetters in The Wanderer, lines 19-21, and of sorrow as a companion, in line 30 of the same poem. There are not, in fact, many metaphors in the elegies, and where they occur it sometimes seems, as in these cases, that the Anglo-Saxon poet is not so much making an implicit comparison as viewing an abstract thing in a much more concrete way than a modern person would. This type of metaphor may well be used unconsciously.

Whereas Wyld regards the simile as foreign to the Anglo-Saxon mentality, E.G. Stanley, in 1956, is of the opinion that the Anglo-Saxons were fully conversant with simile and allegory, and used them quite consciously. He does, however, admit that some of the expressions which strike us as figurative might not have seemed so to the Old English poets. Stanley's view represents the opposite extreme from Tolman's, and differs considerably from Wyld's. He says, 'The extensive use of simile shows the Anglo-Saxons to have been accustomed to figurative thought ... ' (p. 415). It is not true that

70 'Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Penitent's Prayer,' Anglia, LXXIII, 413-466. Stanley's aim is to establish the possibility for the use of imaginary speakers in these poems by the conscious device of ethopoeia. His interpretation of the poems is based on his preliminary argument for a familiarity with the use of figurative diction. See above, Chap. II, p.88.

71 See Stanley, pp. 418-423.
the Anglo-Saxons used simile extensively, but the occasions on which it occurs are often memorable. Stanley points out various extended similes, for instance that in Daniel (lines 273-277, and 345-351) where the fiery furnace which failed to injure Ananias, Azarias, and Misael is compared to soft spring weather, and the simile in Christ II (lines 850-866) in which life is compared to a voyage in a ship (pp. 415-416). In neither case does the poet appear to have taken his simile from a source. Such similes seem to be 'special-occasion' devices. Shorter similes occur more frequently, but still not very often. Examples are the picture of the boat skimming over the waves like a bird, in Beowulf, 218 (flota famTheals fugle gelfcost) and the description of ice shining 'like gems' in line 30 of The Rune Poem (glsnap gleeshlütittur, gimmum gelfcost). Clearly, the Anglo-Saxons knew how to handle simile.

Stanley also argues that they understood the use of allegory. He admits that it was 'probably not indigenous' with them (p. 417), but believes that their handling of it, in The Phoenix, for instance, shows a mastery of its technique. Again, one can accept that the Anglo-Saxon poets understood allegory, but it is even less common than simile in Old English. The Phoenix is based on a Latin poem. Stanley rather weakens his own argument for a conscious understanding of allegory among the Anglo-Saxons by pointing out, with acknowledgement to Wyld, the union of fact and figure in Old English. Thus, he refers to 'the intermingling of the symbol and the thing symbolized, which, as Wyld says, is characteristic
of O.E. poetry' (p. 414), and later states: 'They [the Anglo-Saxons] treated allegory in a manner revealing a relationship of fact to figure so close that the figure was only an aspect of the fact, and not separable from it' (p. 452). Stanley finds this type of figurative language in the image of the devil shooting arrows of sin into the soul, seen in Beowulf, lines 1740-1747, among other places. As Stanley points out, this may well not be thought as a figure, but be associated with the primitive belief that evils, both moral and physical, were 'shot' into the body by malevolent spirits.72 This kind of figure seems to stem from the same kind of concrete view of the abstract as the 'metaphors' previously cited from The Wanderer. Stanley mentions the figure of the 'fetters' of cold, found in lines 8b-10a of The Seafarer as an image of the same type. This union of fact and figure in Old English poetry is an important feature, and it occurs in the elegies, but it has really nothing in common with the much rarer device of allegory, with which Stanley confuses it.

The comments of Wyld and Stanley on the intermingling of fact and figure bring us to a feature of the Old English poetic technique which has a strong bearing on the elegies. This is the use of description, especially natural description, with a largely symbolic function. Wyld noted this feature, but did not develop it. A number of the early critics make comments which can be related to it, although they were not so related by their authors. Thus, Miss Hanscom, in 1905, in her

72 See Stanley, pp. 421-422. This idea is seen in the charm, Wiþ Færstice.
article on nature in Old English poetry, goes systematically through the various aspects of landscape and weather to see how fully they are treated by the Old English poets. It is these things in the abstract, rather than their function in individual poems, that she investigates. She observes, quite accurately, that the sterner aspects of nature are more prominent, an observation which she makes in rather florid terms:

The fact seems to be that they were impressed only by stern and rough manifestations; when the great harp of nature was struck with sufficient strength, when the icy hand of winter smote the clanging strings, then they lifted up their voices and sang with glee of wailing wind and surging ocean.

(p. 446)

Miss Hanscom sees a romantic exultation in the wilder aspects of nature. What in fact we have is a concentration on the hostile and dour in natural scenes in keeping with the tendency of Old English lyrical poetry to depict melancholy and painful emotions. A typical feature of elegiac poetry is that it abounds in descriptions of winter and storm.73 Commenting on such a description, Miss Hanscom remarks: 'It is such passages as these, vivid in suggestion, barren of detail, that convince us that the early English saw far more fully and accurately than they expressed' (pp. 450-451).

But the poets do not aim to express the details of the natural scene fully and accurately. With reference to the passage in *The Seafarer* describing the seabirds, she says,

73 See above, Chap. I, especially Pilch's catalogue of elegiac motifs, p. 34.
'Surely the man who made these lines had the seeing eye and the hearing ear' (p. 447). In contrast, she finds the descriptions of milder scenes insipid, and refers to pictures of spring and summer, including that in lines 48-55a of The Seafarer as 'slight and unsatisfactory' (p. 440). But the description contained in these lines is in fact no less and no more realistic than that of the seabirds. The blossoming and brightening of the landscape is described in general, but effectively suggestive terms:

Bearwas blœstmum nimaδ, byrig faegriaδ, wongas wlitigaδ . . .

(Seafarer, 48-49a)

In Seafarer 19b-25a, the birds are chosen for their harsh cries and lonely associations: the swan, the gannet, the gull, the tern, the eagle. They are not formed into a clear picture, and the epithets applied to them, Isigfebora and Trigfebora, suggest cold and gloomy connotations rather than the actual appearance of the birds. In the one description the poet is evoking the stirring of the seafarer’s heart with eagerness to go to sea, in the other his lonely ordeal on the wintry ocean. He is not attempting to paint landscapes or seascapes,

Mrs. Gordon and other editors think that Trigfebora (line 25) may be a corruption, since the word is so similar to Isigfebora in the preceding line and there is no alliteration in line 25. If the word is corrupt, probably the poet intended something like it, and meant to suggest the sinister quality of the eagle as the bird of battle (see p. 226 below). Trigfebora is applied to the eagle in battle-descriptions in Judith, 210, and in Elene, 29, and possibly 111 (here it may be applied to the raven, depending on the punctuation).
and thus Miss Hanscom's conclusion that she finds 'at least the germs of nature-observation and feeling' present in Old English poetry (p. 462) is inept.

In 1899, W.E. Mead had made observations on the use of colour-words in Old English poetry which can also be seen to have a bearing on the non-realistic character of description.75 Mead comments on the indefiniteness and paucity of colour-words in Old English verse:

The remarkable fact about a great number of the Old English words that possibly are to be taken as color-words, is that they are so indefinite in their application as scarcely to permit us to decide whether a color-effect is intended or not. (p. 170)

and:

One of the first things that strike the reader of old English poetry is the comparatively small number of genuine color-words that it contains. (p. 171)

Thus, the expression fealwe wēgas in line 46 of The Wanderer tells us precious little about the colour of the waves. Fealu is conventionally applied to the sea, and its meaning is much disputed. Mead expresses uncertainty about it (p. 198). The word probably means 'yellowish,* here a dull brown. It is the depressing quality of the scene rather than its colours that the Wanderer poet is intent upon at this moment. This kind of description is very different, both in its aim and its effect, from the minute observation of detail that we sometimes find in later poetry, as, for instance in Thomson’s reference

75 'Color in Old English Poetry,' PMLA, XIV, 169-206.
to 'the yellow wallflower stained with iron brown' in The Seasons, where he skilfully captures the exact colour-quality of a particular flower. The vagueness of most colour-words in Old English makes the description of the wall in line 10 of The Ruin as raeghear ond reaf*ah ('grey with lichen and stained with red') rather unusual, and lends some support to the belief that the poet had an actual scene in mind.

Mead notes that, in contrast with the small number of words for colour, there are a great many terms for light and dark in Old English and these are often used symbolically (p. 174). This is highly important, and is related to the more general use of words for emotive, rather than visual or aural, effect. Greenfield points out that in the second half of The Ruin 'The former splendour... accumulates in the vague but connotatively rich beorht (lines 21a, 33a, 37, 40a). '76 Here we have the same symbolic usage that Mead commented on. When the poet says Beorht weorburgæced (line 21), he conveys the idea that the halls were joyful and richly adorned rather than that they were well-lit. Pictorial and emotive description mingle in the same way as Wyld and Stanley state that fact and figure mingle. Thus, the poet can describe a warrior as gleedmōa ond goldbeorht (Ruin, 33) as if the psychological and the physical terms were equivalent, the latter having as much emotional reference as the former.

This use of description with an emotive rather than pictorial effect can be seen in the fact that the elements of

a scene are sometimes incongruous or puzzling if taken on a literal level. Thus, in line 48 of *The Wanderer* the poet concentrates three aspects of inclement weather:

hrōsan hrīm ond snǣw hagle gemenged.

His aim is to convey the wanderer's sense of desolation through the bleakness and relentlessness of his environment. On a literal level, hoar-frost does not 'fall', and neither do hail and snow at the same time. The scene described in lines 48-50a of *The Wife's Lament*, the *drēorsele* in which she imagines her husband sitting, cannot be resolved pictorially:

under stānhlipe, storme behrīmed,
wīne wārigmōd wætre beflothwen
on drēorsele.

Here we have a complex of exilic elements, which individually resemble those found in similarly dismal descriptions elsewhere: the 'rime' and the water remind one of the wanderer awakening by the sea with 'rime' and snow falling mingled with hail; the rocky cliff is like the storm-swept cliffs/slopes of *Wanderer*, 101 and *Seafarer*, 23; and the *drēorsele* is like the *eorǷeal* which the wife herself inhabits (line 29). The effect of the description is to attach all kinds of associations of solitude and exile to the figure of the husband, not to present an actual place. Stanley observes exactly the same technique in the description of the mere in *Beowulf*:

Factually the scenery could hardly exist. The combination of fenland and mountains, of wind-swept headlands and woods overhanging the pool is not possible: it is a gallimaufry of devices, each of which is horrific in its associations.

(p. 441)
Stanley in fact criticises Wyld for implying that natural descriptions give rise to moods, and stresses, rightly, that it is the other way round. He speaks of generalizations such as that of H.C. Wyld's

The old poets are fond of using the processes of nature as symbols of mood; it might indeed almost be said that for them

... the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Few will deny that with the old poets the processes of nature may be symbols of their moods; but it is not the flower that gives the thought; with the O.E. poets it is the thought that gives the flower. And the flower that is born of the mood may take on sufficient concreteness to appear capable of existence within and outside the mood.

(p. 427)

This symbolism is rather different from what may seem to be very similar usages in modern poetry, in that, in Old English, although as Stanley says it is the mood that gives rise to the scene, the latter does have an existence of its own on a concrete level. It is not, as in later poetry, consciously subordinated to its symbolic function. Thus, in Wulf and Eadwacer the islands on which the lovers find themselves are symbols of their irrevocable separation in much the same way as the islands in Arnold's 'To Marguerite' are symbols of the isolation of one human being from another:

Wulf is on Æge, ic on Æberre.
Fæst is þæt Æglond, fenne biworpen.

(Wulf and Eadwacer, 4-5)

??Greenfield notes this resemblance ('The Old English Elegies,' p. 164).
and:

Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone.

('To Marguerite.' 1-4)

In Arnold the use of the image is very deliberate, but the Old English poet seems to have arrived at his image instinctively, and presents it as a fact. Once again, we have a blending of symbol and thing symbolised. The same kind of comparison can be made between line 10 of Wulf and Eadwacer and the opening of a poem by Verlaine:

bonne hit wæs rēnig weder  ond ic rēotugu sæt

Il pleure dans mon coeur
Comme il pleut sur la ville.

The modern poet uses a deliberate transference when he says 'It is weeping' just as 'It is raining'. The rather exclamatory style of the Arnold passage makes it the more self-conscious of the two modern pieces, but both contrast sharply with the lines in Wulf and Eadwacer. In both cases, the Old English poem is the more satisfying, because internal and external are at once more simply and more subtly fused.

Some critics have been led to dubiously based interpretations of elements in the poems because of a mistaken assumption that the descriptions in them were to be taken on a realistic level. Thus, Kennedy states: 'Old English poets usually employed adjectives of form, color and sound with a realistic accuracy which reflected careful observation.'

This is simply not true, and the statement gives a false basis to the contention which Kennedy makes in connection with it, that 'the application . . . [in The Seafarer and The Husband's Message] of the adjective mournful to the cuckoo's song had reference to . . . [its] unpleasing change of note in late May and early June, and that the reference was intentionally employed to suggest a sailing date, not in early spring when seas might still be rough, but in June when the ocean would normally be safe and calm for pleasant voyaging.' All this is very plausible, but it would be highly unlike the Old English poets to be so precise in this regard. Also, the adjective used is 'mournful' (geðomor), not 'harsh', and appears to be deliberately chosen in both cases to contrast with the fairly cheerful tone of the context. A similar attempt to interpret the details of a poem realistically when they are intended symbolically is made by Miss Kershaw and Roy Leslie, when they make suggestions as to the exact nature of the dreorsele described towards the end of The Wife's Lament. Miss Kershaw suggests that the scene may be 'a flooded ruin or . . . a cave on the coast to which access can be obtained only by water.'79 She obviously finds difficulty in incorporating the various elements of the description. Leslie, solving the problem by ignoring some of them, proposes more simply that the place is an island.80 But, as we have seen, the description is not capable of being resolved on a literal level.

80Leslie, Three Old English Elegies (Manchester, 1961), p. 58.
The imagery of the elegies has sometimes been interpreted with a more specific thematic relevance. Two perceptive contributions are those of Irving and Greenfield. Commenting on *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*, Irving picks out the image of the crumbling wall in each (e.g., Wætlīc is béswéalstān in line 1 of *The Ruin*, and Stoneð nū on læste læofre dugube / wealwundrum hēah wyrmlīcum fāh in lines 97-98 of *The Wanderer*). He notes: 'The wall—and whatever it may suggest about man's heroic and doomed effort to hold things together, to resist change and death—is crumbling and battered by storm, but it endures, somewhat in the way the hero's fame endures' (p. 156). A further extension of this theme applies to *The Wanderer*: 'In the world of epic this [i.e., courage and fame] is a man's ultimate greatness and all that can survive of him, even though it will not last forever. In the Christian world we can turn to that wall that cannot fall into ruin, the faestnung "firmness, stability; fortress [?]" of God the Father.' Greenfield too makes a comment on the 'wall' image of *The Wanderer*. His interpretation is of a different kind, but also has light to throw on the theme of transience in the poem. He states: 'there is ... a shift between parts one and two of the monologue from references to "hall" to references to "wall".' The references


82'The O.E.Elegies,' *Continuations and Beginnings*, 142-175.

83Irving's square brackets.
in the former section 'imply warmth and hope for the exile who sees only his narrow predicament as one capable of remedy in another place, another time. But the wise man who sees the futility of all earthly joys focuses on the external and more forbidding "wall". Having finally shown 'all this earthly gesteal (line 110a ...) emptied of human life and values,' the poet can, in his conclusion, 'state the source of true fæstnunc' (p. 150).

Finally, we come to the formulaic studies of Old English poetry. The seminal work in this field was the article published by Francis P. Magoun, Jr. in 1953. Magoun applied the findings of Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord, in connection with Homeric and modern oral Yugoslavian poetry, to Old English verse. He believed that the bulk of Old English poetry was composed orally, in a formulaic tradition. Magoun states, rather sweepingly: 'Oral poetry, it may be safely said, is composed entirely of formulas, large and small, while lettered poetry is never formulaic' (p. 447). He argues that poets composing orally did not memorise their material, but worked extempore by piecing together inherited formulas and shaping expressions on the basis of traditional formulaic systems. Magoun accepts Parry's definition of a formula as 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea,' and defines a formulaic system as a group of formulas of the same

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84 Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry,' Speculum, XXVIII, 446-467.
type (i.e., the underlying pattern behind phrases of the same kind). Magoun states that an oral singer's 'apprenticeship involves the learning of thematic material, plots, proper names, and formulas with which he will gradually become able to compose . . .' (p. 447). Further, he believes that the existence of formulas provides the touchstone as to whether a given poem is oral or lettered (p. 449).

Magoun's position is an extreme one, and would not be accepted in its entirety by most scholars, although some have followed him in stressing the view of most Old English poetry as composed extemporaneously on traditional formulaic patterns. Thus, Robert Creed 'remakes' a passage from Beowulf to show how the poet would have composed extempore in the first place. The fact that his version is decidedly flatter than the original rather suggests that the poet exercised more time and care than Creed is willing to allow. Greenfield makes the point that Old English poetry need not be composed with careless rapidity, and specifically attacks Creed's article. Brodeur criticises Magoun for implying a lack of originality in the poetry, and stresses that the diction of Beowulf, at least,

85 See Magoun, pp. 449-450.

86 Campbell uses a 'test' similar to this when he attempts to distinguish the older from the newer material in The Seafarer. See above, Chap. II, pp. 66-67.


'goes far beyond the inherited stock of words and formulas.'

Others have accepted Magoun's theory in the main, but added qualifications to it. Thus, Campbell, with particular reference to *The Seafarer*, expresses the opinion that educated poets could have written their poems in formulaic style rather than dictated them to themselves, as Magoun assumes, and he also considers that memorisation had a part to play in the transmission of songs. These are reasonable qualifications. Similarly, O'Neil, in his response to Campbell's article, and also with reference to *The Seafarer*, states:

There are now few who would not subscribe to and extend to Anglo-Saxon poetry in general Mr. Diamond's statement, about Cynewulf's poetry, that in Anglo-Saxon England . . . there is the possibility of three kinds of poetry: (1) poetry composed orally and written down by a scribe; (2) poetry composed pen in hand in the modern way; (3) poetry composed by a learned poet making use of the traditional poetic formulas . . .

Again, one would accept that written poetry on the formulaic pattern cannot be distinguished from oral poetry written down by a scribe. In fact, Magoun's work has been valuable in drawing attention to the traditional and conventional basis of Old English poetry, but he goes too far in regarding the poetry as entirely formulaic and in making so sharp a distinction

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89See Brodeur, pp. 5-6.


between oral and lettered poetry.

The most important formulaic study as far as the elegies are concerned is that of Greenfield: 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry.' In his analysis, Greenfield divides the formulas associated with exile into four categories: (1) status, the key phrases being *wineleas wraeca*, an A-verse, and *earm eanhaga*, a D-verse; (2) deprivation, with past participles like *bereafod* and *bedaled*; (3) state of mind, with adjectives such as *hēan*, *earm*, *ge斯or*, and compounds in -cearig; and (4) movement in or into exile, e.g., *wadan wraeclāstas*, a D-verse. Examples of these formulas and formulaic systems in the elegies can be multiplied.

*Wineleas wraeca* occurs in line 10 of *The Wife's Lament*. The similar, but less typical, *wineleas guma* is found in line 45 of *The Wanderer*. And the formula occurs in the other elegies as well as the typical six. Thus, we find it in line 91 of *Resignation*, not surprisingly, in close proximity to *anhaga*, which appears in line 89. The formula is also found in poems which are not elegies but which contain exilic situations. Thus, in *Genesis*, line 1051, *Cainlis* described as a *wineleas wrecca*. In the same way, *wadan wraeclāstas* occurs in line 5 of *The Wanderer*, and *Satan*, in *Christ and Satan*, line 120 says that he must *wadan wraeclāstas*. He has just referred to himself as *hēan* and *earm*, and goes on to describe himself as

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93 *Speculum*, XXX (1955), 200-206.

94 A statement not logically appropriate to a prisoner. See p. 228 below.
duguþum bedæled.

As Greenfield points out, 'The importance of ascertaining conventional patterns in Old English poetry lies ... in the basis such patterns establish for the further investigation of the aesthetic values of individual poems' (p. 205). An awareness of the conventional background enables the reader to recognise that the poet is calling upon traditional language and traditional connotations, and also to assess his handling of them in a particular poem—as the Anglo-Saxon audience would have done. Greenfield observes elsewhere: 'originality in the use of formulas and themes depended on the degree of tension created between the traditional associations evoked by these stylizations and the unique applicability they had in their specific contexts.'

He illustrates with particular reference to The Wanderer how the good poet can create this 'tension', pointing out that 'the opening line temporarily suspends the conventional associations of "wretchedness"' to be developed later, and that ánhdagæ is linked with Ære, God's mercy, 'a key idea in the poem that is brought to a resolution in its conclusion.' In his study of the formulas Greenfield analyses the early part of The Wanderer quite closely. He notes that the poet begins with a general picture of an ánhdagæ, and goes on to a more specific depiction of the speaker's personal position:

Oft earmcearig, ęõle biðedæled,
frœomægum feor ...
Greenfield comments especially on the -cearig compounds (noted above as particularly effective), and finds a deliberate sequence in the series mōdccearig (line 2), earmcearig, wintercearig. Of wintercearig, he says: 'It is perhaps no accident of textual transmission that the last of these words is a hapax legomenon. It catches up both the ideas of "state of mind" and the hrtmcéalde sæ [line 4].'97 Thus, as Greenfield demonstrates, the skilful poet need not be limited by the traditional mould in which he works, but can use the conventional patterns to create something unique.

Other formulaic studies have a bearing on elegiac poetry, though less directly on the six elegies with which we are dealing. Magoun, in 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry,'98 shows how the picture of the wolf, eagle, and raven as attendant on battle is a set-piece in Old English poetry and finds its expression in traditional formulas and formulaic systems. He considers lines 81b-83a of The Wanderer to be a treatment of this theme. Here we have a sum-series setting out the various deaths of men in battle.99


98NM, LVI (1955), 81-90.

The wolf and a fugel, which may be the eagle, are mentioned. Diamond, in 'Theme as Ornament in Anglo-Saxon Poetry,' also discusses the theme as a set-piece, concentrating chiefly on the battle theme, but also mentioning the sea-voyage, comitatus, and cold-weather themes. The last three, especially the theme of cold-weather, are drawn on in elegiac poetry. Leonard Frey discusses those places in the Christian epic poems which have associations with exile and elegy. The examples he cites are as follows: the conversation between Andrew and God in the guise of a mariner, where Andrew is presented as a destitute exile (Andreas, lines 290-314); Andrew's ordeal in prison, where there is an extended description of wintry weather (Andreas, 1253-65); the messenger's report from Guthlac; certain passages from Christ and Satan in which Satan appears as an exilic figure (lines 81-95, 119-124, and 163-171).

Frey notes that many of these passages are inappropriate if one attempts to fit them literally into the narrative context. This observation will be seen to be related to the point made earlier, that external description often serves a symbolic function. Thus, Frey remarks that the description of the wintry weather during Andreas' night in prison is, in a way, absurd, since this is taking place in Mermedonia, an

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100PMLA, LXXVI (1961), 461-468.
102Discussed above in Chap. I as an example of elegy.
imaginary country somewhere in the region of Ethiopia, certainly in a hot climate. Frey states: 'The poet is not concerned with what applies to Mermedionia, only with the effective presentation of a difficult and hostile environment.' (p. 297). We saw that the description of wintry weather in *The Wanderer*, line 48, though less conspicuously inappropriate, was not to be taken literally. Frey points to other examples of incongruity, including Satan's lament (*Christ and Satan*, 119-124) that he must 'tread the tracks of exile'. Frey comments: 'A strange claim, certainly, if taken literally, that Satan must wander widely and walk the exile's path.' He adds that the poet is intent on 'the symbolic sense of destitute wandering' (p. 300).

Many critics have pointed out the incongruous use of a conventional image, especially with regard to the description of winter in *Andreas*. This has been noted by Stanley, Diamond, and Bessai (who terms this type of usage 'an exile-trope'), among others. Bessai also points out as an 'exile-trope' used 'inappropriately' The Father's lament in *Beowulf*, where the desolate hall described has no logical connection with the death of Hrethel's son. Stanley makes it clear that he does not find such usages inartistic. Bessai

103 'O. E., Poetic Diction,' p. 440.

104 'Theme as Ornament,' p. 468.

105 F. Bessai, 'Comitatus and Exile in Old English Poetry,' *Culture*, XXV (1964), 139-144.
seems to consider them faulty. Those critics who look for realism are certainly liable to find them so. Kennedy objects to The Father's Lament because it lacks a realistic basis:

To a degree not found elsewhere, these lines suggest how readily the characteristic images of elegiac invention hardened into a conventional pattern. The evidence is found in the fact that in this passage certain of these characteristic elegiac images are employed in circumstances in which there is no grounding in realism to suggest them.106

Kennedy is wrong in thinking that there is a grounding in realism to suggest these images elsewhere. As we have seen, they are expressions of mood so concrete that they take on an existence of their own.

Summarising the distinctive features of style in the elegies, as noted by critics, we can say that although they contain formal features which pervade the whole of Old English poetry, there are certain differences in their use of them. The prosody of the elegies is sometimes unusual. They are not conspicuous in their use of formal devices: simile and allegory are absent; true kenning is rare; metaphor often seems to be used unconsciously. They are imaginative in their use of compounds, without seeming to strive for an effect. Altogether, the elegies are more informal and spontaneous than most Old English poetry. The above qualities have not been systematically categorised by critics, and their observations have tended to be scattered and in passing, but they do point in the direction indicated.

As we have seen in other areas, scholars have come to credit the Old English poets with a greater degree of sophistication in the matter of style. They have also come more to study the structure of poems and the relation of style to content, rather than giving lists of striking phrases and purple passages. There have been a number of perceptive studies of the structural and thematic use of diction and imagery in individual elegies. Critics have become more aware of the symbolic function of description, something which is particularly relevant to the elegies, where much of the evocation of mood is achieved by it. The formulaic analyses of diction have enabled critics to distinguish quite sharply those words and word-patterns associated with certain elegiac situations. The more recent studies of structure, imagery, and formula have shown that, although the elegies are full of conventional elements, the traditional patterns and the traditional elegiac words and phrases can be handled with striking freshness and power.
CONCLUSION

Thus, the survey undertaken in the preceding chapters has evaluated criticism pertaining to the elegies from the three standpoints of definition, interpretation of meaning, and stylistic analysis. It has been found that although the use of the term 'elegy' has been variously applied, and rejected by some, it is a convenient and valid term to cover a body of Old English poetry linked by certain typical themes and forms. No simple generalisations can be made as to the meanings of the six elegies discussed. The meaning of each poem is different. However, certain comments may be made which apply to all.

The old view of the poems as pagan is inappropriate. It is better to regard those poems and passages which are not specifically Christian as secular, at the same time acknowledging their indebtedness to an outlook on life which goes back to pagan times. Also, the poems should be taken as they stand, without attempting to cut out later 'interpolations'. All the same, the Christian-didactic aspect of the poems has been overstressed by some critics, especially those who interpret the poems allegorically. There is, to my mind, no evidence for allegorical interpretation. In the wholly secular poems such as The Husband's Message and The Wife's Lament an allegorical reading is thoroughly out of place. The Wanderer and The Seafarer, which contain explicitly didactic material, admit of symbolic overtones on a moral level, but this is not to say that they are allegories. It has been convincingly
shown that The Wanderer and The Seafarer reveal an awareness of Latin patristic influence, at least via the tradition of the Old English homilies. There may also be non-ecclesiastical Latin influence behind these and other elegies, but this is more difficult to prove. There is insufficient evidence to assign any of the poems to a heroic cycle, and the abstract nature of the elegies makes such a connection unnecessary and inappropriate on a literary level. The elegiac poems are not homogeneous in their subjects. The Wanderer and The Seafarer are similar in that both contain moralising inspired by the idea of earthly transience. The Ruin also embodies the theme of transience, but without the moral complement. The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer are both love-laments, while The Husband's Message is a love-poem more optimistic in subject and more formal in kind.

Stylistic analysis of the elegies has been of two types. The first, containing by far the larger number of critical works, has been concerned with the style of Old English poetry as a whole, and has merely taken examples from the elegies. The second has examined the elegies for their own sake. This latter type of criticism has been concerned chiefly with what I designated 'structural repetition' and with the relation of imagery to the overall meaning and effect of the poems. It has tended to make remarks about individual poems rather than relating them to recurrent elegiac patterns. Just as the
elegies differed in subject, so they were found to differ stylistically. The Wanderer and The Seafarer are probably the most alike, but even they show metrical differences. The Ruin is quite unusual in its formal stylistic features, and Wulf and Eadwacer is very different both metrically and stylistically from all the other elegiac poems. The term 'elegy' will therefore remain a loose classification in this connection.

It appears to me that there are two main areas in which further study of the elegiac poems would be fruitful. On the one hand, the formal stylistic features of the poems could be evaluated with specific regard to the elegies, as Brodeur has done with Beowulf.\(^1\) The metrical and rhythmic characteristics of the poems could be investigated in particular, since they are quite varied, and have not, as far as I am aware, been studied with regard to elegiac poetry as a type. On the other hand, it would be profitable to study the interconnections among the elegiac poems with respect to the looser features of theme and imagery, in much the same way as Greenfield has studied the formulaic features.\(^2\) Much has been said as regards the content of the poems. It is along the lines of formal style and less formal elegiac pattern that most remains to be done.

\(^1\) A.G. Brodeur. The Art of Beowulf (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960).

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