

**Birds and Bird-lore in the Literature of Anglo-Saxon
England**

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I, Mohamed Eric Rahman Lacey, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis presents an interdisciplinary approach towards understanding the ways in which Anglo-Saxons perceived the birds around them and the cultural associations with which we find them endowed in the literature. It focuses on closely examining the entire range of primary sources available to us in order to build as accurate and as complete a picture of Anglo-Saxon bird-lore as possible, and it stresses the indivisibility of observational experiences of birds and their cultural associations.

As very little work has been done on birds in Old English, this thesis starts with the fundamentals: how were birds categorised, identified and differentiated? Such fundamental questions must be addressed if we are not to anachronistically impose our own understanding on the Old English evidence. My examination reveals that birds were primarily heard, rather than seen, and that this experience of birds is reflected in the literature, where descriptions focus on their calls, instead of their appearances.

This aural primacy is stressed throughout the thesis. In the first half of the thesis I argue for remnants of an apparently ancient, and common Germanic, practice of augury in the literature of Anglo-Saxon England, in which the vocalisations of birds were held to contain prophecies and tidings of present import. I present arguments for this belief being grounded in observed experience, stressing the connection between bird-lore and the lived experiences of birds in the Anglo-Saxons' environment. In the second half of the thesis, I demonstrate that Christian bird-lore was quite different, being steeped in symbolism and scholarly tradition rather than naturalistic observation, but that it had common ground in associating birds with divine knowledge. I subsequently show how the Christian traditions of birds interacted with pre-Christian bird-lore – both in terms of augury and in terms of Anglo-Saxon proto-scientific classification.

Contents

Acknowledgements	8
Abbreviations	9
Introduction	11
Birds and bird-lore	12
Problem and Method	16
Methodology: the comparative approach	17
Outline of thesis	19
A note on orthography	22
A note on texts	22
Part One – Pre-Christian Bird-lore	24
Chapter One: Semantics of bird names and Old English Taxonomy	25
Introduction	25
Theory and Method	27
Taxonomy and ‘science’	27
‘Species’ and lexis	32
What’s in a name?: bird-names and their semantic fields	34
Overview of previous scholarship	38
<i>Hroc, hrefn and crawe</i>	43
The visual criteria	54
<i>Pullis corvorum</i> – and its implications for <i>Corvid</i> taxonomy	57
<i>Corvid</i> perception and taxonomy	59

Ideophonic bird-names	60
<i>Ule and ufe</i>	61
<i>Brysce and þrostle</i>	65
<i>Higera and hraga</i>	69
An Anglo-Saxon genus? The case of OE <i>ganot</i>	72
<i>Ganot</i> as attested in Old English	72
The <i>ganot</i> outside Old English	80
The semantic range of OE <i>ganot</i>	82
The Birds of <i>The Seafarer</i> – revisited	83
Previous identification	83
<i>Ylfetu</i>	84
<i>Ganet</i>	89
<i>Huilpe</i>	93
<i>Mæw</i>	93
<i>Stearn</i>	94
<i>Earn</i>	95
<i>Geac</i> and the <i>anfloga</i>	96
Chapter Two: Augury in Anglo-Saxon England	100
Beasts of battle	101
The supernatural aspect	103
The natural basis: analogous evidence and historical speculation	114
The religious aspects	120
Literary representations of augury	122

Chanting birds	122
Talking birds	129
The talking birds of <i>The Seafarer</i>	136
Historical evidence for augury	144
Glossary evidence	151
The penitential evidence	154
Conclusion	164
Part Two – Christian Bird-lore	166
Chapter Three: Sparrows in Anglo-Saxon England	167
Problematising Bede’s account	167
The significance of the sparrow	174
Sparrows and the soul in Anglo-Saxon England	181
Conclusion	190
Appendix: Sparrows and biblical allusions in Old English	192
Chapter Four: Doves in Old English Literature	196
Old English words for ‘dove’: <i>culfre</i> and <i>turtle</i>	197
Dove-lore in Anglo-Saxon England	202
The Dove, white bills, and <i>bilewitnysse</i>	204
<i>Corvidae</i> and doves	213
Doves and augury	222
Doves and the Holy Ghost	233
Chapter Five: The Bird-Soul	250
Souls in dove-form	250

Swans, souls and doves	259
Excluding the transformational tradition: the case of the swan-maidens	270
Conclusions	280
Summary	280
Future implications	281
Bibliography	283
Primary sources	283
Secondary sources	292
List of figures:	
1.1 Lexical hierarchies in Modern English	28
1.2 Intermediary taxonomic levels in Modern English	29
1.3 Lexical hierarchies in Modern English and Old English	30
1.4 Collected transliterations of crow (<i>Corvus corone</i>), rook (<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>) and raven (<i>Corvus corax</i>)	46
1.5 Translations of <i>pullis coruorum</i> in Old English	57
1.6 Transliterations of jay and heron calls	70
1.7 Winter vocalisations of <i>ganet</i> candidates	91
3.1 Sparrows and biblical allusions in Old English	192

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Abbreviations

<i>ASC</i>	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
<i>BT</i>	J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller, <i>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary</i> (London: Clarendon Press, 1898)
<i>BWP</i>	S. Cramp, et al., <i>Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: Birds of the Western Palearctic</i> , 9 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1977-1994)
<i>CBG</i>	L. Svensson, et al., <i>Collins Bird Guide: The Most Complete Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland and Europe</i> , 2 nd edn (London: HarperCollins, 2009)
<i>CCSL</i>	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
<i>CH I</i>	<i>Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series, Text</i> , ed. by P. Clemoes, EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)
<i>CH II</i>	<i>Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text</i> , ed. by M. Godden, EETS s.s. 5 (London: OUP, 1979)
<i>CSASE</i>	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
<i>CUP</i>	Cambridge University Press
<i>DOE</i>	<i>Dictionary of Old English A-G</i> (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English, 2007) < http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/ > [accessed 11/11/2013]
<i>DOEC</i>	<i>Dictionary of Old English Corpus</i> (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English, 2009) < http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/ > [accessed 11/11/2013]
<i>EETS</i>	Early English Texts Society
<i>IEW</i>	J. Pokornoy, <i>Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch</i> , 5 th edn, 2 vols (Bern and München: Francke, 1959-1969).
<i>MED</i>	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001) < http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/ > [accessed 23/11/2013]
<i>MGH</i>	Monumenta Germaniae Historica

<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> (Oxford: OUP, 2013) <www.oed.com> [accessed 25/11/2013]
<i>OEM</i>	<i>Old English Martyrology</i>
<i>OUP</i>	Oxford University Press
<i>PE I</i>	<i>The Poetic Edda: Volume I: Heroic Poems</i> , ed. and trans. by U. Dronke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)
<i>PE II</i>	<i>The Poetic Edda: Volume II: Mythological Poems</i> , ed. and trans. by U. Dronke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. by J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844-64)
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>S</i>	Indicates charter number from P. Sawyer, <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography</i> (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968)
<i>Skj</i>	<i>Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning</i> , ed. by Finnur Jónsson, 4 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912-15)
<i>Supp.</i>	<i>Homilies of Ælfric: Supplementary Collection</i> , ed. by J. C. Pope, EETS 259, 260, 2 vols (London: OUP, 1967-8)
<i>VGM</i>	<i>Vita Gregorii Magni</i>

Introduction

An Old English calendar from Sherborne, c.1061, makes the following observation under its entry for the eleventh of February: *her onginnað fugelas to singenne*.¹ It is endearing in its simplicity: ‘at this time the birds begin to sing’. This stands out from all the other entries in the calendar, most of which are records of different saints’ days; the other notes are on the lengths of days, for example. Animals do not feature in the calendar otherwise. The reference to bird-song clearly shows bird-song’s capacity to mark the passing of time, and the combination of there being less noise pollution, as well as birds specialising in projecting their voices as far as possible in their respective ecological niches, means these songs would have been very noticeable.² This reference also betrays some subtle but significant aspects of the Anglo-Saxons’ experience of birds. One of these aspects is the primacy of aurality: the birds are not observed (and indeed, there are very few physical descriptions of birds in Old English), but their sounds are ubiquitous across the Anglo-Saxon landscape – both the literary landscape and the physical one.³ Another, though more implicit, aspect revealed by these calendar entries is that there is an informative aspect to bird calls. We will see much more of this over the course of this thesis. This informative aspect could manifest itself quite naturalistically, as when birds inform the time and season, such those heard singing in the calendars, or when the cuckoo, a summer visitor to the British Isles, is called *sumeres weard* (‘the herald of summer’).⁴ It could also manifest itself in more stylised – even supernatural – ways, as in the ‘beasts of battle’ topos, where the noises of the eagle and raven are among

¹ Kalendar 14 (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422), in *English Kalendars before 1000 AD*, ed. by F. Wormald, Henry Bradshaw Society 42 (London: Harrison & Sons, 1934), p. 185.

² C. K. Catchpole and P. J. B. Slater, *Bird Song. Biological Theme and Variation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 71-91.

³ Some fantastic birds are described visually, such as *The Phoenix*, but as we will see, naturalistic birds are never lavished with physical descriptions. Some ostensibly visual descriptions, such as the description of doves not scratching with their claws, are derived from patristic sources and are primarily symbolic. See chapter 5. For an examination of birds and bird-calls in the natural landscape, see K. Poole and E. Lacey, ‘Avian Aurality in Anglo-Saxon England’, *World Archaeology* (forthcoming).

⁴ *The Seafarer* l.54a; see also *Guthlac A*, where *geacas gear budon* (‘cuckoos heralded the spring’, l.743b), and in *The Husband’s Message* (ll.20-23) the cuckoo’s call is the sign for the the message’s recipient to travel over the seas – presumably because of the fair seafaring weather that accompanies spring.

its defining features.⁵ A third aspect of this entry is the way in which bird-lore which pre-dated the Christian conversion is assimilated into a Christian context. We can assume that heathen Anglo-Saxons had always noticed that time of year, around mid-February, when all the birds started to sing. In this sole witness to Anglo-Saxons remarking on the day when birds begin to sing, however, we find it sandwiched between lists of saints' days and the litanies required for them, linking birdsong with human worship.

These three aspects noted above form the investigatory themes – and thus the key arguments – of this thesis. On the one hand, I demonstrate the aural primacy of Anglo-Saxon bird experiences, both in life and in literature. This auralty is very closely linked with the second theme, that of the bringing of information. I argue that this has a natural basis, but that it also has roots in both Christian and pre-Christian religions, where birds either literally bring information in the form of prophecies, or where birds bring information by example. The third theme entails those features of Anglo-Saxon pre-Christian bird-lore which may be identified as being borrowed into Christianity syncretically, and I explore the reasons for these borrowings.

Birds and bird-lore

Birds are ubiquitous both in life and in literature, and in both spheres they are multivalent. This is as true today as it was in the Anglo-Saxon period. In life they are (and would have been) pests, pest-controllers, markers of time, music-makers and raucous sleep-spoilers. In art and literature today soaring birds may indicate freedom or imprisonment, depending on whether the observer watches them in the open themselves, or from within a confined space. Anglo-Saxon birds were equally multivalent. Ravens, for example, often heralded forthcoming slaughter, but in Bede's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* ravens are model penitents.⁶ Their meanings are related in both life and literature, and so these spheres cannot be examined in isolation. The

⁵ These are investigated in detail in chapter two.

⁶ *Two Lives of Cuthbert* ed. and trans. by B. Colgrave (Cambridge: CUP, 1940), chap. XX.

lived experience of Anglo-Saxons fed into their bird-lore, and their bird-lore in turn governed how they experienced the world around them. Ravens, for example, would have attended the slaughter noisily, giving the impression they were relishing in it (though in reality these calls are used to draw non-resident ravens to carcasses to overwhelm the dominant resident pair).⁷ This clearly underlies the ‘beasts of battle’ topos – yet it also underlies Bede’s use of them as model penitents: if such barbarous birds are able to repent (and be forgiven), then there is more hope of forgiveness for good Christian men.

This example of the ravens also draws attention to the reorientation of the cultural values attributed to birds as Anglo-Saxon culture became more Christian. There is both consistency and change, and an exploration of the elements which change completely, are substituted, and are re-oriented comprises the third thematic strand of this thesis. A combination of stasis and transition is to be expected: although the religions and cultures changed in Anglo-Saxon England between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, the environment remained more or less consistent; a good analogue is in the reorientation of pagan words following the arrival of Christianity. Some words, such as *giedd* (‘song’, but also ‘dirge’, and even ‘prophecy’) and *wyrd* retain overtones of their previous meaning while remaining formally the same and adapting to new contexts.⁸

In the interests of trying to understand how religious and cultural change affected the ways birds were seen, I have chosen to focus on ‘popular conceptions’. This is difficult given the circumstances of preservation: not just the chance survival of Old English texts, but also the fact that they were written down by monks and nuns in monastic contexts. My determining of ‘popular conceptions’, in this way, has been largely genre and context-dependent, although it has depended on the frequency with which they occur as well. Ultimately, those texts which are likely to have had a large audience or readership or both have been assumed to reflect popular conceptions.

⁷ B. Heinrich and J. Marzluff, ‘Do common ravens yell because they want to attract others?’, *Behavioural Ecology and Sociobiology*, 28 (1992), 13-21.

⁸ For *gydd* as prophecy and dirge see R. North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings* (Amsterdam: Rodopi: 1991), pp. 40-3. For *wyrd* see E. G. Stanley, *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975), pp. 92-125.

Thus homilies, heroic poetry and even the elegies are taken to reflect ideas more popular than those tucked away in a Latin commentary on the Bible, for example. Similarly, in the interests of gauging which aspects of bird-lore were popular, I have examined a wide range of literatures, from *Beowulf* to Bede, from Ælfric's Homilies to the elegies.

Any analysis of the birds in Old English literature must take into account a difficult and hitherto neglected, but necessary point: the very basic categorisation, identification, and perception of birds. To approach birds – or indeed any animal – without making these provisions is ultimately anachronistic: our experience of birds today is shaped not only by a *mélange* of cultural factors, but by the advent of the tirelessly rigorous empiricism that characterises the modern scientific tradition. Furthermore, living in the age of secularism, we are accustomed to separating the scientific and the religious. Applying this sort of divide between phenomena deemed religious, and phenomena deemed scientific, would also be anachronistic. David Lindberg, writing here specifically of Christianity, observes that religion assimilated the natural sciences into its rhetoric and world-view early on because

the temporal [i.e. the natural sciences] could serve the eternal by supplying knowledge about nature that would contribute to the proper interpretation of Scripture and the development of Christian doctrine.⁹

Valerie Flint, examining magic in the middle ages, candidly relates how 'the historian pales' at having to define and partition science and magic from religion as they are such intimately related concepts,¹⁰ and Richard Kieckhefer, producing a model for what should be considered magic and science based on the medieval evidence, defines magic as both science and religion: 'natural magic' was a 'branch of science', 'demonic magic' was a 'perversion of religion'.¹¹ What this means in

⁹ D. C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 151.

¹⁰ V. I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 7-9.

¹¹ R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 9.

relation to birds is that any ostensibly ‘magical’ qualities they might possess, or indeed, any religious connotations they may bear, are likely to carry over into other spheres. The raven is particularly interesting in this respect, and we shall see how its natural behaviour was perceived to be magical, for example.

It is prudent to define the key terms of my thesis title. ‘Birds’ may seem self-evident, but it must be stated that in this thesis I examine only those creatures which today we still know as birds. In the later middle ages, bees and bats were often identified as birds. Chaucer, in his *Parlement of Foules*, describes, for example

The swalwe, mortherere of the foules smale
That maken hony of floures freshe of hewe.
(ll.353-4)¹²

His swallow is a *mortherere* because it kills bees, which Chaucer calls *foules smale* (‘small birds’). However, the earliest reference I have found to bees as birds is from the thirteenth-century *De proprietatibus rerum* (‘On the properties of things’, XII.5) by Bartholomaeus Anglicus, made popular in England by John Trevisa’s subsequent translation.¹³ It is not in, for example, the popular naturalist works of Pliny or Isidore. The idea that the bat (*vespertilio*) was a bird is found in these works (e.g. Isidore’s *Etymologiae* XII.vii.36). There is no vernacular evidence which suggests this sort of thinking was found among the Anglo-Saxons. Indeed, the presence of terms such as *hreaðemus* (‘ornamented mouse’) and *hreremus* (‘rowing mouse’) for ‘bat’ suggest that they identified it as a sort of *mus* (‘mouse’),¹⁴ although I have found nothing to suggest how they categorised bees. This probably speaks in favour of them not being identified as birds, as the semantic category for ‘insects’ and

¹² *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by L. D. Benson (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p. 390.

¹³ *On the Properties of Things: Trevisa’s Translation of Bartholomæus Anglicus, ‘De Proprietatibus Rerum’: A Critical Text*, ed. by M. C. Seymour, et al., 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-88).

¹⁴ *BT*, s.v. ‘hreaþe-mus’.

‘bugs’ was covert in English for a long time, and was not lexicalised until the eighteenth century.¹⁵

I define ‘bird-lore’ more widely than its general usage today. I take it to mean not only the traditional beliefs regarding, or popular associations of, birds, but moreover to refer to learned conceptions of them too. The advantage of this is that where we find beliefs and ideas with long textual traditions behind them, such as biblical lore surrounding the dove, these can be examined alongside culturally prevalent associations, such as those of the raven in the ‘beasts of battle’ topos.

Problem and Method

This thesis investigates the birds, and the bird-lore, of Anglo-Saxon England from a multi-disciplinary perspective. As stated above, birds and bird-lore are examined together because they are indivisible and mutually informative. At the heart of this research are the basic questions: how did the Anglo-Saxons experience birds in their landscape and literature, and what associations did they hold? This is not a phenomenological analysis, however, but a primarily linguistic and textual one which is interested in the language used of birds and their literary depictions. It is concerned with what the Anglo-Saxons can tell us about their experience and understanding of birds rather than trying to recreate these experiences.

Broadly speaking, the research falls into two areas: pre-Christian bird-lore and Christian bird-lore. Generally speaking, components of the former are both naturalistic and religious/magical, whereas the latter prioritises symbolic readings and textual traditions over individual observation. There is no evidence beyond the wholesale importation of some words for Christian bird-lore effecting the ‘scientific’ or taxonomic conception of species (e.g. the borrowing of *culfre*, examined in chapter four). Any investigation into the pre-Christian concepts in Anglo-Saxon

¹⁵ E. R. Anderson, *Folk-Taxonomies in Early English* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), p. 412.

England requires more justification than the investigating Christian ones because of the circumstances of Anglo-Saxon literary production: all our extant literary evidence was produced in monasteries by Christians. These justifications will be outlined in my methodology, below.

Methodology: the comparative approach

No single methodology has been used throughout, as the different types of evidence surveyed lend themselves to different approaches. As it is only my first chapter which employs an anthropological linguistic framework (of folk-taxonomies), I have outlined the theory and background of this approach in the introduction to that chapter. Similarly, I discuss the background to glosses and glossaries before I analyse glossary material in chapter two. Here I will justify the broader, comparative approaches I adopt throughout the rest of the thesis.

In discussing birds as biological entities as well as literary ones, it has been necessary to make use of the fields of ornithology and ethology (the study of animal behaviour). This allows us to extrapolate bird identifications and behavioural patterns from the literary evidence, though underlying the comparisons is the assumption that the behaviour of birds has not changed significantly in the intervening centuries. A similar assumption is made when using comparative ethological data, and like the former, these reflect widely accepted premises in ecological studies: that similar creatures in similar environments will respond to the same stimuli similarly.

The second half of the thesis revolves around the bird-lore of two birds replete with Christian associations: the sparrow and the dove. The comparative material here is relatively straightforward, as it is usually Latin which can be shown to have either influenced, or been influenced by, an Anglo-Saxon text. Whenever possible I have preferred to use those texts which were known to be used, or at least copied, in Anglo-Saxon England. There are many instances – especially in the *Old English*

Martyrology – where we must make assumptions about lost texts if episodes do not match up between extant analogues to the entries.

In the first half of the thesis I focus on pre-Christian bird-lore. Part of the evidence used for constructing the religious beliefs of the Anglo-Saxons is comparative use of the Old Norse-Icelandic evidence (out of convenience I call it the simpler ‘Old Norse’ throughout). The Scandinavians converted to Christianity relatively late. By the eighth century all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were Christian (nominally, at least), though it must have taken longer for paganism to die out completely, as most conversion methods were top-down, focusing on kings and their retainers. It was not until much later that the Scandinavians converted, over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, and Iceland did not accept Christianity as its official religion until 1000 A.D. In these areas we have some skaldic verse which pre-dates conversion written by pagans; this sort of verse is metrically rigid and lexically complex, making it resistant to being easily changed by copyists and scribes.¹⁶ Even when skaldic verse post-dates the Christian conversions, the genre relished the use of complex pagan imagery and mythological allusions in its kennings. There is also Eddic poetry, which comprises narratives relating mythological episodes from pagan beliefs or legendary exploits of heathen heroes. These are preserved in manuscripts from the thirteenth century but pre-date them by some margin – by how much is another question and must be taken on a poem by poem basis. Nevertheless, as Ursula Dronke once remarked, ‘Eddic poetry, read together with the earliest skaldic verse, gives us the closest view we shall ever get of the paths of religious thought among the Germanic people’.¹⁷ The late date of conversion and the preservation of these types of poetry mean that aspects of the related Germanic paganisms are better attested in the more plentiful literature of Old Norse.

The term ‘Germanic paganism’ is a problematic one. We must remember that as ‘a non-codified religion... with strong regional variations’, it is as appropriate to refer to

¹⁶ For Norse poetry as ‘more memorial than improvisational’, see M. Clunies-Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 2 vols (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994-1998), I, p. 23.

¹⁷ U. Dronke, ‘Eddic poetry as a source for the history of Germanic religion’, in H. Beck, D. Ellmers and K. Schier, ed., *Germanische Religionsgeschichte. Quellen und Quellenprobleme* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), repr. in *Myth and Fiction in Early Norse Lands* (Ashgate:Variorum, 1996), pp. IV.656-684, quotation at p. 656.

many paganisms as it is to a single religion.¹⁸ However, it is convenient to use the singular to refer to the paganisms collectively in much the same way as we refer to varying sects of Islam or Christianity by the singular – even where, as in the case of Sufism or Mormonism, sects are different enough for arguments to be produced to exclude them from the umbrella-term.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter One, ‘Semantics of bird-names and Old English Taxonomy’, addresses a fundamental problem with discussing birds – or indeed any animal – in historical languages. That problem is one of speciation: our current concepts of speciation are the product of centuries of empirical thinking. As Susan Crane puts it, the categorisations we impose ‘do not exist in nature, but in observation and analysis of nature’.¹⁹ Before any meaningful discussion can be made of birds in Old English, we must first understand the basis on which species were identified and differentiated. I survey the background of taxonomy formation in non-Linnaean environments, and the basic principles behind bird-names in Old English. I then argue for the primacy of aurality in the naming and identification of birds, and produce several case studies to illustrate this. With *hroc* (‘rook’), *hrefn* (‘raven’) and *crawe* (‘crow’) I show how these birds were not differentiated visually, but appear to have been distinguished on aural grounds. This theme of visually similar birds with different vocalisations is continued in my analyses of the owl-names *ufe* and *ule*, and the thrush-names *þrysce* and *þrostle*. The cases of *higer* (‘jay’) and *hraga* (‘heron’) are quite different: here visually different birds have cognate names because of the similarities of their sounds. This chapter closes with a reappraisal of the identities of the birds of *The Seafarer*, bearing in mind principles of speciation unavailable to previous scholars of Old English bird-names like Margaret Goldsmith and Peter Kitson.

¹⁸ R. Simek, ‘Germanic Religion and Conversion to Christianity’, in B. Murdoch and M. Read, ed., *Early Germanic Literature and Culture*, The Camden House History of German Literature, vol 1 (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), pp. 73-101, at 74.

¹⁹ S. Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 73.

Chapter Two, ‘Augury in Anglo-Saxon England’, carries on with the theme of aurality, moving from the realm of the natural to its overlap with the supernatural. The chapter begins with the ‘beasts of battle’ topos, well known among Anglo-Saxonists. Scholars working on the topos have remarked on the unusual quality of the beasts appearing before the fighting starts, with Joseph Harris going so far as to say that ‘only ultimately religious roots can account for the persistent supernatural features.’²⁰ Harris is right, to an extent, insofar as there are religious roots to the topos. Before furthering the case for religious origins for the ‘beasts of battle’ topos, however, I show that there are other (natural) influences. Using ethological evidence from ecosystems which have wolf, eagle and raven in them, I suggest, based on behaviours of learning exhibited by wolves and ravens, that they could have learned to follow troops of armed men before combat. The link between science, religion, and magic is made clear here. We then move into the realm of the literary, and examine literary depictions of the practice of bird-divination. For part of this we return to *The Seafarer*, to make the case that not just the *anfloga* – but all the birds in the poem – draw on imagery associated with this belief. I close the chapter by producing historical evidence for the practice of bird-divination, beginning with historical narrative sources but then moving on to the glossaries and the penitentials. These latter two groups of texts contain valuable data, but have methodological difficulties: these are discussed before each group of texts, respectively.

Chapter Three, ‘Sparrows in Anglo-Saxon England’, is a comprehensive survey of all the sparrows attested in Old English narrative texts. It begins by problematising the well-known simile of the sparrow from Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* (henceforth *Historia*) by comparing it to other eighth-century accounts of Edwin’s conversion. I argue that Bede fabricated this episode to replace an unseemly tradition about Northumbria’s first Christian king giving in to superstition, and, moreover, that the fabricated episode would have been recognisably allegorical. I then survey other sparrow attestations in Old English

²⁰ J. Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, in C.D. Wright, F. M. Biggs and T. N. Hall, ed., *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007), pp. 3-25, at p. 15.

narrative texts to show that sparrows always derive directly from biblical (usually psalms) imagery.

Chapter Four, 'Doves in Anglo-Saxon England', begins with a philological conundrum: the origins of the Old English word *culufre*. Latin origins are complicated by the irregular sound changes that must take place if we are to derive *culufre* from *columba*. I argue that a Vulgar Latin transmission could accommodate this, and posit both *culufre* and *turtur* as Latin loanwords that oust native OE **dufe* ('dove'). The almost entirely biblical nature of all Anglo-Saxon dove-lore also suggests this wholesale importation of the Latin terms. Although the dove has many biblical associations (such as the dove-sellers scattered from the temple and being used in sacrifice), I have focused on those which have the widest circulation. It is a happy accident that the most widely circulating associations are the most interesting. The OE word *bilewit* ('innocent'), for example, due to its constant association with the dove, becomes folk-etymologised as *bilehwit* ('bill-white'). Further evidence that there was no native dove-lore may be gleaned from the paradoxical relationship between ravens and doves in Christian texts. On the one hand they are contrasted, though in these contrasts more emphasis is placed on the negative qualities of the raven in order to stress the positive qualities of the dove. On the other hand, the dove is syncretistically endowed with aspects of augury normally attributed to the raven. Overtones of augury are used to stress the dove's role as a symbol of the Holy Spirit too, and a detailed investigation into the differences between the dove's appearance in this guise in Old English and the sources for this make this use quite clear.

Chapter Five, 'The Bird-Soul', moves from examining the dove's appearance as the Holy Spirit to any holy spirit. I adduce more evidence for the dove's lack of significance in Anglo-Saxon England. Early depictions of the Holy Spirit (as well as any holy spirit) appear as a swan in both text and iconography, and I argue that this use of the swan indicates reluctance on the part of early Anglo-Saxon Christians to imbue the innocuous dove with such weighty significance. I further argue that we have no evidence that the swan ever symbolised anything comparable to the soul in Germanic paganism either, and show that the so-called 'swan-maidens' do not reflect

a pre-Christian Germanic belief, though a tradition seems to have existed in Old Norse of comparing women to swans and geese.

As several strands are examined over the course of this thesis, it seemed best to append the conclusion as a separate entity. I revisit the strands that have formed the backbone of this thesis: the aurality of birds, their association with information-giving, and the constants and variables as we move from pre-Christian to Christianised bird-lore.

A note on orthography

I have made no attempt to normalise spellings throughout the thesis, opting instead to present spellings as found in differing texts. The only time I have intervened with the edition's presentation of the text is in the two series of Ælfrician homilies edited by Peter Clemoes and Malcolm Godden, where I have supplied the text with modern punctuation for the sake of clarity. When I discuss words generally I have opted for the standardised spellings in both Old Norse and Old English (where late West Saxon is standard).

A note on texts

Unless otherwise stated, all references to Old English poetry are to the *ASPR*;²¹ all references to charters are to Sawyer and the enumeration of documents therein;²² all references to the Latin Bible are to the Weber and Gryson edition of the vulgate;²³ all

²¹ *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. by G. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931-53).

²² P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968).

²³ *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. by R. Weber and R. Gryson, 5th edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

references to Old Norse Eddic poetry are to Neckel and Kuhn;²⁴ all references to Snorri's *Edda* are to Anthony Faulkes' editions;²⁵ and all skaldic references are to Finnur Jónsson's *Skjaldedigting*.²⁶ As a matter of convenience and to facilitate easy cross-referencing, I have given both the dates and the Kotzor/Rauer numbers for entries in the *Old English Martyrology*.²⁷ Similarly, all references to glossaries are by the *DOE* and *DOEC* lineations and to their stipulated editions. There are three exceptions to this. Two exceptions are for the same reason: in both these cases the *DOE/DOEC* lineation is not intuitive. I thus follow J. D. Pheifer's lineation for the Épinal-Erfurt glossaries, and Jan Hendrik Hessels' letter and number sectioning for the Corpus glossaries.²⁸ The third exception is J. Zupitza's edition of a glossary in MS Harley 107. Zupitza's edition is five lines ahead of the *DOE/DOEC* lineation because he includes some extra glosses before the list of *nomina volucris* ('names of flying-creatures'), where the *DOE/DOEC* lineation begins.²⁹

²⁴ *Edda: die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern: I. Text*, ed. by G. Neckel and H. Kuhn., 5th edn (Heidelberg: Winter, 1983).

²⁵ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by A. Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005); *idem.*, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by A. Faulkes, 2 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998); *idem.*, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. by A. Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research 2007).

²⁶ *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigting*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, 4 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912-15), generally abbreviated to *Skj.*

²⁷ *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. by G. Kotzor, Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse, No. 88, 2 vols (Munich: Beck, 1981), and *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. by C. Rauer (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013). Rauer follows Kotzor's enumeration.

²⁸ *Old English Glosses in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary*, ed. by J. D. Pheifer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). *An Eighth Century Glossary, Preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (Ms no. 144)* ed. by J. H. Hessels (Cambridge: CUP, 1890). The *DOE/DOEC* lineation of the former is distinct for the Épinal and the Erfurt glossaries, which makes consultation of Pheifer's edition difficult (where the lineation is the same for both, and where the lack of corresponding entries is marked by empty lines). The *DOE/DOEC* lineation of the latter is numerical, and this makes consultation of the Hessels edition less straightforward (where the alphanumeric numbering of lines begins anew with each letter of the alphabet, e.g. the Second Corpus glossary entry *Bacidones radinne* is entry 2.3 in the *DOE/DOEC* and is B.3 in Hessels' edition).

²⁹ J. Zupitza, 'Altenglische Glossen', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 33 (1989), 237-42, at 239-42.

Part One

Pre-Christian Bird-lore

Chapter One

Semantics of bird names and Old English Taxonomy

Introduction

Before any sort of systematic study can be made of birds in Anglo-Saxon England, we must understand the relevant terminology. This chapter, then, without any aspirations of being an exhaustive analysis of every bird-name attested in Old English,¹ sets out to give us an impression of the semantic ranges of Old English bird-names, and as a result, to give us an impression of the system of taxonomy with which the Anglo-Saxons worked. Moreover, a close study of the attested bird-names gives us insight into what details the Anglo-Saxons were noticing, and as we shall see, it will also tell us a lot about how they experienced the birds in their environment.

In the interests of understanding how the majority of the population at this time perceived birds, I have limited myself to the vernacular evidence. That most of this population noticed these creatures in their landscape is something of which we can be fairly certain: in his analysis of some bird names in Old English, Peter Kitson remarks that ‘practically all attested Old English bird-names are of native Germanic origin, not loans from Latin as the majority of the plant-names are, implying greater awareness by ordinary speakers of varieties of birds than of plants’.² This heightened awareness of the variety of birds among ‘ordinary speakers’ may also be seen in, and the longevity of such an awareness also testified by, the existence of an abundance of modern folk-names for the creatures, many of which can be shown to

¹ Listing these alone has taken a significantly sized article. See C. H. Whitman, ‘The Birds of Old English Literature’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 2 (1898), 149-98.

² P. R. Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, *English Studies*, 78 (1997), 481-505, at 482.

have old roots (e.g. ‘puttock’ for ‘kite’).³ The way in which many of these old bird names describe or evoke the characteristic most apparent about the species in question also suggests a functional origin which is therefore common, rather than intellectual.

In spite of the recent surge of studies in the history of ornithology, very little has been written on the place of this in the early medieval world. This may be partly because these studies understand ornithology as a visual science.⁴ Brunsdon Yapp, however, examining birds in medieval manuscript art, notes that ‘not until the mid-thirteenth century, in Gothic manuscripts, does there appear any attempt at the kind of accurate drawing that might satisfy a modern illustrator,’ and it is not until later that we have evidence of birds being drawn from life (or from a dead specimen).⁵ Indeed, it does not seem to be until the sixteenth century that scientific ornithology of the visually-oriented variety really began, with the works of William Turner, whose *Avium praecipuarum, quarum apud Plinium et Aristotelem mentio est, brevis et succincta historia* was published in 1544, and Conrad Gesner, whose third volume of the *Historiae animalium*, titled *Avium natura*, was published in 1555. More often, however, the beginning of the era of modern ornithology is attributed to the seventeenth-century publication of the collaborative efforts of John Ray and Francis Willughby.⁶ In all these cases we have the work of elite specialists, studying largely from dead animals to allow the observation of details impossible for a field observer.⁷ All this indicates that the close visual inspection of birds developed gradually over time, rather than that it was always the norm. The implication of this is that we must question whether ornithology was as visually oriented for the Anglo-Saxons as it is for us, and indeed was for the pioneers of systematic ornithology.

³ For ‘puttock’ (OE *puttoc) see P. R. Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, *English Studies*, 79 (1998), 2-22 at 9, and W. B. Lockwood, *The Oxford Book of British Bird Names* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), p. 123, s.v. ‘puttock’.

⁴ For an illustrative list see n.6, below.

⁵ B. Yapp, *Birds in Medieval Manuscripts* (London: British Library, 1981), p. 71.

⁶ For more on Turner and Gesner see M. Walters, *A Concise History of Ornithology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), particularly pp. 23-28, and P. Bircham, *A History of Ornithology* (London: Collins, 2007), particularly pp. 24-35. For Ray and Willughby’s *Ornithologia*, see Walters pp. 37-41 and Bircham pp. 59-81.

⁷ Bircham, *History of Ornithology*, pp. 62-66. This observation has also been made several times in the history of ornithology – hence R. T. Peterson, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* (London: HarperCollins, 1954) has markers drawing attention to key criteria which could be used for quick identification in the field.

This chapter has mainly two interrelated aims: first to identify the semantic ranges of Old English bird names; and second, to infer, as far as possible, how birds were grouped and categorised in Anglo-Saxon England. As it is impractical to go through every bird name in the Old English corpus and discuss them thus individually, I will present three preliminary case studies (on corvids, ideophonic names and *ganot*) which I consider to be representative of the main considerations underlying the bird names and bird categorisation. I argue for a much less rigid system of classification than we are used to today; and I argue that this system derived from identificatory criteria inherent within the bird's name, most often its vocalisations, as well as other basic characteristics which depended on the birds' habitat and behaviour.

Theory and Method

Taxonomy and 'science'

Before delving into the evidence, some preliminary remarks are in order. The analysis of bird-names and taxonomy in this chapter is not concerned with the learning of an intellectual elite, but rather with trying to identify, as far as is possible, what the majority of Anglo-Saxons may have understood by a specific term (say, *hroc*, or *hrefn*), and what their conception of 'species' entailed. In the latter respect, as I will deal with what is sometimes called 'folk-taxonomy', it is beneficial to define what a 'folk-taxonomy' is, as well as to introduce pertinent points about this theoretical framework.⁸

Anderson defines a folk-taxonomy as 'a hierarchical semantic system that lexicalizes a domain in human experience or in nature',⁹ and Eugene Hunn usefully describes

⁸ A reliable study of taxonomies in Old and Middle English is available in Anderson, *Folk-Taxonomies in Early English*. My definition draws upon pp. 17-54.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the formation of categories as being based on ‘discontinuities in nature’.¹⁰ When the data has no discontinuities, such as in colours in a spectrum, then focal points are chosen instead.¹¹ All folk-taxonomies begin with a taxonym, which is ‘a single, general term that provides the folk-taxonomy with a head-word or label’;¹² taxonyms are thus relatively arbitrary and can start at any given specificity. There are then subsequent levels of increasing specificity. To give a pertinent example of lexical hierarchies in Modern English:¹³

Table 1.1: Lexical hierarchies in Modern English

Level	
0 (Taxonym)	Animal
I – ‘basic’ terms	Mammal Bird Fish Reptile Insect
II – ‘secondary’	Deer (type of mammal) Hawk (type of bird) Heron (type of bird) Shark (type of fish) Beetle (type of insect)
III – ‘specialised’	Muntjac Deer (type of deer) Sparrowhawk (type of hawk) Hammerhead Shark (type of shark)
IV – ‘technical’	Levant’s Sparrowhawk Scalloped Hammerhead Shark

¹⁰ E. Hunn, ‘The Utilitarian Factor in Folk Biological Classification’, *American Anthropologist*, ns. 84 (1982), 830-47, at 833.

¹¹ For focality and the construction of colour taxonomies, see Anderson, *Folk-Taxonomies*, pp. 55-121.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹³ This information presented in these tables is a combination of Anderson, *Folk-Taxonomies*, pp. 22-3 and my own.

We can also introduce intermediate levels (marked by the affix of –A to the level, e.g. IA, IIA etc.) to account for intermediary culturally or thematically oriented criteria, such as ‘pets’, or ‘domestic animals’. We may see this at work in the following example:

Table 1.2: Intermediary taxonomic levels in Modern English

Level	
0 (Taxonym)	Animals
I – ‘basic’ terms	birds mammals
IA – intermediary	bird of prey (subset of birds) livestock (subset of mammals)
II – ‘secondary’	hawk (type of bird of prey) heron (type of bird) sheep (type of livestock) rat (type of mammal)

One final point must be mentioned, and that is vertical polysemy.¹⁴ This is when a lexical form fills ‘semantic slots at adjacent taxonomic levels’,¹⁵ or, when the same word is repeated across subsequent taxonomic levels, with slight shifts in meaning (usually one more general meaning and one more specific meaning). Below are an Old English and Modern English example, with the polysemous terms in bold.

¹⁴ For more on this see Ibid., pp. 409-16.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 415.

Table 1.3: Lexical hierarchies in Modern English and Old English

Level	MnE	OE
0 (Taxonym)	animal (i.e. ‘all creatures’)	animal (no OE equivalent)
I – ‘basic’ terms	animal (i.e. ‘distinct from insects’) bird insect	<i>deor</i> (‘wild animal’) <i>nytenu</i> (‘domestic animal’) <i>fugel</i> (‘bird’)
II – ‘secondary’	cow sheep	<i>deor</i> (‘deer’) <i>hafuc</i> (‘hawk’)

Folk-taxonomies are often contrasted with ‘scientific taxonomy’.¹⁶ This sort of distinction is useful in some regards, but I would argue that it is not useful when discussing Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁷ For a start, how should we define their ‘scientific tradition’? Do we assume that the ‘scientific tradition’ is the same as the ‘learned tradition’ and therefore identify this with ecclesiastical education?¹⁸ Or do we define the ‘scientific tradition’ using our modern, empirically-oriented criteria? Clearly neither of these is preferable for our purposes. The last set of criteria is anachronistic, and Christian zoological scholarship, such as the Bestiary or *Physiologus* texts, was, in the words of Joyce Salisbury, ‘not scientific in the same way we understand the term’;¹⁹ rather, as Richard Jones puts it, it comprised of ‘not

¹⁶ Anderson endorses this distinction because he works within a well-established anthropological linguistic framework, in which ‘folk-taxonomies’ refers to the lexicalisation of one’s environment, and ‘scientific taxonomies’ refers to our modern empirically-centred categorical norms, see Anderson, *Folk-Taxonomies*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁷ It is useful, for example, in some of the cases Anderson considers such as Albert Magnus’s thirteenth-century *De animalibus libri XXVI*, in which all living creatures fall into one of five categories: *gressabilia* (‘walking animals’), *volatilia* (‘flying animals’), *natatilia* (‘swimming animals’), *serpentia* (‘crawling animals’) and *vermes* (‘insects’), in *Ibid.*, pp. 410-11. Even here, however, it is only at Level I that there is variance between ‘scientific’ and ‘folk’ taxonomies.

¹⁸ This assumption is implicit in many histories of science, such as D. C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago: University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ J. E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 86-7. She is writing of the *Physiologus* here, and further observes that these texts are ‘less

zoological treatises but allegorical and moralising texts'.²⁰ Indeed, if we can equate 'science' with its etymon *scientia*, then 'science' for an Anglo-Saxon had little to do with the natural world, concerned instead with the pursuit of divine truth and wisdom.²¹ To simplify matters, I will use 'science' and 'scientific' to denote our current empirically oriented paradigm, and 'learned' to denote the Christian and inherited Classical traditions of learning, study and knowledge.

Moreover, I disagree with the view held by Earl Anderson that folk-taxonomy is not a 'protoscience'. It is best to give Anderson's position in his own words:

a folk-taxonomy differs from a scientific taxonomy in that the former is a linguistic strategy for imposing order on the diverse details of experience through a process of selection and hierarchical arrangement, while the latter is an inclusive strategy, designed for the purpose of analysis. To regard folk-taxonomy as protoscience is to misunderstand its linguistic nature. In those cultures that have developed scientific traditions, folk-taxonomies coexist with scientific taxonomies in language, with little influence of one on the other.²²

It seems that one of the differentiating explanations Anderson gives for folk-taxonomies and scientific taxonomies could be reversed and remain just as true: scientific taxonomy also seeks to 'impose order on diverse details... through a process of selection and hierarchical arrangement'. The second definition, that scientific taxonomies are 'designed for the purpose of analysis' cannot be dismissed, but is hardly sufficient grounds for demonstrating the independence of the two systems. Most problematic is Anderson's claim that folk-taxonomies and scientific taxonomies 'coexist... with little influence of one on the other'. It is certainly true, to

interested in describing an animal than using the animal as a vehicle for understanding religious truth'.

²⁰ R. Jones, *The Medieval Natural World* (Harlow: Pearson, 2013), p. 76.

²¹ See, for example, the opening of Homily XXXV: [The Old English Alcuin] *De Scientia*, in *Early English Homilies from the Twelfth Century MS. Vesp. D. xiv*, ed. By R.N. Warner, EETS o.s. 152 (Oxford: University Press, 1917), p. 91, and Wulfstan Homily IX (*De Septiformi Spiritu*), in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. by D. Bethurum (Oxford: OUP, 1957), p. 185, ll.24-5. The latter is a rewriting of an Ælfrician homily (see *Ibid.*, p. 305) which repeats Ælfric's translation of *scientia* as *god ingehygd* ('excellent understanding'). For the Ælfrician homily see Homily VII in *Wulfstan*, ed. by A. S. Napier, *Sammlung englischer Denkmäler 4* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883), p. 51, l.8.

²² Anderson, *Folk-Taxonomies*, p. 54.

an extent, of communities which possess both. To give a modern example, we still lexicalise (i.e. folk-taxonomise) the King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) as a cobra, even though it is not part of the cobra genus (*Naja*). However, for many of those with little interest in herpetology, this lexicalisation reflects the belief that the King Cobra is a cobra. And why should it not? King Cobras and other cobras are visually similar, particularly in the defensive posture (with the front part of the body raised up and the hood extended) which we find so characteristic of these snakes. In this respect, folk-taxonomy is a protoscientific classification: it is categorisation based on the identification of observed characteristics. It is even more baffling, in light of his observations elsewhere in his book, that Anderson opines that viewing folk-taxonomies as protoscience is a misunderstanding of the former's 'linguistic nature'.²³

Therefore, in spite of Anderson's reservations, one of my working assumptions is that before the advent of empirically-oriented scientific analysis, and especially before Linnaean taxonomy, folk-taxonomy was protoscientific in its capacity for categorising observed species hierarchically. This brings us to the next problem, how to define species in a protoscientific environment.

'Species' and lexis

Although the concept of 'species' is essential to the formation of taxonomies, it is not an easy concept to define. Philip Kitcher perhaps best articulates the problems that beset the classification of taxa (i.e. groups of related organisms) and species when he facetiously presents the cynic's definition of species: 'species are those groups which are recognized as species by competent taxonomists. Competent taxonomists, of course, are those who can recognize the true species.'²⁴ The

²³ Indeed, Anderson, *Folk-Taxonomies*, p. 17, opens his book with a quotation from the *Prose Solomon and Saturn* (§28) which identifies the lily (*lilige*) as a herb (*wyrt*), and asks 'why is the lily classified as a herb rather than a flower?'. Is this not protoscientific classification?

²⁴ P. Kitcher, 'Species', *Philosophy of Science*, 51 (1984), 308-333 at 308. For the wide variety of potentially applicable 'species concepts' (e.g. morphological, hybrid, and polytypic etc.) see G. G. E. Scudder, 'Species concepts and speciation', *Canadian Journal of Zoology*, 52 (1974), 1121-34. For an

categorisation of species is thus identical to the formation of taxonomies, and the processes of forming taxonomies and identifying species are reciprocally defined.²⁵ If folk-taxonomies reflect lexicalisation of an environment, then it follows that species, the integers by which an environment is lexicalised, is the lexis used of an environment. It then also follows that the semantic range of the lexis will tell us something about the identification of what constituted a species to the Anglo-Saxons.

Medieval writers do not seem to have concerned themselves with philosophising about what constituted a 'species' in the same way as was popular in the twentieth century.²⁶ For William Turner (perhaps the first true ornithologist in the modern sense of the word), as for Charles Darwin, there was no questioning what a species was; it was considered self-evident.²⁷ Species, after all, existed: different types of birds had different names, and so did different animals and plants.²⁸ In the absence of any theoretical framework provided by medieval writers, we will have to make do with the same assumption. However, it is useful to consider very briefly some modern theory associated with species definition which will assist in our understanding of speciation in Old English, before we examine what the Old English words themselves can tell us.

illustration of the difficulties in, and attempts at, defining objective grounds for identifying what constitutes a species see the essays in *Speciation and the Recognition Concept: Theory and Application*, ed. by D. M. Lambert and H. G. Spencer (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), and *Species. The Units of Biodiversity*, ed. by M. F. Claridge, H. A. Dawah and M. R. Wilson, The Systematics Association Special Volume Series 54 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1997). Two essays, in particular, deserve to be singled out in this respect: D. L. Hull, 'The ideal species concept – and why we can't get it', in *Species*, ed. by Claridge, Dawah and Hull, pp. 357-80, and M. F. Claridge, H. A. Dawah and M. R. Wilson, 'Practical approaches to species concepts for living organisms', in *Ibid.*, pp. 1-16.

²⁵ See also M. C. McKittrick, and R. M. Zink, 'Species Concepts in Ornithology', *The Condor*, 90 (1988), 1-14. esp. 2.

²⁶ See, for example, B. H. Burma and E. Mayr, 'The Species Concept: a discussion', *Evolution*, 3 (1949), 369-73.

²⁷ Turner's *Avium praecipuarum, quarum apud Plinium et Aristotelem mentio est, brevis et succincta historia*, published in 1544, launches immediately into a description of the species of hawks (*accipitres*) immediately after its epistolary introduction, see *Turner on Birds: A Short and Succinct History of the Principal Birds Noticed by Pliny and Aristotle*, ed. and trans. by A. H. Evans (Cambridge: CUP, 1903), pp. 12-15. C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. by G. Beer (Oxford: OUP, 1996), pp. 333-342, discusses classification but does not theorize at all about species, introducing them as self-evident. The closest he comes to defining 'species' is when he writes that 'our classifications are plainly influenced by chains of affinities,' p. 339.

²⁸ Ernst Mayr makes a similar remark, in Burma and Mayr, 'The Species Concept', 371.

Kitcher offers a pluralistic approach to species categorisation, but crucially (for our purposes) declares that ‘the species category is heterogeneous’, i.e. that there are multiple ways of delimiting these categories.²⁹ Although modern ornithology has largely rejected the idea of multiple speciation because ‘it results in taxa that are not comparable’,³⁰ this is only a problem within paradigms where analytical comparisons of specific characteristics are desirable. Outside of such paradigms, taxa differentiated by dissimilar criteria do not bother English speakers: we may refer to songbirds (identified by behaviour) in contrast to eagles (identified by size and shape) or waterfowl (identified by environment) or game (identified by edibility) with no problem whatsoever, even though some of these taxa are defined in more detail than others. We must, then, be aware of the potential for varying criteria, in varying details, in Old English too.

What’s in a name?: bird-names and their semantic fields

An under-appreciated resource in studies of Old English bird-names, and one with implications for their semantic ranges, is the evidence brought out by the names themselves. To an extent, all names are descriptive, even if not transparently so. In Modern English, this is true of Level IA terms as it is of individual species: Level IA ‘waterfowl’ indicates the aquatic nature of these creatures; Level II ‘swift’ (referring to the Genus *Apus*) describes the bird’s speed; Level III ‘sparrowhawk’ indicates the bird’s prey of choice; and Level IV ‘green woodpecker’ clearly describes both the bird’s colour and characteristic behaviour. Etymology can often reveal a hidden descriptor too. Level II ‘egret’ refers collectively to some white birds of different genera from the order *Ciconiiformes*, and derives from an early French *aigret(te)*. This in turn is composed of *aigron* (‘heron’) and the substitution of final *-on* with the diminutive suffix *-et(te)*, giving the meaning of ‘little heron’, and the birds covered by Level II ‘egret’ are indeed generally smaller than herons.³¹ We can also

²⁹ Kitcher, ‘Species’, 309.

³⁰ McKittrick and Zink, ‘Species Concepts in Ornithology’, 1.

³¹ For the etymology of this see W. B. Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, p. 57, s.v. ‘egret’.

use historical linguistic reconstruction to shed light on opaque elements too, as in the case of Level II OE *hafoc* (‘hawk’). Based on its cognates we can postulate a proto-Germanic **xabukaz* (ON *haukr*, OHG *habuch*),³² a term which appears to be closely allied with **xafjanan* (Gothic *hafjan*, ON *hefja*, OE *hebban*, OHG *heffen*, ‘to lift, to bear up’),³³ **xabēnan* (Gothic *haban*, ON *hafa*, OE *habban*, OHG *habēn*, ‘to have’),³⁴ and on a wider scale, with Latin *capere* (‘to seize’). All of these cognates reflect some aspect of their Indo-European etyma **kap-*, ‘to seize, to grasp, to take hold of’,³⁵ and it is most likely that OE *hafuc* and its cognates reflect this sense too. *Hafoc* / *haukr* / *habuch* would then mean ‘snatcher’, a name appropriate to the various birds of prey to which these and modern ‘hawk’ apply,³⁶ as these birds, rather than tackling prey in the manner of larger birds like buzzards, kites and eagles, swoop and pick up their prey in fluid motions.

There is one particular sort of bird-name which lends itself to name-based identification, and these are names based on the birds’ calls. I discuss this in more detail, below, and will limit myself to introductory remarks for now. I will refer to bird-names as ideophonic rather than onomatopoeic because I take onomatopoeia to refer to a word which imitates the sound of its meaning (e.g. ‘shrill’), whereas I take ideophonia to refer to a word which evokes the sensory experience of its meaning. This distinction is a useful one to be able to make, in order to differentiate between, for example, the verb ‘to crow’ and the bird ‘the crow’; the former is onomatopoeic (i.e. it sounds like the noise it refers to), whereas the latter is ideophonic (i.e. the sound of the noun ‘crow’, /krəʊ/, is evocative of the sound made by the bird).

Ideophonic bird-names are especially useful because these sometimes refer to more specific individual traits than, for example, *hafuc* or *glida* (‘glider’, referring to the soaring of the buzzard). Thus, despite looking very similar to crows, the Jackdaw

³² V. Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), s.v. ‘**xabukaz*’.

³³ *Ibid.*, s.v. ‘**xafjanan*’.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, s.v. ‘**xabēnan*’.

³⁵ *IEW*, s.v. ‘**kap-*’.

³⁶ The final element of these bird-names is more difficult to explain. Presumably it reflects the *-ock* suffix seen in many British bird names (Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘*-ock*’), such as the Ruddock, Dunnock and Puttoc (a folk name for the kite cognate with OE *pyttel*, and also the byname for Ælfric Puttoc, archbishop of York from 1023-51). In Old English we also find *crannoc* used of the crane alongside *cran*, see P. R. Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, 16. It is not clear, however, if this is of proto-Germanic antiquity; H. Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1909), p. 360, tries to explain the terminal consonant(/consonantal cluster) on phonological grounds.

(*Corvus monedula*, which looks especially similar to the Hooded Crow, *Corvus cornix*) was known separately from OE *crawe* ('crow'), whether as **dawe* or *ceo(h)*, because of its distinctly different calls.³⁷ Moreover, the sort of ideophonic name we find most commonly tends to be self-declarative rather than descriptive: *stangellan* ('kestrel') and *nihtegale* ('night-singer' = nightingale) are a few examples of the latter. More often we find names such as *mæw* ('seagull'), *hroc* ('rook') and *higera* ('jay'), *ule* (probably 'tawny owl') which are imitative of the sounds most often made by these birds.

One problem which naturally arises from this approach is the imprecision with which bird-sounds can be transcribed, and the varying subjective interpretations of the listener. It goes without saying that accurately and objectively transcribing bird-calls into human languages is well-nigh impossible, though the ensuing approximants are valuable nonetheless for characterising the bird-calls in a readily understandable way. The authoritative nine-volume ornithological study *Birds of the Western Palearctic (BWP)*, as well as the popular but technical *Collins Bird Guide (CBG)*, consistently provide transcriptions of bird vocalisations and this practice has a long history behind it. The ongoing usefulness of such transcriptions to even the scientific community may be seen in their use alongside sonograms in *BWP*. Sonograms are not useful for medievalists, who have no means of comparing the sonographic data with any medieval evidence. On the other hand, medievalists can compare transcribed vocalisations, both contemporary to us and earlier, with transcribed vocalisations where they do occur in medieval literature, and also with the transcriptions inherent within ideophonic bird-names. However, we must be cautious of the possibility that medieval listeners characterised birds by different vocalisations to those we most readily associate with birds today, or that they emphasized different aspects of these calls, and thus a combination of ideophonic and linguistic analysis is necessary.

Linguists will be familiar with the concepts of semantic broadening and semantic narrowing: OE *brid(d)* ('young bird') broadens to mean 'any bird'; OE *fugel* narrows to eventually mean 'fowl', which now predominantly refers to edible birds. We must

³⁷ I am more inclined here to agree with Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v.v. 'Chough' and 'Daw', than Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 5-6.

be prepared to observe similar phenomena in OE bird-names, and moreover, we must be prepared for OE bird-names encompassing a wider, or narrower, range of species than their modern reflexes. This is not a position which should be proved, but rather, must be assumed: without reference books or ornithological authorities from the period, we cannot imagine that species were identified as concisely as today, or even as concisely as in the sixteenth-century ornithological studies of William Turner and Conrad Gesner. We must question how birds were identified, what features were considered characteristic of a perceived species and how this sort of knowledge was transferred. This last point is speculative, but is a necessary consideration: we can reasonably assume that there was no centralised or regulated system of classification, and, as we shall see, there is no real evidence for close visual inspection of birds either. Ornithological knowledge was presumably transferred orally, and probably *in situ*, that is, upon seeing or hearing the bird in question. It is difficult to imagine how else this information would be transmitted. This brings us to query the identification process, and it seems probable that identifications were aided, if not provided by, the descriptive qualities of the bird-names outlined above.

A corollary of this is that birds of what we would consider different species could be cited by a single name, and birds we consider of a single species, by multiple names. Modern folk-names provide a convenient parallel to the extent that they are not centrally regulated, and here we find, for example, that some names apply to a wide variety of birds and that individual species of birds may have more than one name. To illustrate: ‘barker’ is recorded as a folk-name for the Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*), Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*),³⁸ while the Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) is also known as the ‘bald kite’, ‘barcud’, ‘barcutan’, ‘black kite’, ‘buzzard hawk’, ‘glead’, ‘glider’, ‘little eagle’, ‘puttock’ and ‘shreak’.³⁹ There are, of course, several reasons why this may be so: very different birds may produce a similar sound and thus have the same name (e.g. ‘barker’, above), or the names may appear similar but derive

³⁸ C. Jackson, *British Names of Birds* (London: Witherby, 1968), s.v.v. ‘Avocet’, ‘Black-tailed Godwit’, ‘Greenshank’, ‘Spotted Redshank’. See also Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, and H. K. Swann, *A Dictionary of English and Folk-names of British Birds* (London: Witherby, 1913), s.v. ‘Barker’.

³⁹ Jackson, *British Names*, s.v. ‘Buzzard’.

from different roots, such as ‘crake’, which ordinarily refers to the Corn Crake (*Crex crex*), but is also attested as referring to crows (< ON *kráka* ‘crow’).⁴⁰

Overview of previous scholarship

There is a small but high quality body of scholarship on Old English bird-names. Even Charles Whitman’s 1898 catalogue of Old English bird-names is still useful, though it is now best used as a platform for searching the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*.⁴¹ Hugo Suolahti’s 1909 monograph on German bird-names uses the Old English evidence to support philological reconstructions and is a handy reference for other Germanic bird-names.⁴² It finds its Old English counterpart in Peter Kitson’s study of bird names in Old English, which is philologically tireless, and Kitson derives otherwise unattested bird names from place names and by comparing English folk-names with Germanic (mostly German) cognates. However, like the aforementioned studies, it is concerned only with the names of the birds and the species they refer to. Kitson bypasses the complications of taxonomical groupings with this brief statement in his introduction:

the species are taken in an order that compromises between groupings modern English-speakers, ornithologists or otherwise, might expect, and those which the philological evidence suggests ancestral speakers made⁴³

Precisely what ‘philological evidence suggests’ is never made explicit. He acknowledges the complications of names being transferred across species and individual species bearing multiple designations but does not pursue these implications.⁴⁴ Furthermore, many of Kitson’s arguments are based on *a priori* suppositions about where species were distinguished and delineated. W. B. Lockwood makes a similar acknowledgement during his discussion of the imitative

⁴⁰ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v.v. ‘Crake 1’ and ‘Crake 2’, respectively.

⁴¹ Whitman, ‘The Birds of Old English Literature’, 149-98.

⁴² Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*.

⁴³ Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 484.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 481, 483.

origins of Old English *hroc*: ‘the Indo-European roots ... at once suggest an onomatopoeic origin, an imitation of the deep, grating cry of the Rook and other members of the crow family’, and later, when discussing the root of OE *hrefn*, that ‘its meaning must have then included the two Crows (the Carrion and the Hooded), whose cries are so similar to the Rook’s, and the species are of course comparable in size and appearance.’⁴⁵ But if two things look similar, sound similar, and are called by the same name, are they then not, at least in some capacity, considered the same thing? Lockwood, like Kitson, does not seem to see the implication of this. Margaret Goldsmith, writing on the birds of *The Seafarer*, also noticed this fluidity of appellations in both Old English and in modern dialect but dismissed this as merely ‘the vagueness of early bird-watchers.’⁴⁶ Yet this dismissal, and her claim that ‘the OE. bird-watcher could not have made exact distinctions’⁴⁷ does not seem to square up with Goldsmith’s assumption that these ‘early bird-watchers’ were paying close enough attention to birds to describe their habits naturally; she rejects the meaning ‘tern’ for OE *stearn* because of its ‘thoroughly unternlike behaviour’⁴⁸ and offers ‘kittiwake’ instead because ‘it frequents cliffs more than other gulls, and is therefore more apt in this context’.⁴⁹ The ‘exact distinctions’ Goldsmith found wanting in the ‘OE. bird-watcher’ are missing precisely because they are anachronistic: the poet had made his distinction in calling the bird a *stearn*. It is the modern notion of what constitutes identifying the bird which demands something more distinct.

Lockwood’s work usefully tries to trace the early attestations and semantic developments of bird names and Goldsmith was the first to show how ornithology could fruitfully shed light on problems in Old English texts. The real strengths of Lockwood’s and Kitson’s works are that they draw on, and improve the older dictionaries of bird-names (by Christine Jackson, H. Kirke Swann, Charles Whitman and Charles Swainson)⁵⁰ by situating the dialect names and the historical names within a wider context. An additional, though unintended, benefit of this approach was that the differences between the post-Linnaean, scientific classification and folk

⁴⁵ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, p. 9.

⁴⁶ M. Goldsmith, ‘*The Seafarer* and The Birds’, *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 5.19 (July 1954), 225-235, at 226.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁴⁸ Goldsmith, ‘*The Seafarer* and The Birds’, 234.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁵⁰ Jackson, *British Names*, Swann, *Dictionary*, Whitman, ‘The Birds of Old English Literature’, C. Swainson, *Provincial Names and Folk Lore of British Birds* (London: Trübner, 1885).

taxonomies were thrown into sharp relief. Being able to refer to the discrepancies between these two systems will play a major role in two of the case studies below.

Scholars of Germanic bird names have often noticed that many derive ultimately from ideophonic roots.⁵¹ Nor is this an unusual thing: Martin Grant examined 446 different names used for birds in America and concluded that second to ‘names from other languages’, the bird’s call or song was the most frequent basis for its name.⁵² His study is slightly flawed in bundling together all ‘names from other languages’, as many of these in themselves are of imitative origin (e.g. ‘cuckoo’), but it is useful for giving a sense of the prominence of ideophonic naming. It is interesting, and relevant, to note that ornithologists have advocated identification by call rather than by sight as the vocalisations often allow for very easy distinction between visually similar species; there is also the fact that you are far more likely to hear a bird before you see it.⁵³ As birds are often named after the feature most striking, or immediately apparent, to their observers, the high number of birds named after their calls implies the primacy of aural perception. Indeed, it may be (and I will discuss this at length after the case studies) that vocalisations were at least as important as, if not more so than, the appearance in Anglo-Saxon perception of birds. Most literary depictions of birds describe their calls and relatively few describe the physical properties of the birds. The majority of these are generic descriptions of the *hrefn* as ‘dark’, or ‘black’, such as *sweartan* (e.g. *Brunanburh* l.61a) and *wonna* (e.g. *Beowulf* l.3024b). Others, such as the description of the ‘seabirds bathing’ (*baþian brimfluglas*, l.47a) in *The Wanderer* and the dewy feathers (*urigfeþra*, l.25a) of the eagle and the icy feathers of the *stearn* (*isigfeþera*, l.24a) in *The Seafarer* are not species specific. Some have limited use in identification, though these are very rare. Examples include *hyrnednebban* and *æftan hwit* (both from *Battle of Brunanburh*, ll.62a and 63a); the former possibly in reference to the raven’s thick bill, the latter to the white

⁵¹ Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, 10, accuses Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, of over-subscribing to what he calls ‘onomatopoeic’ origins for bird names, which Lockwood calls ‘the most potent’ factor in bird names. While I agree with ideophonic origins I have to concede Kitson’s point when faced with Lockwood’s postulated **Tweet* as the root for the twite (*Carduelis flavirostris*, p. 159). Orel, *Handbook*, postulates imitative origins for a number of bird names including *geac*, ‘cuckoo’, < **zaukaz* (p. 128), *higer*, ‘jay’, < **xixurō* (p. 172), *hrefn* < **xrabōn* (p. 182), as well as those which derive from verbs describing their call, e.g. *mæw*, ‘gull’, < **maiwaz* < **maiwjanan* ‘to shout, to mew’ (pp. 256-7).

⁵² M. Grant, ‘The Origin of the Common Names of Birds’, *Bios*, 22.2 (May 1951), 116-9, at 117.

⁵³ See, for example, J. Mynott, *Birdscapes: Birds in our Imagination and Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 145-181, and M. Constantine, *The Sound Approach to Birding* (Poole: The Sound Approach, 2005).

marking tail markings of either the adult white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) or the juvenile plumage of the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*). Even if we accept that bird-calls are easier to represent in literary depictions, we still have to account for the overwhelming focus on the birds' vocalisations (e.g. the songs of the *treowfugas* in *Guthlac B*) compared to physical descriptions. Where we have both physical and aural descriptions together, there is a marked emphasis on the sound over the appearance, e.g. *hrefn blaca heofones wynne/ bliðheort bodode* ('the bright/black raven merrily declared heaven's joy', *Beowulf* ll.1801-1802a),⁵⁴ *hrefen uppe gol./ wan ond wælfel* ('a raven cried out above, dark and slaughter-savage', *Elene* ll.52b-53a),⁵⁵ *onhwæl þa on heofonum hyrnednebba/... wonn wælceasega* ('then the horny-beaked one cried out to the heavens, the black chooser of the slain', *Exodus*, ll.161-164a), and, less morbidly, when Guthlac has finished his ordeal with the demons and returns to the wilderness, he is greeted by the birds of the area. We are told that he feeds them and that they land on his hands, but more prominent is the description of how *hine bletsadon/ monge mægwlitas meaglum reordum./ treofugla tuddor* ('they blessed him [Saint Guthlac], the many families and kinds of tree-birds, with earnest voices', *Guthlac A*, ll.733b-35a).⁵⁶

This degree of emphasis on the sounds of birds, somewhat alien to a modern audience, may have contributed to the *Old English Boethius* deviating from its source in chapter 25 of the B text (and, subsequently, metre 13 of the C text). Where the *Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 524) describes a single captive wild bird singing sadly and desiring to be back in the forest (*Silvas tantum maesta requirit,/ Silvas dulci voce susurrat*, III.ii.25-26),⁵⁷ the Old English has not only employed the imagery of fowlers attempting to lure back released captives, but also of these birds enjoying the sounds of other birds:

⁵⁴ *Blaca* may be from *blæc*, 'black', or from *blaca*, 'shining, brilliant'. sv. *blæc* and *blac*, *DOE*.

⁵⁵ *Cynewulf's Elene*, ed. by P. Gradon (London: Methuen, 1958).

⁵⁶ *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, ed. by J. Roberts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

⁵⁷ 'The bird wants only the woods, and murmurs of the woods sadly, with a sweet voice', own translation based on S. J. Tester, ed. and trans., *Boethius*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 238-9.

Ðonne ne reccað hi þara metta gif hi þæs wuda benugon, ac þincð him
wynsumre þæt him se weald oncweðe and hi gihiran oðerra fugla stemne.⁵⁸

(*Old English Boethius*, Chap. 25)

Then they do not care about those foods [which their old masters try to feed them] if they enjoy the woods, but they think it more joyful to them that the forest replies to them and they hear the voice of other birds.

It is easy to overlook this and read the voice of the other birds with romantic notions of rustic serenity. However, this description stresses the concept of enjoying one's natural place in the world (a concept which Wisdom explores further following this passage), and the reference to birdsong therefore invokes one of the most quotidian experiences of the time.

I have kept the discussion brief here, so as not to pre-empt the case studies and to minimize repetition, given that I return to the topic of birds and bird-calls throughout this chapter. Due to constraints of space I will limit myself to three detailed case studies which will each explore a different aspect of Anglo-Saxon bird names and bird taxonomy. Firstly I will look at *hrefn*, *hroc* and *crawe* to try and determine, as far as possible, how much these terms overlapped and to what extent they were conceived of as distinct creatures. Secondly I will demonstrate the importance of bird-sound through three case-studies of ideophonic naming. The first two, for owl-names and thrush-names, show how similar-looking birds (or birds we would group under one name) were differentiated on the basis of their differing calls. The third case study explores the relationship between *higere* ('jay') and *hraga* ('heron'), words which are not in themselves problematic but which have a troubling, related etymology for birds which look and behave so differently. Old Norse *hegri* ('heron') and Old Saxon *regera* ('heron') seem to be at least as close to OE *higere* ('jay') as they are to each other, and I try to determine how these disparate species end up being etymologically related. Thirdly, I investigate OE *ganot* and its relatives to problematise the meaning of this word, often understood to mean the same thing as MnE 'gannet' (*Morus bassanus*, formerly known as *Sula bassanus*) on the basis of *The Seafarer* and the common periphrasis for the sea as *ganotes bæð* ('the gannet's

⁵⁸ *The Old English Boethius*, ed. and trans. by M. Godden and S. Irvine, with M. Griffith and R. Jayatilaka, 2 vols (Oxford: OUP, 2009), I, 293-4.

bath’). After these case-studies, I bring their conclusions and implications to bear on a systematic analysis of the birds of *The Seafarer*, which have largely gone unquestioned since Margaret Goldsmith’s seminal 1954 article and is in need of re-evaluation in light of recent work, like Anderson’s on folk-taxonomies.⁵⁹

Hrefn, hroc and crowe

As noted, there has been a tendency to impose the modern meanings of ‘raven’, ‘rook’ and ‘crow’ on their Old English etyma and to therefore see them as distinct in the OE are they are today. However, at the less regularised level of dialectal usage, these terms are not as distinct: ‘cra’ and ‘craw’, related to ‘crow’, are used to refer to the rook, and ‘croupy crow’ and ‘corbie crow’ are terms for the raven, suggesting a taxonomic conception of both being types of ‘crow’.⁶⁰ Swann records the name ‘barefaced crow’ for the rook which has similar connotations.⁶¹ Jackson has ‘raven crow’ as a name for the carrion crow, which implicates it in some sort of relationship with the raven.⁶² All three birds look very similar, being medium to large birds with iridescent black feathers, and all three have harsh dissonant cries. In the field the three birds can be very difficult to distinguish if an observer is not trained to look for key identifying criteria, and they are liable to be confused anyway. Moreover, cultural factors may contribute to a speaker’s labelling of the bird. For example, the crow and raven bear popular connotations of ill-omen and death; consequently a rook perched on the windowsill of the sick or dying is prone to being identified as one of the two former birds. In the absence of any regulation on names of birds, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Old English terms had fluid meanings in a manner not unlike these folk-names, and that a variety of factors, ranging from dialect to the context, contributed to whether a speaker referred to a large *Corvidae* as one or the other.

⁵⁹ Goldsmith, ‘*The Seafarer and The Birds*’, 225-235; Anderson, *Folk Taxonomies in Early English*.

⁶⁰ Swainson, *Provincial Names and Folk Lore*, pp. 86-7 for rook names, p. 88 for raven.

⁶¹ Swann, *Dictionary*, p. 11.

⁶² Jackson, *British Names*, p. 35.

Hrefn is one of the most frequently attested individual bird names in Old English, occurring in 11 poetic texts and 19 prose texts.⁶³ Both *hroc* and *crawe* are much less common, the former appearing only once in prose and the latter never outside glosses and placenames.⁶⁴ Historically there has always been some degree of semantic overlap with the words for these species (especially so with the crow and raven): Latin *cornix*, *corvus* and other words could mean ‘crow’ as well as related species;⁶⁵ Old Irish *bodb* could refer to a conspiracy of creatures ranging from the

⁶³ Poetic texts: *Battle of Brunanburh* (l.61), *Genesis A* (ll.1438, 1449), *Elene* (l.110), *Fortunes of Men* (l.36), *Soul and Body I* (l.52), *Soul and Body II* (l.49), *Beowulf* (ll.1801, 2448, 2501, 2925, 2935 and 3024), *Judith* (l.206), *Elene* (ll.52, 110), *Finnsburh Fragment* (l.34), *Battle of Maldon* (l.106); Prose texts: *Prose Life of Guthlac* (chapters 9 and 11 in *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des heiligen Guthlac*, ed. by P. Gonsler, *Anglistische Forschungen* 27 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1909)), the two OE translations of the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great* (chapter 8, in *Bischofs Warferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. by H. Hecht, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa* 5, 2 vols (Leipzig: Wigand, 1900-1907)), the two versions of Alcuin’s *De virtutibus et vitiis* (discussed below, see notes 95 and 96 for the editions), the Anglo-Saxon ‘C’, ‘D’ and ‘E’ chronicles s.a. 878 (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative edition. Volume 5, MS C*, ed. by K. O’Brien O’Keefe (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2001); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a collaborative edition. Volume 6, MS D*, ed. by G. P. Cubbin (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1996); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition. Volume 7, MS E*, ed. by S. Irvine (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004)), the *Old English Martyrology* (No.16/Jan 10, No.97/June 2), the OE *Heptateuch* (Leviticus 11:13 and Genesis 8:3, in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, ed. by S. J. Crawford, EETS 160 (London: OUP, 1922)), the West-Saxon Gospels (Luke 12:24, in *The Four Gospels in Anglo-Saxon, Northumbrian, and Old Mercian Versions*, ed. by W. W. Skeat, 4 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 1871-87)), the *Durham Proverbs* (proverb 6, in *The Durham Proverbs: An Eleventh Century Collection of Anglo-Saxon Proverbs*, ed. by O. Arngart, *Lunds Universitets Årsskrift, N.f., Afd. 1*, 52.ii (Lund: Gleerup, 1956)), *Adrien and Ritheus* (Questions 22 and 24, in *The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrien and Ritheus*, ed. by J. E. Cross and T. D. Hill, *McMaster Old English Studies and Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982)), the *Old English Version of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang* (chap. 81, in *The Old English Version of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang Together with the Latin Original; and An Old English Version of the Capitula of Theodulf together with the Latin Original; An Old English Rendering of the Epitome of Benedict of Aniane*, ed. by A. S. Napier, EETS o.s. 150 (London: Trübner, 1916)), a homily called ‘In Letania Maiore’ (*Two Apocrypha in Old English Homilies*, ed. by R. Willard, *Beiträge zur englischen Philologie* 30 (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1935), p. 40), a homily called ‘Geherað nu mæn ða leofestan hu us godes bec’ (in *Two Apocrypha in Old English Homilies*, p. 39), *CH* II.3 (l.183), *CH* II.10 (ll.105, 184-5, 189-191), *CH* II.11 (ll.144 and 146), *Ælfric’s First Letter to Wulfstan* (l.83) (*Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, ed. by B. Fehr, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa* 9 (Hamburg: H. Grand, 1914)), *Ælfric’s Life of Vincent* (ll.240, 245, in *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. and trans. by W. W. Skeat, EETS o.s. 74, 82, 94, 114, 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1881-1900), II, XXXVII, ll.240, 245), the Legend of the Seven Sleepers, formerly attributed to *Ælfric* (ll.76-7, for the edition see following note), and the Institutes of Polity (§125, in *Die ‘Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical*, ed. by K. Jost, *Swiss Studies in English* 47 (Bern: Francke, 1959)).

⁶⁴ The only time *hroc* appears in prose it is in an alliterative pairing with *hrefn*: *ðær flugon sona to hrocas and hremmas* (nominatively, ‘and rooks and ravens immediately flew there’). The text is *The Seven Sleepers* (*Ælfric’s Lives*, I, XXIII, ll.76-77), though is no longer considered *Ælfric’s* work. See H. Magennis, ‘*Ælfric* and the Legend of the Seven Sleepers’, in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints’ Lives and their Contexts*, ed. by P. Szarmach (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 317-331.

⁶⁵ J. André *Les noms d’oiseaux en Latin* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1967), pp. 60-62, E. W. Martin, *The Birds of the Latin Poets* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1914), p. 68, further references for the crossover between *corvus* and *cornix* are given in W. Lindsay, *Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), p. 97. The Brussels Glossaries also suggests this: *Corvus hrefne oththe corax*,

raven and its relatives to the blackbird;⁶⁶ and in Welsh the three birds are encompassed by *brân*.⁶⁷ Because of the attestations of the etyma of modern English ‘raven’, ‘rook’, and ‘crow’ in OE, it is very tempting to link them. As we shall see, however, there are reasons to be suspicious of this meticulous separation of these three *Corvidae*, not least because these species look, sound and behave very similarly. Out of the 64 occurrences of *hrefn* (not including its occurrences in formations glossing *nocticorax*), 17 are poetic, 31 are in prose and 17 are in glossaries. Neither *hroc* nor *crawe* occurs in a poetic context, however. This suggests a hierarchy of register associated with each of these terms which problematises any notion of clear-cut distinctions between them.

It is a convenient starting point to examine the etymology of *hrefn*, *hroc*, *crawe* and their cognates to see what they can tell us about the species of bird denoted. Moreover, as ideophonia so clearly underlies these names it is worth seeing how closely they match the species they refer to. Lockwood follows the general agreement that the names of *hrefn*, *hroc* and *crawe* must be derived from the sounds of their calls. *Hrefn* and its cognates suggest a Proto-Germanic **xraβnaz/*xraβon* (and a Proto-Indo-European **korp-*),⁶⁸ and *hrok* suggests Proto-Germanic **xrōkaz*.⁶⁹ The /χraβ/ and /χrok/ noises indicated by these roots, at first glance, are plausible renditions of the cries of the raven and rook respectively, but this will be examined more closely below. *Crawe* is trickier. Lockwood considers it ‘evidently of West Germanic age’,⁷⁰ Suolahti posits a root like **krāg-n-* (> **krākk-*)⁷¹ and Orel declines to provide an entry for it at all despite doing so for *hroc* and *hrefn*, perhaps implying he considers it a post-Common Germanic innovation. There is evidently some connection between the bird’s name and the verb ‘to crow’, a relationship paralleled in OE *crawe* – *crawan* and OHG *krâja/krâ(w)a* – *chrâjan/krâwen*.⁷² For

in *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, ed. by T. Wright, 2nd edn rev. by R. Wülker, 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1884), I, IX, 1.3.

⁶⁶ M. Tymoczko, ‘The Semantic Fields of Early Irish Terms for Black Birds and Their Implications for Species Taxonomy’, in *Celtic Language, Celtic Culture: A Festschrift for Eric P. Hamp*, ed. by A. Matonis and D. Melia (Van Nuys: Ford and Bailie, 1990), pp. 151-171.

⁶⁷ sv. *brân* 1, in *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1950 – 2003).

⁶⁸ This reconstruction negotiates Pokornoy’s and Lockwood’s, see Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, p. 9 and *IEW*, sv. ‘ker-¹, kor-, kr-’ with final –p.

⁶⁹ I follow the Proto-Germanic forms given in Orel, *Handbook*, Lockwood’s forms are given in *Oxford Book of British Bird Names* pp. 9-10, as well as sv. ‘crow’, ‘rook’ and ‘raven.’

⁷⁰ Lockwood *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, p. 10.

⁷¹ Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 180.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 179-180.

morphological reasons it seems more probable that the verbs are the result of independent, parallel formations based on the common Germanic bird names (or West Germanic in the case of *crawe/crawan* and its cognates), and this can be compared with formation of the Gothic verb *hrukjan* ‘to crow’, presumably related to **xrōkaz*.⁷³ The origins of these three terms then all seem to replicate the hoarse croaking and crowing noises made by the ravens, rooks and crows; inferrably /χɪɑβ/, /χɪok/ and /kɪæk/ respectively. Replication seems plausible in this case, but is it possible to corroborate this in any way?

As a first step towards trying to corroborate the postulated ideophonic roots of *hrefn*, *hroc* and *crawe* I have collected as many transliterations of their calls from as many modern ornithological guides, both popular and scientific, as I have been able to access. These are presented in table 4, below.

Table 1.4: Collected transliterations of crow (*Corvus corone*), rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) and raven (*Corvus corax*)

	Crow	Rook	Raven
<i>Pocket Guide to the Birds of Britain and North-West Europe</i> ⁷⁴	‘kraa’	‘kaargh’	‘kronk’
<i>Birds of Europe</i> ⁷⁵	-	-	‘krrooap, krrooap’, ‘krrahk’, ‘klong’, ‘arrk-arrk-arrk’
<i>Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East</i> ⁷⁶	‘keerght’, ‘kaaah’, ‘keeerk’	‘caw’, ‘caah’, ‘kiook’	‘pruk, pruk’

⁷³ For Gothic *hrukjan* see J. Wright, *Grammar of the Gothic Language* (Oxford: OUP, 1910), p. 328. For **xrōkaz* see Orel, *Handbook*, p. 188.

⁷⁴ C. Knightley and S. Madge, *Pocket Guide to the Birds of Britain and North-West Europe*, rev. repr. (London: Helm, 2002).

⁷⁵ L. Jonsson, *Birds of Europe* (London: Helm, 1992).

⁷⁶ H. Heinzel, R. Fitter, J. Parslow, *Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*, 4th edn, repr. with revisions (London: HarperCollins, 1998).

<i>RSPB Pocket Guide to British Birds</i> ⁷⁷	‘caw’, ‘caw-caw’, ‘caw-caw-cwa’	‘caaw’, ‘caaw- caaw’	‘pruk’
<i>RSPB Handbook of British Birds</i> ⁷⁸	‘kaar’, ‘konk, konk’	‘kaah’	‘kronk, kronk’, ‘toc, toc, toc’
<i>Jim Flegg’s Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe</i> ⁷⁹	‘caw’, ‘corr’	‘carr’	‘gronk’
<i>Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe</i> ⁸⁰	‘kawr’	‘kaah’	‘karronk’, ‘pruk’, ‘toc-toc-toc’
<i>Hamlyn Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe</i> ⁸¹	‘kraa’, ‘krrr’	‘kah’	‘prruk’, ‘krra-krra- krra’
<i>Birds Britannica</i> ⁸²	‘caw’	‘caw’, ‘krah’ ⁸³	— ⁸⁴
<i>CBG</i>	‘krrah krrah krrah’, ‘krrr krrr...’, ‘krrah’ ⁸⁵	‘geeah’, ‘geeeh’, ‘gra gra grah’	‘korrp’, ‘krack- krack-krack’, ‘klong’
<i>BWP</i>	‘kraa’, ‘kraah’, ‘kraarr’, ‘karaa’, ‘aaarr’, ‘kraar’,	‘kaah’, ‘korr’, ‘krah’, ‘kaaar kaar kau’, ‘kar-kor kar-	‘pruk’, ‘quork’, ‘kra’, ‘krok’, ‘kruk’, ‘kro’,

⁷⁷ S. Harrap, *RSPB Pocket Guide to British Birds* (London: Helm, 2007).

⁷⁸ P. Holden and T. Cleeves, *RSPB Handbook of British Birds*, 2nd edn (London: Helm, 2006).

⁷⁹ J. Flegg, *Jim Flegg’s Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁸⁰ P. Sterry, et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* (Basingstoke: AA Publishing, 1998).

⁸¹ B. Brunn, et al., *Hamlyn Field Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe*, new rev. edn (London: Hamlyn, 2001).

⁸² M. Cocker and R. Mabey, *Birds Britannica* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005).

⁸³ ‘Caw’ is invariably used to describe the call of both... rook and carrion crow ... but ‘krah’ is a better transliteration of [the rook’s call]”, *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁸⁴ ‘The note is typically described as a ‘croak’ although ravens have a wider vocabulary than this word suggests’, *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁸⁵ The vocalisations for the hooded crow (*Corvus cornix*) have been given here, as *CBG* states that the carrion crow’s voice is ‘very like Hooded Crow’s, but often sounds a bit harder and more ‘malevolent’ in tone ... difference of doubtful use in field, bearing in mind individual variation’, p. 366.

	‘kraang’, ‘krong’, ‘keerk keerk keerk’, ‘aaah’, ‘karr’, ‘kar kar’, ‘kaaar’, ‘klok klok klok’, ‘krrr’, ‘ir’, ‘rärrärrärr...’, ‘rarrarrarr...’, ‘rarr’, ‘rärr’, ‘caaa’, ‘aaa aaa’, ‘äh’, ‘ou-ain’, ‘hi(ä)-hi(ä)’, ‘gschää-gschää- gschää’, ‘tschiä- tschi’, ‘gschi’, ‘rräh-rräh’, ‘schrebb’. ⁸⁶	kor kar-kor kar- kor’, ‘kar’, ‘kor’, ‘kaar’, ‘gow gowa’, ‘ku’, ‘kjä’, ‘kyu’, ‘gorrr’, ‘karlee’, ‘rra’, ‘wawawawa’. ⁸⁷	‘prok’, ‘croak’, ‘rapp’, ‘krapp’, ‘gro’, ‘korr’, ‘gru’, ‘gri’, ‘gwee’, ‘rüh’, ‘ky’, ‘kray’, ‘krä’, ‘ow’, ‘row’, ‘krrooa’, ‘ko’, ‘cho’, ‘kwulkukul’, ‘kra- kra-kra’, ‘kreh- kreh-kreh’, ‘rrack’. ⁸⁸
<i>The Raven: A Natural History in Britain and Ireland</i> ⁸⁹	-	-	‘crok’, ‘pruk’, ‘rok’, ‘quork’, ‘kra’, ‘tork-tork’, ‘crok-crok-crok’, ‘crak’, ‘plop’, ‘goingg’, ‘craark’, ‘cork’, ‘quork’, ‘cork’, ‘glock’, ‘glank’, ‘clonk’, metallic ‘clink’.

⁸⁶ These transliterations are the renderings of a variety of calls covered in *BWP*, VIII, 187-190, and like the entries I cite from *BWP* for the rook and raven, also reflect the collection of transliterations from other ethological publications. I have listed them all here despite some calls being more frequent (such as the advertising-call ‘kraa’) than others (such as the ‘ir’ hawk-alarm call).

⁸⁷ *BWP*, VIII, 165-167, again covering a wide variety of calls and including transliterations from articles cited therein.

⁸⁸ *BWP*, VIII, 216-218, once more covering a wide variety of calls and including transliterations cited therein.

⁸⁹ D. Ratcliffe, *The Raven: A Natural History in Britain and Ireland* (London: T & A D Poyser, 1997), pp. 265-7.

The table has an obviously Anglophonic bias, but it should be pointed out that *BWP* collects transcriptions made from German, French, Russian, Dutch, Spanish and Swedish sources as well as from English ones. For those who have experienced the calls of the rook, crow and raven, these transliterations can prove reflective both of the variation between these calls, and of the general similarities between them. Some general observations may be made about the most frequently noticed cries of these birds: crows are generally associated with a /kɪə/ sort of cry, rooks a /kɛ/ sort of cry and ravens something like /χɪok/.⁹⁰ This matches up quite nicely with the root suggested for *crawe*, and there are some transcribed raven vocalisations, like ‘krroap’ and ‘rapp’ that are actually quite a good fit for the suggested /χɪɑβ/. There is a noticeable absence, however, of rook vocalisations that match the suggested /χɪok/; in fact, /χɪok/ is only really matched by raven calls. This is true of the cognates of *hroc* too: ON *hrókr* and OHG *hruoh* (both mean ‘rook’) more closely match raven sounds than rook sounds.

This presents us with two alternatives for the origins of *hroc* and its cognates. The aural data suggests that it was originally a raven term that was transferred to the rook, but we cannot dismiss the possibility that early Germanic speakers heard rook cries as /χɪok/ (such as those rook calls transliterated as ‘krah’ and ‘grah’). To determine which of these is most likely we must turn to the Old English evidence. There are some items which we may term transliterations of this sort in Anglo-Saxon England. Of particular relevance here is an excerpt from Alcuin’s *De virtutibus et vitiis*,⁹¹ a treatise which was later translated into Old English. Here Alcuin impugns those who defer their conversion to Christianity:

Forte respondes: Cras, cras. O vox corvina! Corvus non redit ad arcam, columba redit.⁹²

The resolute responds: tomorrow, tomorrow. O voice of the raven! The raven does not return to the ark, [but] the dove returns.

⁹⁰ In a similar vein, Mynott, *Birdscapes*, p. 161, is puzzled by the name for the crow being more appropriate for the rook’s call than ‘rook’ is.

⁹¹ Datable to around 799-800, and written while Alcuin was on the Continent. See L. Wallach, ‘Alcuin on Virtues and Vices: A Manual for a Carolingian Soldier’, *The Harvard Theological Review*, 48.3 (July 1955), 175-195, especially 176.

⁹² PL 101, *caput xiv*, p. 623

We cannot read too much into *cras*, employed as it is in a punning manner, though it is safe to say that the sound ‘*cras*’ at least evoked the sound of a raven’s voice, if we cannot indeed call this a transcription of it. We can assume that this evocativeness was particularly powerful because despite losing the pun, or at least some of its force, in translation this passage is evidently the source for sermons recorded in London, British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius A.III⁹³ and MS. Cotton Vespasian D.XIV.⁹⁴ Both of these texts introduce the meaning of Latin *cras* (Tiberius A.III: *þu cwyst cras, þæt is ledenword, 7 hit his on ure geþeode tomorgene*, ‘you say “*cras*”, and that is a Latin word, and it, in our language, is “tomorrow”’, Vespasian D.XIV: *þu cweðst, cras, þæt is Ledenword 7 is on ure þeodan tomorgen*, ‘you say “*cras*”, that is a Latin word and in our language is “tomorrow”’) before the translation of the Latin passage cited above. The Tiberius text endeavours to be as explicit as possible when it delivers (what was in the original) the punning punchline, stating

Nu, hwonne þu cwyst cras, cras, þæt is tomorgen, tomorgen. Cras eawla þæt is hræfnes stæfn. Se hraefen ne gecyrde na to Noes earce, ac seo culfre cyrde.⁹⁵

Now, when you say ‘*cras, cras*’, that is ‘tomorrow, tomorrow’. ‘*Cras*’, alas, that is the sound of the raven. The raven did not return at all to Noah’s ark, but the dove returned.

The Vespasian text refrains from repeating the definition of *cras* and simply states *Nu gyf þu cwetst, cras, cras, þæt is þæs hræfnes stefne. Se ræfen ne gecerde to Noes arca, ac seo culfre cerde* (‘now if you say ‘*cras, cras*’, that is the sound of the raven. The raven did not return to Noah’s ark, but the dove returned’).⁹⁶ The need to introduce the meaning of *cras* in these homilies shows that it was not a Latin word a vernacular audience would be expected to know, suggesting that this passage was

⁹³ Dated s.xi med. by H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 241 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), p. 68, no.363.

⁹⁴ Dated s.xii by Warner, in his *Early English Homilies*.

⁹⁵ Edited in M. Förster, ‘Altenglische Predigtquellen II’, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 122 (1909), 256-9, at 258.

⁹⁶ ‘Homily XXXV: [The Old English Alcuin] *De Conversione Ad Dominum*, in *Early English Homilies*, ed. by Warner, pp. 102-4.

chosen for the striking comparison with a raven's call, and so it follows that 'cras' must have been readily identifiable as such to an Anglo-Saxon audience.

In the Harley glossary (London, British Library, MS Harley 3376), dated by Ker to the beginning of the eleventh century, we find another possible example of transliteration at line C 1385: *Coax .i. cra . uox ranarum uel coruorum* . ('coax, that is cra, the sound of frogs or ravens').⁹⁷ Patrizia Lendinara sees this as glossary-embedded evidence of the circulation of *uoces animantium* (texts where the names of animals were coupled with verbs describing their cries) and links both this and the following item in the glossary (C 1386, *Coaxant . siue ranae .*, 'they croak, or [the sound] of the frog') with Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* which contains the lines *garrulitas ranarum crepitans coaxat* ('the rippling garrulity of the frogs' croaks') and *ranae coaxant* ('frogs croak').⁹⁸ Lendinara's observation is certainly correct for C 1386, but cannot be for C 1385 because *coax* and *cra* are not verbs. It seems more likely that the source for this was, ultimately, Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* I.I.2: *aliae autem sunt, quae, quamvis scribantur, tamen inarticulatae dicuntur, cum nihil significant, ut 'coax,' 'cra'* ('however there are other [voices], which, although they are written, have no meaning, like 'coax' and 'cra)'), in which there is no accompanying information identifying the sources of these sounds. We have a fragment of, and an excerpt from, Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* predating the Harley glossary,⁹⁹ and Bede and Aldhelm seem to have had access to the text too.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ C 1385 in *The Harley Latin-Old English Glossary Edited from British Museum MS Harley 3376*, ed. by R. T. Oliphant, *Janua linguarum, Series practica* 20 (The Hague: Mouton, 1966). For the dating see N. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 312.

⁹⁸ P. Lendinara, 'Contextualized Lexicography' in *Latin Learning and English Lore*, ed. by K. O'Brien O'Keefe and A. Orchard, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), II, pp. 108-131, at p. 118. The translations are hers.

⁹⁹ In *Grammatici Latini*, ed. by H. Keil, 8 vols (Leipzig: Teubner, 1855-80), II (1855), 5. According to H. Gneuss *Handlist*, the only manuscripts containing Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* definitely pre-dating the Harley glossary are a fragment in Canterbury, fragment in Canterbury, Cathedral Library, MS Add.127/19 (Gneuss 211, s.ix/x or x¹) and an excerpt in Columbia, University of Missouri, Ellis Library, Fragmenta manuscript F.M.2 (Gneuss 809.9, s.ix) which was in Winchester by the start of the tenth century. Gneuss lists copies of the text occurring in Cambridge, University Library, MS Ii.2.1 (Gneuss 13.5, s.xi/xii or x.xii in.), Cambridge, Jesus College, MS 28(Q.B.11) (Gneuss 123, s.xi ex.), Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2981 (7) (Gneuss 127.3, s.xi²), and Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.51 (1155) pt ii (Gneuss 192,s.xi/xii). See also the catalogue of manuscripts containing this in M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 326-7. Priscian's text may have been known earlier than this list of manuscripts suggests, as Lapidge notes that Aldhelm could possibly have had access to Juvenal through the *Institutiones grammaticae* in *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 100-101, and that he seems to have used Priscian's text in his *De pedum regulis*, p. 184. Lapidge also presents an inventory list containing this text from s.xi^{ex} in *ibid.* pp. 141-2

The presence of this gloss in only the one manuscript seems to affirm Helmut Gneuss's observation that this particular text was rare.¹⁰¹ Presumably the 'voices' 'cra' and 'coax' would have been readily identifiable to Priscian's immediate audience as the sounds of a frog and a raven (or some other corvid), and it is possible that the source glossary for C 1386 originally sought to remedy a later problem of identification by glossing *coax* with *uox ranarum* and *cra* with *uox coruorum*. At least some degree of misunderstanding is suggested by the placement of *.i.* in the item's line, as both *coax* and *cra* should be rendered by the interpretamentum rather than just *coax*. This could simply be the result of scribal error, yet for such an error to take place, both *cra* and *coax* must have been seen as plausible transliterations of both a frog's and a raven's call, and *cra* as especially fitting for the raven. It is doubtful, then, whether 'coax' was readily perceived to be a transliteration of the raven's call to Anglo-Saxon ears, but rather more certain that 'cra(s)' was. However, if this was the case, the perceived sound of the raven's call is essentially indistinguishable from the posited ideophonic root for *crawe*. Indeed, as can be seen in Table 4, the transliteration 'cra(s)' could apply to the rook's vocalisations too.

The cases of OE *crakettan* and *cræcetung* are similar. Jointly they are attested once each in the Old English corpus: *crakettan* the Old English *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great,¹⁰² and *cræcetung* once in the Old English prose *Life of Guthlac*.¹⁰³ In both cases they refer explicitly to the vocalisations of a *hrefn*. Although they derive from the Latin of the source text (*crakettan* < Latin *crocitare*, *cræcetung* < Latin *crocitatio*),¹⁰⁴ their use necessitates ready understanding that the words are onomatopoeic; and in the prose *Life of Guthlac*, *cræcetung* is found alongside a Germanic onomatopoeic word: *hræfena cræcetung ond mislice fugela hwistlunge* ('the croaking of ravens and the various whistles of birds'). The implied sound of these terms is something like /kræk/ - a sound much like the posited root for *hroc*

¹⁰⁰ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, notes that Bede used it for his *De orthographia* (p. 223), and that Priscianus was available to Alcuin, though we cannot be sure which text(s), p. 231. Abbo and Byrhtferth seem to have had access to it too, pp. 246 and 273 respectively.

¹⁰¹ H. Gneuss, 'Anglo-Saxon Libraries from the Conversion to the Benedictine Reform', II.668, in H. Gneuss, *Books and Libraries in Early England*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996).

¹⁰² Both times it occurs in Book II chapter 8, in *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors Des Grossen*, ed. by Hecht, p. 118, l.25 for *crakettan*. The *DOE* notes that it is spelt differently in different manuscripts: Hecht uses the spelling of H, C has *cræcetta* and O has *cræcetan*, sv. *crācettan*.

¹⁰³ *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des heiligen Guthlac*, ed. by Gonser, Chapter 8, l.8.

¹⁰⁴ *DOE*, sv. *crācettan* and *crācettung*, respectively.

(<**xrōkaz*). Possible affirmation that the Anglo-Saxons continued to equate a sound of this sort with the *hroc* can be seen in their choice of interpretamentum for Latin *graculus*, a bird for which we do not have any real identification for apart from its blackness, and its distinction from crows and ravens.¹⁰⁵ In all but one instance *graculus* is glossed *hroc*, and in one of those instances it is misspelt *cracculus*.¹⁰⁶ It is possible that its frequent equation with the *hroc* (as opposed to *ceo*, attested once) was because *graculus* was thought to refer to a bird which made a /gɹæ̃k/ sound, on the other hand, it seems more likely that *graculus* was translated *hroc* on the basis of its occurrence in Pliny's *Natural History* XI.201, in which three birds (*graculi*, *corvi* and *cornices*) are described as having hardier stomachs (*gula patientiore*): it would seem straightforward for glossators to opt for a third scavenger bird (the rook) alongside the raven and crow here.

The evidence from the Old English period, then, suggests that /kɹæs/ and /kɹæ̃k/ were sounds appropriate for a *hrefn* and also, though with less certainty, that /gɹæ̃k/ was appropriate for a *hroc*. The difference between /kɹæ̃k/ and /gɹæ̃k/ seems slight. I think we would be justified in understanding these as variant transcriptions of the same call, though intriguingly this call is only made by the raven, and not by rooks or crows (see Table 4). The sound represented by 'coax', interpreted in the Harley Glossary to be a description of the vocalisations of both frog and raven, seems to square with the modern transliterations of raven calls (like 'krrahk' and 'krrooah').

There are still too many uncertainties to allow for secure identifications, but if we can, for the moment, make some broad generalisations, the 'cras' found in Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis* and the Old English translations, as well as in the Harley Glossary, looks to be equally applicable to raven, rook and crow by comparison with modern transliterations, though it is only ever attributed to the *hrefn* in Old

¹⁰⁵ For *graculus* see Andre, *Les noms d'Oiseaux*, pp. 86-7.

¹⁰⁶ *Hroc* glosses *cracculus uel garrulus* in the Second Antwerp-London glossary, see 'The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS.32 and British Museum MS. Additional 32,246', ed. by L. Kindschi (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1955), l.1030. The other cases of *hroc* glossing *graculus* are in Ælfric's glossary, p. 307, ll.11-12 in *Ælfrics Grammatik and Glossar*, ed. by J. Zupitza (Berlin: Weidmann, 1880), and in the *libellus de nominibus naturalium rerum*, l.25 in R. Garrett, 'Middle English and French Glosses from MS. Stowe 57', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, New Series, 21 (1908), 411-12. In the one instance *graculus* is not glossed by *hroc*, it and *monedula* are both glossed by *ceo* (etymon of MnE chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*)) in the Second Antwerp-London glossary, l.1017. OE *ceo* referred not to the same bird as MnE 'chough', however, but the jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*). See Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, sv. 'chough'.

English.¹⁰⁷ The implication of this is that all three birds could be subsumed under a Level II category *hrefn*, and evidence to corroborate this implication is presented below. Something quite different is going on, however, with the sounds /kɪæk/, used of the *hrefn*, and /gɪæk/, implied to be the sound of the *graculus*. By comparison with the modern transliterations, these seem more likely to refer to raven vocalisations than rook calls. As these sounds recall the postulated root for OE *hroc* (/χɪok/), it is difficult to avoid concluding that Proto-Germanic **xrōkaz* was originally a Level III term referring to the raven rather than the rook. It then probably became a vertically polysemous Level II term referring to the three largest *Corvidae* collectively, before narrowing semantically to cover the rook and other crows, and then eventually just the rook.¹⁰⁸

The attribution of these sounds to the *hrefn* in Old English may have to do with the *hrefn*'s prominence in the Anglo-Saxon imagination. For the moment it is sufficient to note that despite the parcelling of sounds inherent in the names *hroc* and *crawe*, crows, ravens and rooks all make /kɪæ/ (or /kɪɑ/) noises and only ravens make /χɪok/ calls, and that this has implications for their (lack of) speciation. In the next section I examine visual descriptions of these birds, where they occur, in order to see how specific the descriptions of the visual characteristics are, and whether they provide a case for differentiating the *hrefn*, *crawe* and *hroc*.

The visual criteria

In this section I look at the visual descriptions of *hrefnas* to see what features were noted and what they might be able to tell us about the conceptualisation of what a *hrefn* was. In particular, I will be looking to see if any of the visual details could eliminate the possibility of either the rook or crow as being denoted by the word.

¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that it is attributed to a *corvina* in the Latin, a point to which we shall return below.

¹⁰⁸ This particular shift is somewhat evidenced in the use of *hroc*, below, to refer to 'small ravens' in Old English, though it is better attested in Middle English and Early Modern English. See *OED*, s.v. 'rook, n.1', and *MED*, s.v. 'rōk(e (n.(2)))'.

Most descriptions of the *hrefn* in Old English are in relation to its colour. Most of these are specifically about the *hrefn*'s darkness and so does not preclude the possibility of ravens, rooks and crows being covered by the word. Even in the singular case of the *hrefn blaca* (*Beowulf* 1.1801b), the bird referred to could still plausibly be rook, raven or crow.¹⁰⁹ A list of all the colour descriptions of the *hrefn* I have been able to find runs thus: *se wanna hrefn* ('the dark raven', *Judith* 1.206b), *sweartne ... hrefn* in *Genesis* 1.1438, *sweartum hrefne* in *Genesis* 1.1449, *se swearta hrefn* in *Soul and Body II* 1.49, *se wonna hrefn* in *Beowulf* 1.3021, *an sweart hrem* and *sweartan hræm* in *Ælfric's Life of Saint Vincent*, 1.240, 1.245, *se swearta hrefen* of *Soul and Body I* 1.52, *hrefen ... wan ond wælfel* ('dark and slaughter-fierce) in *Elene* 1.52, *hræfen ... sweart and sealobrun* ('black and dark brown') in *Finnsburgh Fragment* 1.34, *blacan hremmes*,¹¹⁰ *sweartan hremm*,¹¹¹ (*twegen*) *swearte hremmas...* *mid heardum bile* ('(two) dark ravens... with hard bills')¹¹² in *Ælfric's homilies*, and *blac hrem* (for *niger coruus*) in *Ælfric's Grammar*.¹¹³ We can add to this a description of the *hrefn* as *saluwigpadan* ('dark-coated') in *Battle of Brunanburh* 1.60 and as *salwigpad* in *Fortunes of Men* 1.36.

In the extant texts no occurrence of either *hroc* or *crawe* is accompanied by a colour description, a corollary of their occurrence in the less elaborate registers where they are afforded no adjectives. In the single instance where *hroc* occurs in a prose text only two things can be inferred: firstly, that it is flying, and secondly, that it is accompanied by ravens and many other kinds of birds.¹¹⁴ Neither of these are helpful for indicating whether *hroc* and *hrefn* here are appositive statements or different birds.

The adjective *hyrnednebban(n)* (lit. 'horned-beaked') is applied at least once to the *hrefn* in *Brunanburh* (*þone sweartan hræfn/ hyrnednebban*, 'the black raven, horny-

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed discussion of this see the next chapter on literary representations of augury. Whether the meaning of *blaca* is 'dark' or 'bright' (and therefore, 'iridescent') is irrelevant as rooks, ravens and crows are all dark and iridescent.

¹¹⁰ *CH* II.3, 1.184.

¹¹¹ *CH* II.10, 1.103.

¹¹² *CH* II.10, ll.191-2.

¹¹³ *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, p. 12, 1.12.

¹¹⁴ *ðær flugon sona to hrocas and hremmas* ('and *hrocas* and *hrefns* immediately flew there'), *Ælfric's Lives*, I, p. 492, ll.76-77. See also n.64, above.

beaked’, ll.61b-62a) and possibly again in *Judith* (l.212).¹¹⁵ It is tempting to link this to the raven’s thick, heavy-set bill, and the possibility of the compound applying to the eagle in *Judith* only seems to support this definition of *hyrnednebbā*. However, *hyrned* connotes both the sharp-point of an object as well as its horn-like curve; thus the gloss *bryhyrnedē* for *triangulus* (contrast with the following entries *quadrangulus fyperscyte*, *quinquangulus fifecgede*, and *sexangulus sixecgede*),¹¹⁶ and possibly in the bizarre case of *hyrnde ciolas* (?‘pointed boats’, ?‘horned boats’) of metre 26 of the *Old English Boethius*, an innovation found neither in the Latin *Consolation of Philosophy* nor in the Old English prose of the B-text. Thus *hyrnednebbā(n)* does not necessarily mark the identifying thick, curved beaks of the raven and eagle and could possibly apply to the slim, pointed bills of crows and rooks, perhaps reinforced by the jabbing motion used by these birds to penetrate and tear into food.¹¹⁷ The adjective *sweartan* used of the beak of the *hræfn* in prose *Life of Guthlac* is almost as vague, ruling out only the adult rook (but not the dark-billed juvenile, which is almost impossible to tell apart from a carrion crow).¹¹⁸ We have flight descriptions, but these are hardly detailed enough to allow for any kind of differentiation between the three birds. It is striking that the criterion used by most modern observers to distinguish the raven from other *Corvidae* is completely absent: nowhere in the Old English corpus is reference made to the large(r) size of the bird, nor to the scruffy cluster of feathers under its throat (and unique among the *Corvidae*) known as hackles, which can clinch the identification if the size of the bird is difficult to assess.¹¹⁹ As neither the transliterated evidence (which is as close to aural evidence as we can come) nor the physical descriptions seem to provide any evidence that the *hræfn*, *craue* and *hroc* were differentiated, it remains only to take a close look at the lexical evidence itself: this is, after all, the only indicator that there was any differentiating between the larger *Corvidae*.

¹¹⁵ *Judith*, ed. by B. J. Timmer, 2nd edn (London: Methuen & co., 1961) makes it clear by his punctuation that he considers *hyrnednebbā* and *salowigpada* (‘dark-coated’) to refer to the *earn*, and R. Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), p. 157, n.211-2 follows this. *Judith*, ed. by M. Griffith (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), p. 131, n.209b-12a, firstly highlights the ambiguity of *hyrnednebbā* in referring to either the eagle or the raven but then argues in favour of the latter.

¹¹⁶ *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, p. 289, ll.3-4.

¹¹⁷ *BWP*, VIII, under the ‘behaviour’ sections of ‘Carrion Crow’, ‘Rook’, and ‘Common Raven’.

¹¹⁸ *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des heiligen Guthlac*, Chapter 11, l.15. For the juvenile rook see *CBG*, pp. 366-367.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Pullis corvorum – and its implications for *Corvid* taxonomy

It is an odd place to look for ornithological data, but eight of the Anglo-Saxon psalters with Old English translations contain a phrase with significant implications for *Corvid* taxonomy in Anglo-Saxon England. The psalters in question are the Cambridge, Vespasian, Salisbury, Arundel, Vitellius, Regius, Stowe, Lambeth and Eadwine’s Canterbury psalters.¹²⁰ Despite representing the Roman, Gallican and Hebraic psalters between them, the passage in question, Psalm 146.9, is the same throughout. In a list of attributions to God, we find a description of God as he *qui dat iumentis escam ipsorum et pullis coruorum inuocantibus eum* (‘who gives to beasts their food and to the raven chicks that call upon him’). Despite the fact that the simplex *coruus* is always translated *hrefn*, the phrase *pullis coruorum* (‘raven chicks’) is translated in three different ways, as shown below:

Table 1.5: Translations of *pullis coruorum* in Old English

Number of times attested	Old English translation	MnE translation	Psalters attested in
3	<i>briddum</i> <i>hrefn/hremma</i>	‘chicks of ravens’	Cambridge, Vespasian and Salisbury
5	<i>briddum (h)roca</i>	‘chicks of rooks’	Arundel, Vitellius, Regius, Stowe, Lambeth

¹²⁰ The editions for these, respectively, are: *Der Cambridger Psalter*, ed. by K. Wildhagen, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 7 (Hamburg: H. Grand, 1910); *The Vespasian Psalter*, ed. by S. M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965); *The Salisbury Psalter*, ed. by C. Sisam and K. Sisam, EETS 242 (London: OUP, 1959); *Der Altenglische Arundel-Psalter*, ed. by G. Oess, Anglistische Forschungen 30 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1910); *The Vitellius Psalter*, ed. by J. L. Rosier, Cornell Studies in English 41 (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962); F. Roeder, ed., *Der altenglische Regius-Psalter*, Studien zur englischen Philologie 18 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1904); *The Stowe Psalter*, ed. by A. C. Kimmens, Toronto Old English Series 3 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1979); *Der Lambeth-Psalter*, ed. by U. L. Lindelöf, Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae 35, 2 vols (Helsinki: Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae, 1909-1914); *Eadwine’s Canterbury Psalter*, ed. by F. Harsley, EETS 92 (London: Trübner, 1889).

1	<i>briddum crawan</i>	‘chicks of crows’	Eadwine’s Canterbury Psalter
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It is important to acknowledge that when ravens are mentioned elsewhere in these psalters, they are translated *hrefn* or *hremn*. It is only here, when translating *pullis coruorum*, that *coruus* is translated with anything but *hrefn/hremn*. The clear implication of this is that fully grown, or large, *Corvidae* were thought to be *hrefnas*, and that smaller, or not fully developed, *Corvidae* were thought to be either *hroccas* or *crawan*. To put this another way, *hroccas* and *crawan* are types of *hrefn*, or, more technically, *hrefn* is a vertically polysemous Level II and Level III term, whereas *hroc* and *crawe* are Level III terms subordinated to Level II *hrefn*.

There is no other evidence in Old English as striking as the translations of *pullis coruorum*, though there is some corroborating evidence for *crawe* and *hroc* being perceived as diminutive ravens elsewhere. Psalm 101.7 (*Similis factus sum pellicano solitudinis factus sum sicut nycticorax in domicilio*, ‘I have been like the *pellicano* in the wilderness, I have been just as the *nycticorax* in the dwelling’) mentions two unusual birds that glossators and translators, both modern and medieval, have generally struggled with.¹²¹ *Nocticorax* is usually calqued into Old English as *nihthrefn*, but in the Lambeth psalter it is calqued *nihthroc* (‘night-rook’). As the Lambeth psalter also translates *pullis coruorum* as *briddum hroca*, it may reflect that some Anglo-Saxons preferentially translated Latin *corvus* with *hroc* rather than *hrefn*, but this in itself suggests that *hroc* was considered both suitable and applicable for a raven. It may be a remnant of the era, posited above, when *hroc* was actually a raven term.

The final pieces of corroborating evidence come from the Second Antwerp glossary. In its list of bird-names, it has the following entries: *Cornix et coruina crawe* (l.1012) and *Coruus et corax remn* (l.1015). It is not clear if *cornix* was understood to be a diminutive of *corax* (these glosses do suggest so), though we can be sure that *coruina* was understood as a diminutive of *coruus*. When faced with diminutives for ‘raven’, the Second Antwerp glossary uses *crawe* instead, and this would support the

¹²¹ H. D. Meritt, *Some of the Hardest Glosses in Old English* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 115.

taxonomy deduced from the *pullis coruorum* glosses, in which *crawan* were thought to be small *hrefnas*.

Corvid perception and taxonomy

This section began by reviewing the ideophonic origins of Old English *crawe*, *hrefn* and *hroc*, and found that there were some complications in the naming in terms of the sounds alluded to by each of these calls: all three names are applicable to raven vocalisations, *crawe* is applicable to crow and rook cries, but *hroc* is not redolent of the sounds of either crows or rooks – it only suits raven calls. The aural data implied that Common Germanic **xrōkaz* was originally a raven-name, and that raven-names (in this case both **xrōkaz* and OE *hrefn*) were prone to becoming Level II terms covering all large *Corvidae*. A survey of physical descriptions of these birds in Old English found no reliable grounds for physically distinguishing the *hrefn*, though the handling of glosses of *pullis coruorum* suggests that the *hrefn* was recognized as being larger.

Taking all of the above together, the following taxonomy suggests itself: *hrefn*, *hroc* and *crawe* were seen, to some extent, as the same creature. This creature was referred to via the Level II *hrefn*, which covered Level III *hrefn* (the largest of the *Corvidae*), Level III *crawe* and Level III *hroc*. It is unclear to what extent, or if, the *crawe* and *hroc* were distinguished beyond being smaller than the *hrefn*. As far as the literary evidence goes, the diagnostic characteristics of these birds were not remarked upon (e.g. the raven's hackles or fan-shaped tail) and so it is not possible to assess if any other visual criteria factored into their identification. This means that, although it is tempting to translate *hroc* and *crawe* with their modern reflexes, there is no justification for doing so: *hroc* could have been applied to carrion crows as easily as *crawe* could have been applied to the rook. Indeed, both *hroc* and *crawe* could have been applied indiscriminately to the same species. This sort of speciation is clear in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, where the eponymous character remarks that 'the

crow/ Makes wing to th' rooky wood' (II.iii.50-51).¹²² It is not clear, either, to what extent the *hrefn* was distinguished from either the *crawe* or *hroc* too: the *pullis coruorum* glosses imply that size was a factor, but the exclusive use of *hrefn* in poetic contexts raises the possibility that artistic licence and dramatic concern, at the very least, could result in birds potentially identified as *crawe* or *hroc* being called *hrefn*. By analogy with modern dialectal speciation, we must also remain open to individual or regional preferences too.

Ideophonic bird-names

Above I have shown that despite the visual similarities of the *Corvidae*, the individual names *hroc*, *hrefn* and *crawe* came about because the birds have different vocalisations. In the introduction to this chapter I also discussed how ideophonic names suggested that birds were perceived primarily through sound, rather than by sight, and I wish to take this up further now. In this section I produce three case studies on how an understanding of the ideophonic names of birds in Old English helps us with species identification and understanding their semantic ranges, though considerations of space mean that this will be far from exhaustive.

My focus will be on visually similar species which bear different names because they have different vocalisations, though I will also offer examples of very different species which bear cognate names because of their similar vocalisations, and of unusual glosses in which the glossator seems to have understood the Latin name as also ideophonic (as we saw potentially with *hroc* and *graculus*, above). This section will finish with an examination of the birds of *The Seafarer*, as a demonstration of how the combination of ideophonic bird-names and descriptive verbs may help us with the identification of the birds, though with serious implications for their semantic fields. This is a revision of Margaret Goldsmith's (deservedly) ubiquitous study of the birds of *The Seafarer*.

¹²² *The Arden Shakespeare: Macbeth*, ed. by K. Muir (London: Arden, 1984).

Ule and ufe

Let us start with a bird for which we have only one ideophonic word in modern English, but two in Old English: the owl. In modern English it is a Level II term which lexicalizes a range of largely, but not strictly, nocturnal birds with round heads and seemingly flat faces. The semantic range of the Old English terms is not immediately clear, as the two Old English words, *(h)ufe* and *ule*, are attested almost exclusively in the glossaries.¹²³ Outside of the glossaries we find *ule* once in Leviticus and in possibly six place-names,¹²⁴ though the *ule* is not described at all in Leviticus, and the place-names bearing *ule* are not species-specific environments. Kitson draws attention to Suffolk place-names possibly employing *(h)ufe*, though again these environments are not species-specific.¹²⁵ This means that if we are to have any chance of recovering the semantics of *(h)ufe* and *ule*, then the lexical and ornithological evidence provides us with the best means of doing so.

While *ule*, the etymon of modern English ‘owl’, is more common in Old English, the presence of cognates of *(h)ufe* in Old High German suggests the latter is not a bookish neologism, though we cannot remark on its prevalence in Old English with

¹²³ *Ule*: *Ælfric’s Glossary*, p. 307 l.10, Aldhelm’s prose *De laude virginitatis* (in *Old English Glosses*, ed. by A. S. Napier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), l.5338, Second Antwerp glossary l.986, Brussels glossary l.35, Second Corpus glossary C.119, N.138 and U.238 (in *An Eighth Century Glossary, Preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*, ed. by Hessels), First Cleopatra ll.1275 and 4281 (‘The Latin-Old English Glossary in MS. Cotton Cleopatra A.III’, ed. by W. G. Stryker (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1951)), Second Cleopatra ll.41 and 42 (‘The Minor Latin-Old English Glossaries in MS. Cotton Cleopatra A.III’, ed. by J. J. Quinn (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1951)), Third Cleopatra l.1361 (in *Ibid.*), the Harley 107 glossary l.55, Harley 3376 glossary C.579 (in the *Harley Latin-Old English Glossary*, ed. by Oliphant), and in a glossary edited by Garrett (‘Middle English and French Glosses from MS Stowe 57’) it is attested on l.30. *(h)ufe*: Brussels glossary l.67, Second Antwerp l.1027, Second Corpus B.206, Épinal-Erfurt ll.142 and 161, First Cleopatra l.700, among some glosses to Isidore’s *Etymologiae* (l.4, in W. Riehle, ‘Ueber einige neuentdeckte altenglische Glossen’, *Anglia*, 84 (1966), 150-55), and in two glossaries edited by H. D. Meritt (nos. 36 and 70), both on l.14 (H. D. Meritt, *Old English Glosses: A Collection*, MLA General Series 16 (New York: MLA, 1945)).

¹²⁴ Leviticus 11:13, in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch*. The place-names are in S79 (*ulan wylle*, ‘owls’ well’), S377 (*ulan del*, ‘owls’ dale’), and S1307 (*ulan bearhe*, ‘owls’ wood’). S803 (*ulan hyrste*, ‘owl’s ornament’) seems to represent a personal name. The weak genitive inflection of *ulan* is possible here if it stands as a contracted plural *-ena*; see Kitson ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, 6 and note.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

any certainty.¹²⁶ Although *ule* glosses a wide variety of Latin ‘owl’ words, namely *strix*, *ulula*, *noctua* and forms of *cavannus* (most often in the form *cavannarum*), *(h)ufe* only ever glosses *bubo* and *bufo*.¹²⁷ Later on, there are also instances where *(h)ufe* glosses Latin *vultur*.¹²⁸ This alone suggests that *ule* had a wider semantic range than *(h)ufe*. As *ule* never glosses *bubo* or *bufo*, Latin words which refer to the large Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*), the implication of the glossary evidence is as follows: firstly, that *(h)ufe* is a Level III term which refers exclusively to the large Eagle Owl (and then, if we can trust its glossing *vultur*, as a Level IA term for large birds of prey generally), and secondly, that *ule* is a Level II term which lexicalizes all smaller owls. The former point is supported by Suolahti’s analysis of the Old High German cognates of *(h)ufe*, which he argues all also refer to the Eagle Owl.

There is a potential problem here, however, and that is the disputed status of the Eagle Owl in Anglo-Saxon England. Derek Yalden and Umberto Albarella note that “Eagle Owls are not represented in Medieval British archaeology”, and that this is “a strong argument that they had become extinct well before then”,¹²⁹ though it is worth bearing in mind that the Eagle Owl’s preferred habitat in the more remote portions of mountains and forests means that they are not likely to be well represented in the archaeological record.¹³⁰ Because of the dearth of evidence for an Eagle Owl population in Anglo-Saxon England, Kitson suggests that OE *(h)ufe* referred to the Long-eared Owl (*Asio otis*), ‘as the native species most similar to the eagle owl and most different from the tawny’; he takes *ule* to refer ‘mainly’ to the Tawny Owl.¹³¹ This raises the stakes for an accurate identification of the *(h)ufe*, as it may or may not

¹²⁶ There are several variant forms in OHG. *BT* notes that the OHG *(h)uvo* can occur both ‘with and without initial *h*’ (s.v. ‘huf’), and Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 309, gives *ûro*, *hû(w)o*, and in n.1, *uuof* and *uuo*.

¹²⁷ According to André, *Les Noms D’oiseaux en Latin*, both *bubo* and *bufo* refer to the Eagle Owl (s.v.v. ‘bubo, -onis’ and ‘bufo, -onis’), whereas *noctua* (s.v.) is a vertically polysemous term which lexicalises both the Level IA meaning covering all nocturnal creatures, and the Level III meaning of the Little Owl (*Athene noctua*). *Ulula* (s.v.) refers to the Tawny Owl (*strix aluco*), *strix* (s.v. ‘strix, strigis’) refers to the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), and André identifies *cavannus* (s.v. ‘cauannus’) as a Gaulish name for the Tawny Owl. The probable source for this lemma is given in André.

¹²⁸ Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, 7, notes that two eleventh-century manuscripts of Ælfric’s Grammar add *(h)ufe* to gloss *vulur*.

¹²⁹ D. W. Yalden, and U. Albarella, *The History of British Birds* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 138.

¹³⁰ For the bird’s history in the British Isles, see Yalden and Albarella, *History of British Birds*, pp. 58-60, and J. Fisher, *The Shell Bird Book* (London: Ebury, 1963), p. 24. Because of issues with the semantic fields of *bubo* and *ufe* we cannot unquestioningly accept Fisher’s comments, on p. 324, that identify the Eagle Owl as ‘recorded’ or ‘possibly native’ between the eighth and eleventh centuries.

¹³¹ Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, 6.

supply documentary evidence for the Eagle Owl's presence in Anglo-Saxon England.¹³²

The ideophonic nature of *ule* and *(h)ufe* is beyond reasonable doubt, and they match quite well to transcriptions of owl vocalisations. Specifically, *ule* is closest to hooting of the vocal (and nocturnal) Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*),¹³³ whereas, *(h)ufe* captures the forcefully expulsive, almost cough-like, qualities of the calls of crepuscular and nocturnal Long-eared Owl,¹³⁴ the often diurnal Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*),¹³⁵ and, though the evidence for its residency in Anglo-Saxon England is basically non-existent, the nocturnal and crepuscular Eagle Owl.¹³⁶ If we combine this with the glossary evidence, then the following taxonomies are suggested:

- I) *Ule* is an ideophonic name redolent of the Tawny Owl's hoot, but as the Tawny Owl is nocturnal and rarely seen (or, at least, rarely observed in the act of its eponymous vocalisation), *ule* could plausibly lend itself to a range of nocturnal birds. This would explain the rationale underlying the varied Latin 'owl'-terms it glosses. Moreover, the fact that it never glosses *bubo* or *bufo* suggests that it was firmly differentiated from the *(h)ufe*. Thus, *ule* is a vertically polysemous term which lexicalises both Level IA 'birds of the night', Level II 'non-*(h)ufe* owls' and possibly even Level III 'Tawny Owl'. The status of the now-resident Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) is not clear in Anglo-Saxon England. It is generally thought to have been introduced to the British Isles in the nineteenth century,¹³⁷ though Fisher notes that we have fossil evidence for their presence in Britain in the Late Ice Age.¹³⁸ It seems probable that the Little Owl, as well as the other occasional visitors such the Scops Owl (*Otus scops*),

¹³² See, for example, Fisher, *The Shell Bird Book*, p. 324.

¹³³ The Tawny Owl's hoot is the sound most people tend to think of when imagining an owl-call.

¹³⁴ Often transliterated as 'oh' but described as a 'deep hooting'. See *CBG*, p. 228.

¹³⁵ The most relevant vocalisations are the alarm-call often transliterated as 'cheh', the female's 'cheh-eh', and the deep hooting flight-call often transliterated as 'uh'. See *CBG*, p. 228.

¹³⁶ See *CBG*, p. 222.

¹³⁷ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 6, and D. T. Parkin and A. G. Knox, *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland* (London: Helm, 2010), p. 223.

¹³⁸ Fisher, *Shell Bird Book*, p. 324.

came under *ule* too, even if only in its Level II meaning.

- II) (*H*)*ufe* is an ideophonic name that evokes the cries of not just one, but three species: the Long-eared Owl, the Short-eared Owl and the Eagle Owl. It is uncertain whether the last of these was resident in Anglo-Saxon England, though it seems to have been the primary referent of (*h*)*ufe*'s OHG cognates. Unlike the Tawny Owl, these three owls are likely to have been seen calling during the day, at dawn, or at dusk, and, moreover, are visually quite similar. The main differences are that the Eagle Owl is substantially larger (59-73 cm long, 138-170 cm wingspan) than the Long-eared or Short-eared owls (L 31-37 cm, WS 86-98 cm, and L 33-40 cm, WS 95-105 cm respectively), and only the Eagle Owl and Long-eared Owl have particularly prominent 'ear-tufts'; these are much more difficult to see on a Short-eared Owl.¹³⁹ The general coloration is nearly identical: all three are largely yellowish-brown with dark streaks, and in flight expose lighter underwings. Therefore, I suggest that the semantic range of (*h*)*ufe* encompassed these three diurnal and crepuscular owls (to the exclusion of largely nocturnal owls, hence (*h*)*ufe* never glosses Latin *noctua*), and that identification was made on both aural and visual grounds. The taxonomic level is less clear; it seems safe to say that (*h*)*ufe* is at least Level II, though the consistency with which it glosses only *bubo* and *bufo* means that it could possibly be a Level III term too.

Further support for this lexicalisation may be found in French, where our Level II 'owl' corresponds to two French terms: *chouette* and *hibou*. This French evidence is particularly useful as *hibou* is a borrowing of cognates of (*h*)*ufe*.¹⁴⁰ While *chouette* is the Level II term for 'owl' generally, the ideophonic *hibou* is a Level III term which

¹³⁹ For the Eagle Owl see *CBG*, p. 222, and for the Long-eared and Short-eared Owls see p. 228.

¹⁴⁰ M. Desfayes, *Origine des Noms des Oiseaux et des Mammifères d'Europe y Compris l'Espèce Humaine* (Paris: Pillels, 2000), p. 77.

refers specifically to ‘chouette à oreilles’, (‘owls with ears’; the ears are also known as *aigrettes*),¹⁴¹ i.e. the Long-eared, Short-eared and Eagle Owls.

Brysce and þrostle

Another set of similar-looking species with very different names in Old English are the thrushes (genus *Turdus*); in particular, the strikingly similar Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) and Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*). Both birds are medium sized Passerines (though the Mistle Thrush is slightly larger than the Song Thrush),¹⁴² brown hued along their heads and backs, with light breasts speckled with dark spots. Their Old English names are *brysce* and *þrostle*, which, as Kitson notes, ‘are closely related, Germanic variants on a root whose meaning ‘thrush’ is of Indo-European antiquity.’¹⁴³ As there is little to disagree with in Kitson’s analysis of these names and their semantic ranges,¹⁴⁴ I limit myself to supplementing this with a discussion on how ideophonia lies behind these names and their semantic fields, and what we can say about their taxonomic levels.

As Kitson has noted, *brysce* and *þrostle*¹⁴⁵ were likely identified as different birds in Old English, though his strongest evidence is that they sometimes gloss different lemmata.¹⁴⁶ However, Kitson does not draw attention to Lockwood’s rather crucial observation that *þrostle* reflects the same Germanic root as *brysce* with a diminutive ending.¹⁴⁷ Later usage of ‘Throstle’, referring to the smaller Song Thrush, is suggestive, though it is worth noting that the Song Thrush is both smaller and quieter

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁴² *CBG*, p. 294. The Mistle Thrush averages 26-29 cm in length, whereas the Song Thrush averages 20-22 cm.

¹⁴³ Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 484. For the Proto-Indo-European etymon **trosdos*, see J. P. Mallory and D. Q. Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 145. See also Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v.v. ‘Throstle’ and ‘Thrush’.

¹⁴⁴ I.e. that they overlap with each other and also, with the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). See Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 484-5.

¹⁴⁵ The variation of forms with and without initial ‘s-’ is ‘of Indo-European antiquity’ and is noted by Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 485, and so I have silently included OE *strosle* with *þrostle* in my analysis.

¹⁴⁶ Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 484.

¹⁴⁷ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Throstle’.

than the Mistle Thrush, and that therefore the diminutive suffix could possibly reference either, or both, of these aspects.¹⁴⁸ The use of OE *prostle* to gloss Latin *turdella* (properly *turdela*, a diminutive of *turdus*) may indicate that glossators were aware of *prostle*'s diminutive status, and thereby provide evidence that this term was used of the Song Thrush from an early date.¹⁴⁹ However, this hypothesis is problematized by the fact that Latin *turdela* referred primarily to the larger Mistle Thrush,¹⁵⁰ and by the interpretamenta we find for *turdus*, which are never *brysce*. When we do find *turdus* in the glossaries, its preferred interpretamentum is *scric*,¹⁵¹ though it is also glossed by *stær* ('Starling').¹⁵² Indeed, *brysce* is attested very rarely in Old English at all: *brysce* glosses *sturtius*,¹⁵³ *brisce* glosses *trutius*,¹⁵⁴ and *ðraesce* glosses *truitius*.¹⁵⁵ Kitson would see these lemmata as 'corruptions of *turdus*', though in each of these cases *turdus* occurs as a separate lemma.¹⁵⁶ Kitson may well be correct in identifying these garbled lemmata as such, but what is important for my purposes here is why the glossators kept such incomprehensible lemmata. We may, of course, accept the hypothesis that the scribes slavishly copied out what was in front of them regardless of comprehensibility. Alternatively, and this is the assumption I work with here, we can ascribe them with the benefit of having reasons for matching the lemmata and interpretamenta they do.

¹⁴⁸ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (I)', 484, makes the observation that the Mistle Thrush is both louder and larger.

¹⁴⁹ *Turdella* is glossed by variants of *prostle* in Second Corpus T.323, Second Cleopatra 1.51, Harley 107 1.52, and Épinal-Erfurt 1.1011. The *DOEC* transcribes a further attestation from an unedited glossary in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 730, with the short title 'CollGI 25', where it is 1.84. The unusual entries in the Second Antwerp and Brussels glossaries (1.1023: *Turdella se mare stær*, 'the starling of the sea', and 1.63: *Turdella scealfor*) are less easy to explain. The most probable explanation is that the common source for Brussels and Cleopatra drew on Isidore's *Etymologiae* XII.7.71 (*Turdela quasi maior turdus*, '*Turdela* is the larger *turdus*'), and either understood the text and had **se mara stær* ('the greater stær'), or misread the *maior* as meaning 'famous' and had **se mæc stær*. In either case, the adjective was subsequently misread as a genitive singular variant of *mere/mære* ('the sea'), which, in spite of generally declining as a masculine noun is attested with the feminine genitive singular form *mere* (see *BT*, s.v. 'mere'). See also André, *Les Noms d'Oiseaux en Latin*, s.v. 'turdela, -ae'.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* See also Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XII.7.71.

¹⁵¹ Second Antwerp, 1.1011, Brussels 1.47, Second Corpus T.324, Second Cleopatra 1.55, Leiden glossary (*A Late Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of the Leiden University*, ed. by J. H. H. Hessels (Cambridge: CUP, 1906)), §47, 1.63, and Épinal-Erfurt 1.1013. It is tempting to read *srheich*, which glosses *turdus* in MS Bodley 730, 1.88, and *stint*, in Harley 107, 1.55, as corruptions of the *scric* interpretamentum, though see the remarks I make below.

¹⁵² Ælfric's Glossary 307.7 and Second Antwerp, 1.1022.

¹⁵³ Harley 107, 1.53.

¹⁵⁴ Second Cleopatra 1.56.

¹⁵⁵ Second Corpus T.314.

¹⁵⁶ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (I)', 484. *Turdus* occurs as a separate lemma, with different interpretamenta, to the garbled lemmata for *brysce* in Harley 107 1.53, Second Cleopatra 1.55 and Second Corpus T.324.

I propose that understanding both the importance of the aural perception of birds as well as the suggested taxonomic levels can go some way to explaining some of these difficulties, namely: 1) the absence of glosses where *brysce* is the interpretamentum for *turdus* despite the pairing of the diminutives of both of these words, 2) the use of *brysce* only for forms so garbled that they are barely recognisable as corruptions of *turdus*, and 3) the potential for *scric* and *stær* to be considered plausible glosses for *turdus*. I shall address each of these points in turn.

Firstly, the existence of a diminutive form does not necessarily indicate a diminutive meaning. The diminutive form is also used hypocoristically, for example, and many bird names are attested with hypocoristic variants which do not substantially alter the word's meaning. To take another Old English example: we find hypocoristic forms of *putta* ('kite', 'buzzard'), in *pyttel*, found only in place-names and personal names,¹⁵⁷ and in *puttoc*, found only as a personal name in Old English. Later attestations of both *pyttel* and *puttoc*, and their reflexes, evidence that these were names for kites and buzzards, and that their meanings were no different to that of *putta*.¹⁵⁸ Although we do not have Germanic cognates to help corroborate which of these is the original form, it is probable, *a priori*, that *putta* (literally 'that which puts', a reference to the bird's swooping strike)¹⁵⁹ represents the stem from which *pyttel* and *puttoc* derive. In spite of Lockwood's reticence, we may be sure, on the basis of a wealth of available parallels, that both *-el* and *-ock* suffixes are common diminutives in Old English.¹⁶⁰ The implication of this parallel is that *turdella* and *prostle* may have been recognised as hypocoristic bird-names, rather than as diminutives with augmentative counterparts.

The second reason that *prostle* may gloss *turdella* at the expense of *brysce* glossing *turdus* is that the first pair are closely ideophonic, evoking a similar sound in a way that the second pair does not. Both *turdella* and *prostle* are commonly acknowledged to be ideophonic in origin, though some commentators remark on this quality only

¹⁵⁷ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 9.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., and Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. 'puttock'.

¹⁵⁹ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 9.

¹⁶⁰ See the *OED*, s.v.v. 'el, suffix1', and '-ock, suffix', and Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird names*, s.v.v. '(-le' and '(-ock'.

with respect to its Indo-European ideophonic roots.¹⁶¹ I argue that both terms were still perceived as ideophonic in the Anglo-Saxon period: *prostle* suggests a /θrɑstələ/, *turdella* suggests the very similar /tɜrdəla/. Bearing in mind the imprecise nature of transliteration, the sound evoked by both *prostle* and *turdella* seems a good match for the trisyllabic beginning of the Mistle Thrush's most characteristic cry, which is today often transliterated as 'truitrūvu'.¹⁶²

Similarly, both *turdus* and *brysce* were understood to be ideophonic too.¹⁶³ However, in this case, the sounds suggested by the names are much less alike: *turdus* evokes the part of the Song Thrush's song often transliterated as 'trrū-trrū-trrū',¹⁶⁴ whereas *brysce* suggests a screechier sound like /θru:ʃə/ or, into the tenth century, /θri:skə/.¹⁶⁵ The sound suggested by /θru:ʃə/ might explain why it only glosses garbled derivatives of *turdus*: *sturtius*,¹⁶⁶ *trutius*,¹⁶⁷ and *truitius*,¹⁶⁸ which all possess an initial dental, medial back vowel and final lingual consonant possibly redolent of the sound of *brysce*. A combination of poor transmission and an expectation of ideophonia may lie behind the entry *Strutio bryssce* (1.48) in the Brussels glossary, and also the gloss *Structio scric* if the Latin were understood to be ideophonic (i.e. on the basis of /stru:tiʃə/ and /θru:ʃə/, and /stru:ktijə/ and /skri:tʃ/).¹⁶⁹ Presumably a gloss such as **turdus. brysce* is at the root of all these corrupted forms, and such a gloss could well have been based on parallelism between *brysce/prostle*, and

¹⁶¹ André, *Les Noms d'Oiseaux en Latin*, s.v.v. 'turela, -ae' and 'turdus', endorses the possibility that these names are ideophonic in origin, though it is not clear how far back he thinks these origins are, or if they were understood to be ideophonic; his explanation, s.v. 'turdus', suggests the latter. Malory and Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World*, p. 145, like Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v.v. 'throstle' and 'thrush', and Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 53, consider the Indo-European ideophonic origins without remarking on the possibility of contemporary speakers recognising the names as such.

¹⁶² CBG, p. 294.

¹⁶³ André, *Les Noms d'Oiseaux en Latin*, s.v. 'turdus'. For the ideophonia of *brysce*, see below.

¹⁶⁴ CBG, p. 294.

¹⁶⁵ I am grateful to Alaric Hall for bringing this phonetic change to my attention.

¹⁶⁶ Harley 107, l.53.

¹⁶⁷ Second Cleopatra l.56.

¹⁶⁸ Second Corpus Glossary T.314.

¹⁶⁹ Harley 107, l.65. The description of the *struthio* ('ostrich') in Isidore's *Etymologiae* XII.7.20 reads: *Struthio Graeco nomine dicitur, quod animal in similitudine avis pinnas habere videtur; tamen de terra altius non elevatur. Ova sua fovere neglegit; sed proiecta tantummodo fotu pulveris animantur*, 'The ostrich is named from the Greek, which is seen to have feathers like a bird, but it does not rise above the ground. It neglects the incubation of its eggs, and the abandoned eggs are brought to life by only by the warm dust' (in *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi: Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. by W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911)). This could conceivably have been understood to apply to either the blackbird or the thrushes, which tend to nest low in thick underbrush and are often seen flying close to the ground, and this may have influenced the glossator's understanding of a garbled form of *turdus*.

turdus/turdella. The corruption of the lemma, however, could suggest that such linguistically oriented understanding was not widespread.

The glossing of *turdus* by *scric* and *stær*, as Kitson has remarked, could imply a regional variation in the identification of these birds.¹⁷⁰ I take issue, however, with his subsequent remark that Ælfric, in particular, ‘did not care very much about the names of small birds,’ and that this contributed to the use of *scric* and *stær* to gloss *turdus*.¹⁷¹ Kitson adduces an entry from Ælfric’s glossary (307.7) to support this, which reads *passer spearwa oððe lytel fugel* (‘*passer*: sparrow or little bird’). There are many reasons to assume that Ælfric’s statement here is indicative of a view held more pervasively than by just a few clergymen. The popularity of Ælfric’s glossary and the lack of alteration to this entry in the various manuscripts suggests it was generally accepted by its audience, and we must also bear in mind the difficulty of differentiating small birds of sparrow-size. Furthermore, we must contend with the fact that *passeres* (‘sparrows’) is rendered *staras* (lit. ‘starlings’) in Matthew 10:29 and Luke 12:6.¹⁷² In addition to this, we find reflexes of *spearwa* used of other birds in Middle English and in the realm of folk-nomenclature.¹⁷³

Higera and *hraga*

The last pair of names I wish to discuss, before moving on to the birds of *The Seafarer*, are *higera* (‘jay’) and *hraga* (‘heron’). While the Old English words look rather different, a survey of their cognates suggests a close relationship between them. We have two reflexes of ‘heron’ words deriving from West Germanic **xraizron*:¹⁷⁴ those which show dissimilation (ON *hegri*, OHG *heigar(o)*, OS *hēg(e)ro*, and in the Old French and Finnish borrowings, *(h)ai(g)ron* and *haikara*,

¹⁷⁰ Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 485, and n. 1.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *MED*, s.v. ‘sparwe (n.)’, and Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Sparrow’.

¹⁷⁴ We cannot accurately posit a Common Germanic form for **xraizrōn* because of the absence of any eastern Germanic forms.

respectively),¹⁷⁵ and those which do not (OHG *reigaro*, Middle Dutch *reiger* and Middle Low German *reger*).¹⁷⁶ Germanic ‘jay’ words are less well attested, but are found in OHG *hehara* and OS *higara* as well as OE *higer*.¹⁷⁷ The etymological relationship between them has been remarked on before: Walter Skeat noted a relationship between OE *higora* (the feminine form of *higer* attested in runes of Exeter Riddle 24), OHG *heiger/heigir*, ON *hegri*, OE *hraga* (‘heron’) and OHG *hehara* (‘jay’),¹⁷⁸ and Rolf Bremmer has similarly observed that the Middle Low German *heger* and *heier* (‘jay’), like OE *higer*, are ‘etymologically related’ to OS *heigro* (‘heron’).¹⁷⁹ As far as I am aware, however, only Suolahti attempts to explain why two such different birds have cognate names: both birds are named after their similar-sounding barking calls.¹⁸⁰ By way of comparison, the ornithological literature transliterates their calls thus:

Table 1.6: Transliterations of jay and heron calls

Jay	‘kraa-aah’, ‘aaa’, ‘kshehr’, ¹⁸¹ ‘kscaach’ ¹⁸²
Heron	‘frank’, ‘kräick’, ‘schaah’, ¹⁸³ ‘kah-arhk’ ¹⁸⁴

The etymological relationship between ‘jay’ and ‘heron’ names in Germanic languages is especially interesting because of the aural identification of the heron, in

¹⁷⁵ Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 378, Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. **xraizrōn*, and R. Bremmer, ‘Two early vernacular names for the *aves beati Cuthberti*: Middle English *lomes* and Middle Low German/Old Frisian *eires*’, *English Studies*, 6 (1990), 486-495, at 491.

¹⁷⁶ Bremmer, ‘Two early vernacular names’, 490-91.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 492 n.32, Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, pp. 198-9 and Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 496. I have not included ON *skjór* ‘magpie’, in this list because, as J. de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2nd edn (Leiden: Brill, 2000), s.v. ‘skjór’, notes, ‘Die etymologie ist umstritten’ (‘the etymology is controversial’). Of the etymologies offered by de Vries, the most plausible is that it is linked to West Germanic ‘jay’ words, such as OHG *hehara* and OE *higer*; this is endorsed by Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. **xixurō ~ *skixurō*. It is, however, difficult to account for the initial consonant cluster in *skjór*, and Orel himself seems unsure about its etymology as he later gives an alternative root for it, s.v. ‘*skeuraz’.

¹⁷⁸ W. W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), s.v. ‘Heron’.

¹⁷⁹ Bremmer, ‘Two early vernacular names’, 492 n.32.

¹⁸⁰ Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, pp. 199 and 378.

¹⁸¹ *BWP*, VIII, 21-23

¹⁸² *CBG* p. 362.

¹⁸³ *BWP*, I, 309-310.

¹⁸⁴ *CBG* p. 84.

particular. It is understandable that the jay is identified aurally: it is a shy bird which makes a prolific range of noises, and the screech-call after which it is named is common in response to the sighting of potential predators.¹⁸⁵ The heron, however, is a visually striking bird because of its size and characteristic angular posture, and it is generally a bird that is seen more often than heard. The endowment of this bird with an ideophonic name says much for the Germanic inclination towards experiencing birds aurally.

Analogous etymologies are useful insofar as they provide a contrast to the Germanic ideophonic heron-names. The etymology of Latin *ardea* is obscure and Jacques André is unable to say more than that it derives from Greek *ἑρωδιός*, and D'Arcy Thompson remarks that the etymology of the Greek is dubious.¹⁸⁶ However, a widely-circulating folk-etymology identified *ardea* with *ardua* ('lofty'), and explained the bird as named after its lofty flight.¹⁸⁷ Clearly the Latin-speaking believers of such a folk-etymology expected such a visually conspicuous bird to be named after visual criteria. The etymology of Old Irish *corr*, a word that means both 'heron' and 'crane', has a visual foundation, being an extension of the homonym *corr*, which encompasses a range of meanings including 'tapering', 'pointed', and 'peaked'.¹⁸⁸ This captures the distinctive postures of both herons and cranes, and fits with the general characteristic of birds in Old Irish that they are there identified largely on visual grounds.¹⁸⁹

Especially when framed against other early medieval speakers naming the heron after visual criteria, it is difficult to see how anything other than a primary mode of experiencing birds aurally could account for the heron being named after its call. This example is striking, but only affirms what we have seen from surveying everything from the *Corvidae* names to thrushes, and from owls to jays. Many more

¹⁸⁵ *BWP*, VIII, 16-17. *CBG*, p. 362, somewhat anecdotally relates that when a flock of jays sight a predator, 'a real uproar can break out in the woods!'

¹⁸⁶ André, *Les Noms D'oiseaux en Latin*, s.v. 'ardea, -ae', and D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), p. 58.

¹⁸⁷ André, *Les Noms D'oiseaux en Latin*, s.v. 'ardea, -ae'.

¹⁸⁸ G. Toner, et al., *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (eDIL)*, rev. electronic edn (Belfast: Royal Irish Academy and Queen's University Belfast) <edil.qub.ac.uk/dictionary/search.php> [accessed 02 November 2013], s.v.v. '2 corr' and '1 corr'. See also J. F. Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 183.

¹⁸⁹ Tymoczko, 'The Semantic Fields of Early Irish Terms for Black Birds', p. 167.

examples could be produced, and a systematic analysis of the ideophonic aspects of Old English bird names could easily fill an entire monograph; it is sufficient here to note the importance, philologically and taxonomically, of acknowledging the prominence of the aural experience of birds. In subsequent chapters of this thesis we will return to this aurality and find that it permeates more than just the naming system of birds. For now, though we will turn to the Old English word *ganot/ganet*, and examine hitherto little acknowledged complications regarding its meaning and semantic field.

An Anglo-Saxon genus? The case of OE *Ganot*

Ganot as attested in Old English

Perhaps the most unusual of Old English bird-names is *ganot*. It is the one of the most frequently attested non-predatory birds, secondly only to *cul(u)fre*, occurring 17 times in the extant corpus.¹⁹⁰ It occurs seven times in the glossaries,¹⁹¹ three times in glossed texts,¹⁹² five times in poetry,¹⁹³ and twice in prose (counting the ‘D’ and ‘E’ chronicles as different prose texts).¹⁹⁴ Usually *ganot* is equated with its MnE reflex ‘gannet’ (*Morus bassanus*), and a connection between these two terms is beyond question.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, we cannot assume that the meaning of *ganot* is

¹⁹⁰ My own searches through the *DOEC* have yielded the same number of attestations as noted in the *DOE*, s.v. ‘ganot’.

¹⁹¹ Second Corpus F.382, where *funix* is presumably an error for *fulix*, First Cleopatra 1.2528, Second Cleopatra 1.13, Brussels Glossary 1.7, Harley 107 1.36, Épinal-Erfurt 1.419.

¹⁹² Regius Psalter 103.17, Blickling Gloss 103.17 (‘The Blickling Glosses’, ed. by E. Brock, in R. Morris, ed. *The Blickling Homilies*, EETS 58, 63, 73 (London: Trübner, 1880)), and gloss no. 402 in Prudentius’s *Peristaphanon* X.220-222, in *The Old English Prudentius Glosses at Boulogne-sur-Mer*, ed. by H. D. Meritt, Stanford Studies in Language and Literature XVI (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), at p. 42.

¹⁹³ *The Seafarer* 1.20a, *Paris Psalter* 104.35, *Beowulf* 1.1861b, *The Death of Edgar* 1.26a (I count this separately from the Chronicle), *The Rune Poem* 1.79a.

¹⁹⁴ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ‘D’, s.a. 975, *ASC* ‘E’, s.a. 975.

¹⁹⁵ Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, 22, does not even suggest there is any problem with this equation, noting only that ‘the gannet *ganot* is well attested in both literature and glossaries’.

identical to its modern reflex, and indeed, many of the earliest occurrences of *ganot/gannet* cannot be taken to refer to *Morus bassanus* with any certainty.¹⁹⁶

Let us begin with the glosses. In five of its ten occurrences, *ganot* glosses *fulix* ('waterfowl') by itself,¹⁹⁷ and the other four times it co-glosses *fulix* with *dopaenid*,¹⁹⁸ which literally means 'diving-duck' (the remaining one time it glosses *cynus*).¹⁹⁹ As we shall see, both *fulix* and *dopaenid* are generic terms, and this has implications for the meaning of *ganot*.²⁰⁰ *Fulix*, in particular, does not seem to have been well understood in Anglo-Saxon England. In the first instance, two discrete Latin words, *fulica* ('coot', *Fulica atra*) and *fulix* ('sea-birds') are understood as variant forms of the same lemma.²⁰¹ In two closely related glossaries there is an error in which *fulix* glosses *stirnus/scurnus*,²⁰² and the Second Corpus Glossary glosses *fulice* with *genus auis marinae* ('a sort of bird from the sea').²⁰³ The only other place *fulix* occurs is in translations and glosses of Psalm 103.17 (*illic passerēs nidificabunt fulice domus dux est eorum*, 'sparrows build a nest there, and the waterfowl build their nests above them'),²⁰⁴ where the *interpretamenta* vary: usually *fulice* in this

¹⁹⁶ This is true of the earliest attestations of 'gannet' noted in the *OED*, s.v. 'gannet', though the *OED* is of the opinion that these refer to *Morus bassanus* (they use its old scientific name, *Sula bassanus*). For example, the Middle English medical book attestation of c.1450, mentions only 'ganataes grece', which is hardly detailed enough to determine whether the grease from a goose, Gannet or other bird such as the Bustard, is referred to here. *A priori*, the grease from a goose seems most likely. Even more problematic is the 1550 attestation in John Bale's *The actes of the Englysh votaryes*, in which there is reference to 'gantēs or bystardes'; the 'bystarde' is the MnE Bustard, and this attestation suggests that 'gantēs' and 'bystardes' are the same thing. The OE evidence is problematised, below.

¹⁹⁷ Brussels Glossary 1.7, Second Cleopatra 1.13, Harley 107 1.24, Regius Psalter 103.17 and Blickling gloss 103.17.

¹⁹⁸ Second Corpus, F.382, Épinal-Erfurt 1.419, and First Cleopatra 1.2528.

¹⁹⁹ *The Old English Prudentius Glosses*, p. 42.

²⁰⁰ Andre, *Les Noms D'oiseaux en Latin*, pp. 75-77, argues that Classical authors originally used *fulica* to refer to the Eurasian coot (*Fulica atra*), but that *fulix* could be applied to seabirds, and that some confusion of terms lead to *fulica* also meaning 'seabirds'. The understanding that *fulix* could refer to any seabird in Anglo-Saxon England is best evidenced by the Second Corpus glossary; see note 202 below.

²⁰¹ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (I)', 497.

²⁰² I take these to be badly copied variants of an original *sturnus*, 'starling'. These glossaries are Second Antwerp, 1.1020 and Brussels glossary 1.53.

²⁰³ Second Corpus, F.397. W. Lindsay, 'Bird-names in Latin glossaries', *Classical Philology*, 13 (1985), 1-13 at 5 explains this as a misunderstanding of Virgil's *Georgics* I 362-3, common in Latin glossaries.

²⁰⁴ There are two recorded versions of Psalm 101: one version, the Roman Psalter, found in the Cambridge, Vespasian, Regius, Junius and Eadwine Psalters, reads *illic passerēs nidificabunt fulice domus dux est eorum*; the other version, the Gallican Psalter, found in the Arundel, Tiberius, Vitellius, Stowe, Salisbury and Lambeth Psalters, has *herodii* (usually 'heron' or a general term for 'waterfowl') instead of *fulice*. For a complete list of the versions of the psalms found in Anglo-Saxon glossed psalters see R. Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), pp. 44-5, n.104.

context is glossed with forms of *hafoc*.²⁰⁵ This is unlikely to indicate that Anglo-Saxons thought the *fulix* was a bird of prey, and is probably best understood as reflecting the influence of Romanum psalter glosses which equate *herodii* with *hafoc*.²⁰⁶ There are two occurrences where the *fulice* of Psalm 103.17 is not glossed by *hafoc*. In the Regius Psalter it is glossed with *ganot*, and in Eadwine's Canterbury Psalter, where the relationship between the gloss and lemma is puzzling; it does not seem to be recognised as a bird-name.²⁰⁷

The use of *dopaenid* as a co-gloss is interesting but not easy to interpret. The word *dopaenid* itself is vague, being a compound of *ened* (usually translated 'duck') and *doppettan* ('to dive').²⁰⁸ At a morphological level *dopaenid* seems to suggest a refinement of a particular sort of *ened*, which, by modern taxonomies, is Level II; *dopaenid* would then be a Level III term. Kitson, who accepts that *dopaenid* is a faithful translation of Latin *fulica* ('coot'), endorses *dopaenid*'s status as a Level III taxonym, arguing that it referred specifically to the Coot. Kitson then tries to justify the application of *dopaenid* to seabirds by suggesting that it also covered the Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) and Velvet Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*). I cannot accept such an easy identification of *dopaenid* with the Coot, and its connection with the seabirds is tenuous; it requires that *dopaenid* and *fulica* have identical semantic fields, and, moreover, is based on general colour similarities between the Coot and some seabirds.²⁰⁹ I have already highlighted the difficulties Anglo-Saxons seem to have had with understanding *fulica*, and we do not know enough about *dopaenid* to assume that its identification was based on colour.

Indeed, we may question whether *dopaenid* is actually as specific as a Level III, or even Level II, term. Semantically, *dopaenid* is related to four attested Old English

²⁰⁵ *Fulice* is glossed *hafoces* in the Vespasian, Junius and Cambridge Psalters.

²⁰⁶ For an explanation of this, see P. Shaw, 'Telling a hawk from an herodio: on the origins and development of the Old English word *wealh hafoc* and its relatives', *Medium Ævum*, 82 (2013), 1-22.

²⁰⁷ Eadwine Psalter has *Der speræn nistlicæþ twiogendlice hus lætiow is hiræ*, which seems garbled ('there sparrows doubtfully make a nest, the house is superior to them'), and seems to gloss *fulice* with *twiogendlice*. Frustratingly little has been written about Eadwine's Psalter, let alone this particular gloss, which is not discussed for its peculiarity in either Wildhagen's edition or in Harsley's edition of *Eadwine's Canterbury Psalter*. The only full-length study dedicated to Eadwine's psalter, *The Eadwine Psalter: Text, Image, and Monastic Culture in Twelfth-Century Canterbury*, ed. by M. T. Gibson, T. A. Ieslop and R. W. Pfaff (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1992), discusses the Old English glosses in some detail, pp. 123-138, but does not discuss *twiogendlice* either.

²⁰⁸ *DOE*, s.v.v. 'ened' and 'doppettan'.

²⁰⁹ Kitson, 'Old English bird-names (II)', 20.

bird-names meaning ‘to dip’ or ‘to dive’, none of which are well attested. The etymon of MnE ‘duck’, **duce*, is found in a single charter from 967, in the place-name *ducan seaðe* (‘duck’s pond’), and the other three are found only in glossaries: *dop-fugel*, *fugeldoppe* (both ‘diving bird’), and *dufedoppe* (‘dipping diver’).²¹⁰ Although they all refer to waterfowl, *dopaenid* only ever glosses *fulix*, and even then, only when it is accompanied by *ganot*; the other three (*dop-fugel*, *fugeldoppe* and *dufedoppe*) consistently gloss *mergulus* (‘diving bird’) and *pelicanus* (ostensibly ‘pelican’), never *fulix*.²¹¹ As Kitson notes, the transparent relationship between *mergu(lu)s* and the verb *mergere* (‘to plunge’) may account for its being glossed by any of bird-names containing *dopettan*.²¹²

Where we have later reflexes, these suggest the application of these terms to a relatively wide range of species: *dufedoppe* is presumably allied with the Modern English folk-name ‘Divedop’,²¹³ and is found in an elided form ‘dydoppar’ in the *Promptorium Parvulorum sive Clericum, Dictionarius Anglo-Latinus Princeps*, c.1440: ‘Doppar, or dydoppar, watyr byrde. *Mergulus*’.²¹⁴ It is not clear what birds are specifically meant in the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, which does have some particularly concise bird-names, e.g. ‘Doterelle’, the etymon of MnE Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*).²¹⁵ The folk-names ‘dive-dop’, ‘didapper’, ‘diedapper’, ‘dive an’ dop’, ‘dobber’, etc., all refer to the Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*),²¹⁶ though ‘didapper’ is also a folk-name for the White-throated Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*),²¹⁷ and Swann gives ‘dive-dapper’ as a folk-name for the Great Crested

²¹⁰ Ibid., s.v.v. ‘dop-fugel’, ‘dufe-doppe’ and ‘fugel-doppe’. *Fugeldoppe* may be, as the *DOE* notes, either a transposition of *dopfugel* or a two word *interprementum*. I have taken it as a discrete lexical item, though my analysis still stands whether or not *fugeldoppe* is not accepted as a word in its own right.

²¹¹ André, *Les Noms D’oiseaux en Latin*, pp. 122-3 shows that *pelicanus*, had two main meanings: one sense referred to a seabird, and the other a desert bird, the latter deriving from Psalm 101.7. Clearly the marine *pelicanus* is thought of when it is glossed by one of the names containing *dopettan*. On pp. 101-3, shows that *mergus*, and its diminutive *mergulus*, is applied to a wide range of seabirds, from the Puffin (*Puffinus puffinus*) to the Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), gulls (*Larus* sp.) and divers (*Gavia* sp.).

²¹² Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 498.

²¹³ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Dive Dapper, Divedop’.

²¹⁴ *Promptorium Pavulorum sive Clericum, Dictionarius Anglo-Latinus Princeps*, ed. by A. Way (London: Camden Society, 1865), p. 126, and Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names.*, s.v. ‘Didapper’.

²¹⁵ *Promptorium Pavulorum* p. 128.

²¹⁶ See Jackson, *British Names*, s.v. ‘Little Grebe’.

²¹⁷ Ibid., s.v. ‘Dipper’.

Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*).²¹⁸ ‘Dipper’, first attested as a translation for Latin *mergulus*, may also be related to these words – perhaps deriving from a shortened form of *dop-fugel* – is now the common name for the White-throated Dipper in Britain but is also used of the Little Grebe²¹⁹ and Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*).²²⁰ One might also wonder if there is a relationship between *dopaenid* and the later names ‘Dabchick’, commonly used in British English of the Little Grebe but also a folk-name for the Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*),²²¹ ‘Dopchick’²²² and ‘divy duck’,²²³ used of the Little Grebe, and ‘diving duck’, used of the Little Grebe, the Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*), the Scaup (*Aythya marila*),²²⁴ and the Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*),²²⁵ where more familiar bird-names are substituted for the obsolescent *ened*. This list is illustrative, rather than comprehensive: many more bird-names could be added, and ideally the historical attestations of these terms would be analyzed in some detail to more accurately determine whether the reflexes of *dufedoppe* and *dopaenid* narrowed or broadened throughout time. Constraints of space prohibit doing so here, and for our purposes it is sufficient to point out that semantic broadening is very rare in bird-names, and to my knowledge is only attested in English in the singular instance of the unusual word *brid* (etymon of MnE ‘bird’), the meaning of which broadens out from ‘young bird’ to ‘bird’ generally.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, if we accept that the folk-names, above, are related to the Old English, and if we assume that the modern folk-names are representative of semantic narrowing of these words, then the varying referents of these folk-names suggests that *dop-fugel*, *dopaenid* and *dufedoppe* all originally referred to small and medium sized birds which were observed to dive underwater. If the semantic range of **duce* did not differ substantially from that of MnE ‘duck’, then this would provide a parallel for the sort of semantic range of these other OE words too. It is not possible, from such sparse Old English evidence, to determine whether *dopaenid* is a Level IA or Level II term, though the varying shapes of the modern referents of the possible reflexes suggests it is Level IA.

²¹⁸ Swann, *Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Dive-Dapper’.

²¹⁹ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Dipper’.

²²⁰ Jackson, *British Names*, s.v. ‘Kingfisher’.

²²¹ Swann, *Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Dabchick’.

²²² Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Dabchick’.

²²³ Jackson, *British Names*, s.v. ‘Little Grebe’.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, s.v.v. ‘Little Grebe’, ‘Red-breasted Merganser’, and ‘Scaup’.

²²⁵ Swann, *Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Diving Duck’.

Although *dopaenid* never glosses *mergu(lu)s*, it is useful to consider *mergu(lu)s*, glossed by the semantically related *doppe*-names, to see how a taxonomy with the same semantic slots, but different lexicalisations, is mapped from Latin onto Old English. It must be conceded that, strictly speaking, *mergus* and *mergulus* are different words in Classical Latin (*mergulus* being a diminutive). However, a distinction does not seem to have been made between them in Anglo-Saxon England.²²⁶ Latin *mergu(lu)s* is vertically polysemous, lexicalising not only the Level IA ‘waterfowl’, but certain Level II species too, such as the Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).²²⁷ In Old English, *mergu(lu)s* is most often glossed with OE *scealfor* (‘cormorant’, ‘shag’),²²⁸ rather than a *doppe*-name, and translated by the same word in Ælfric’s writings on St. Martin, which draw on Sulpicius Severus’s *Epistula* III.6-13.²²⁹ The identification of OE *scealfor* as the Cormorant, but including the similarly-built Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) is fairly certain,²³⁰ though some modern folk-names raise the possibility that other dark seabirds were known by this name too.²³¹ Interestingly, the identification of the *mergos* in Sulpicius’s letter with *scealfor* is not, as Kitson remarks, based on their blackness, because they are never described as black in Sulpicius’ letter.²³² Rather, it is the

²²⁶ See, for example, Ælfric’s *Glossary*, in *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, p. 307, l.6 (‘*mergus uel mergulus scealfra*’), and Ælfric Bata’s *Colloquy*, in *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. by W. H. Stevenson, *Anecdota Oxoniensa, Mediaeval and Modern Series 15* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 85, l.6, which draws on Ælfric’s *Glossary* but reads the lemma *mergus* as glossed by *mergulus* (*mergos .i. mergulos*). For the relationship between these two texts see P. Lendinara, ‘The *Colloquy* of Ælfric and the *Colloquy* of Ælfric Bata’, in P. Lendinara, *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries*, *Variorum Collected Studies Series* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 207-288, esp. p. 250.

²²⁷ Andre, *Les Noms D’oiseaux en Latin*, pp. 100-103.

²²⁸ As in, for example, Second Corpus M.160, Épinal ll.662 and 647, Erfurt l.647, Second Antwerp, 1.988, Brussels Glossary l.64.

²²⁹ *CH* II.34.275-80 and his *Life of St Martin*, in *Ælfric’s Lives*, XXXI, ll.13-26. For the source, see M. Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS s.s.18 (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 632. Sulpicius’ letter is also presumably the source for the *mergu(lu)s*: *scealfor* glosses.

²³⁰ All the Germanic cognates point to the Cormorant/Shag and so we can safely assume this was the meaning of the Proto-Germanic **scarb̄-ô* too. See Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, pp. 393-7. Centuries later Turner’s *Avium praecipuarum* also equates Latin *mergus* with the Cormorant, see *Turner on Birds*, p. 110, though he does not use a cognate of *scealfor*.

²³¹ Swainson, *Provincial Names and Folk Lore*, pp. 212 and 218, gives ‘Scraber’ as a Hebridean name for the Manx Shearwater and a Hebridean and East Lothian name for the Black Guillemot respectively. He links this with Norwegian *skrabe* and explains it with a folk-etymology: ‘*skrabe*, or the scraper; so called because it is said “to scrape a hole in the sand ... where it makes its nest”’ (p. 212). As the Shearwater nests in burrows and the Guillemot nests among rocks, we can reject this explanation. It is clearly cognate with ON *skarfr*, OE *scealfor* and Proto-Germanic **scarb̄-ô* (the former of which gives folk-names for the Cormorant and Shag, see Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Scarf’); it is less clear, however, how recent the lexicalisation of Black Guillemots and Manx Shearwaters by this name is.

²³² Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (I)’, 498.

gluttonous nature of the seabirds which leads to their identification, suggesting that the *scealfor* was widely known as greedy in Anglo-Saxon England.²³³ Similarly, the specific description of the birds in Sulpicius' letter means that it must be the Level II, rather than Level IA, sense of *mergos*. This is in contrast with Virgil's *Georgics* I.362-3, identified by Lindsay as the source for many Latin glossaries, in which *mergi* is employed with its Level IA sense.²³⁴ The alternating use of *scealfor* and *doppe*-names to gloss *mergu(lu)s*, then, reflects an awareness of the Latin word's vertical polysemy, and provides further evidence of *doppe*-names being Level IA, rather than Level II, terms. If we couple this with the morphological analysis, then *dopaenid* seems to have been a convenient catch-all (i.e. a Level IA term) for any bird capable of swimming, such as guillemots and razorbills.²³⁵

It is not clear at all, however, what the relationship between *dopaenid* and *ganot* is in these glosses. Are they near synonyms, as when *gyrdils* and *broec* presumably are when they co-gloss Latin *lumbare*?²³⁶ Or are they alternatives, intended to approximate the vagueness of the lemma? I am inclined to think that it is the former, as we have nearly as many instances of *ganot* glossing *fulix* by itself, and the co-glosses tend to occur in earlier manuscripts, suggesting that perhaps later copyists thought the addition of *dopaenid* superfluous.

The other texts generally tell us very little about the identity of the *ganot*: *Beowulf* l.1861b, *The Death of Edgar* l.26a, *The Rune Poem* l.79a, and the 'D' and 'E' Chronicles *sub anno 975* all mention *ganot* in the periphrasis *ofer ganotes bæð* ('over the *ganot*'s bath') when describing journeys over the sea. The *Paris Psalter* 104.35 also links the *ganot* with the sea when it translates *fulicae domus* ('the water-fowls' house') as *garsecge ganetas* ('the sea of the *ganetas*'), and in *The Seafarer*

²³³ In addition to Ælfric's writings, in n.226, above, Vercelli Homily XVIII.230-232 (in *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. by D. Scragg, EETS o.s. 300 (Oxford: OUP, 1992)) also mentions the greediness of the *scealfor*. We have no other evidence for the *scealfor*'s greediness in Old English, but it is worth noting that the idea of the cormorant's greediness is well-known in Shakespeare's time, which raises the (unprovable) possibility that the bird was closely associated with this characteristic in popular culture in Anglo-Saxon England. See, for example, *Coriolanus* I.i.115, *Love's Labour's Lost* I.i.6, *Richard II* II.i.720, *Troilus and Cressida* II.ii.995, T. F. Thiselton-Dyer, *Folk-lore of Shakespeare* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1884) p. 108, and A. Geikie, *The Birds of Shakespeare* (Glasgow: Maclehose and Sons, 1916), p. 51.

²³⁴ The source for this use of *mergu(lu)s* is, as noted by Lindsay, 'Bird-names in Latin glossaries', 5, Virgil's *Georgics* I.362-3.

²³⁵ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 22 makes a similar speculation with regards to guillemots and razorbills.

²³⁶ Épinal-Erfurt II.573 and 537a.

the *ganot* numbers among the six birds encountered on the winter seas. The contexts of each of these attestations imply that the *ganot* was also associated with journeying too, though this is unhelpful given the itinerant nature of all seabirds.

We will return to *The Seafarer* and its potentially useful description of the *ganot* for a moment, and focus on the one *ganot* attestation not yet discussed. This is an eleventh-century gloss in Prudentius' *Peristaphanon*, copied at Boulogne-sur-Mer.²³⁷ Both Old English and Latin interpretamenta gloss an allusion to Jove's rape of Leda being performed on stage, which reads:

Cygnus stuprator peccat inter pulpit
Saltat Tonantem tauricornem ludius

The swan has illicit sex, does evil on the stage, the Thunderer with the bull's horns is enacted by dancing

(X.221-222)

Both the Latin and Old English glosses are above the line, and specifically above *cygnus*. The Latin is explanatory: *iouem dicit qui uersus in cignum ledam uitiauit* ('Jove is called this, who having changed into a swan, violated Leda'); the Old English, merely the word *ganet*, is an interpretamentum for *cygnus*. This is the only instance where *ganot* glosses a lemma which is not *fulix*. Goldsmith made reference to this gloss to argue that the *ganot* of *The Seafarer* did not refer to the Gannet, but was actually an appositive reference back to the *ylfete* of the previous line.²³⁸ There is nothing in the *Peristaphanon* which clearly suggests why the glossator would think that the *cygnus* is anything but a swan. The verb *stuprare* is unusual, and it may be that the *ganot* was associated with this sort of excessive temperament, though this is speculative.

The Old English evidence does not give a very complete picture of the *ganot*, and the name, at least in this form, does not appear to be ideophonic, precluding the possibility of seeking assistance from the ornithological approach (at least for the

²³⁷ The glosses in Boulogne-sur-Mer nr.189 are contemporary with the manuscript's eleventh-century provenance. See *The Old English Prudentius Glosses*, ed. by Meritt, ix.

²³⁸ Goldsmith, 'The Seafarer and The Birds', 227-8.

moment). We are very fortunate, however, to have a wealth of linguistic evidence to help us with identifying the *ganot*.

The *ganot* outside Old English

The etyma and reflexes of *ganot* are well attested. In fact, *ganot* has the remarkable claim to being cognate with one of the earliest attested Germanic words. Pliny's *Natural History* X.27, of the first century AD, mentions that the most valuable goose down comes from *Germania*, and that *candidi ibi, verum minores; gantae vocantur* ('the white [geese] from that place are smaller and they are called *gantae*'). Subsequently it is found in the works of Polemius Silvius (fifth century) and Venantius Fortunatus (sixth century), though in these instances it is more difficult to ascertain its precise meaning: in Polemius Silvius's *Laterculus*, *ganta* appears among *anser* ('goose') and *avis tarda* (=Bustard, lit. 'slow bird', and the etymon of MnE Bustard, *Otis tarda*); in Venantius Fortunatus' poems it appears alongside *grus* ('crane') and *anser*.²³⁹ A further difficulty lies in the morphology of *ganot*. It is closely related to English 'gander' (< OE *gandra*), Dutch 'gent' ('gander') and Swiss-German 'Ganz',²⁴⁰ and is less closely related to OE *gos* ('goose'), OHG *gans*, and ON *gás*.²⁴¹ It is generally agreed that it derives from the same Proto-Indo-European root as 'goose', **ǵhan-s-*, though bearing a dental suffix of uncertain meaning which is of at least Proto-Germanic antiquity. Derivatives of this **ǵhan-d-* are used of the Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) as well as general terms for geese, and the Germanic etymon behind Pliny's *gantae* numbers among these derivatives.²⁴²

²³⁹ André, *Les Noms D'oiseaux en Latin*, p. 83. Viewing these lists in context, it is difficult to see which names were thought of as more closely synonymous, such as *cignus* and *olor*, and which were not. I have taken the grouping of *grux. Anser. Ganta. Avis tarda. Olor. Cignus* ('crane, goose, *ganta*, bustard, swan, swan') as a collection of nearly synonymous terms, which *olor* and *cignus*, and *anser* and *ganta* certainly were. This list was taken from T. Mommsen, 'Polemii Silvii Laterculus', *Abhandlungen der Philologisch-historischen classe der Königlich Sächsische Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, 2 (1857), 233-277, at 267. For *avis tarda* as the name for the Bustard see André, *Les noms d'oiseaux en Latin*, s.v. 'avis tarda'.

²⁴⁰ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. 'gannet'.

²⁴¹ C. Watkins, rev. and ed., *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), s.v. 'ghans-'; *IEW*, s.v. '**ǵhan-s-*'.

²⁴² *IEW*, s.v. '**ǵhan-s-*'. See also Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, pp. 410-15.

The older historical evidence suggests that a white bird with a stocky body and longer neck was indicated by the etymon of Pliny's *gantae*, OE *ganot* and its other cognates. This would explain how it could be extended to cover not only geese, but also storks, and possibly even the swan in the Old English Prudentius gloss. The Middle English evidence corroborates the older evidence to some degree, though it also suggests that OE *ganot* had an even wider range of referents than just white birds of a certain shape.

The *Promptorium Parvulorum* has the entry 'Gante, byrde. *Bistarda*'.²⁴³ 'Gante' here is clearly a direct reflex of *ganot*, and Lockwood notes that there are several other attestations of variants of 'gant' in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which consistently refer to the Great Bustard.²⁴⁴ The Great Bustard is a bulky bird which appears tri-coloured on the ground, but exposes a lot of white when in flight.²⁴⁵ The Bustard's whiteness, elongated neck and habit of feeding in flocks are all particularly goose-like,²⁴⁶ and these characteristics would explain how a term which historically meant 'goose' came to be applied to the Bustard. A modern folk-name for the Great Crested Grebe, 'gaunt', is also closely related to OE *ganot*.²⁴⁷ It is not clear if this usage of 'gaunt' is a relatively modern development or not. The *OED* notes attestations of 'gaunt' (for a bird) in late Middle English/early Modern English. The earlier text, John Skelton's poem on *Phyllyp Sparowe*, perhaps from 1545, speaks of 'the gaglynge gaunt', which could as plausibly refer to the vocalisations of the Great Crested Grebe as it could for the Gannet or for geese.²⁴⁸ The later text however, Richard Hakluyt's *The Principall navigations, voiages and discoveries of the English nation*, from c.1589, clearly cannot refer to the Great Crested Grebe. It makes reference to 'a great white foule called of some a Gaunt', which is more appropriate for the Gannet than for the Great Crested Grebe, which is brown and white, and rather thin and small. Incidentally, this is the first time, that I am aware of, that we can confidently identify the Gannet as the intended referent of any of

²⁴³ *Promptorium Pavlorum*, p. 186. *Bistarda* derives from *avis tarda*, a name we have encountered above. For these terms see Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. 'bustard'.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, s.v. 'gant'.

²⁴⁵ *BWP*, II, 659.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. 'gaunt'; Swann, *Dictionary*, s.v. 'gaunt'; Swainson, *Provincial Names and Folk Lore*, p. 215; Jackson, *British Names*, s.v. 'great crested grebe'. Jackson also records 'gaunt' as a folk-name for the Gannet, s.v. 'gannet'.

²⁴⁸ *OED*, s.v. 'gannet'.

these words related to *ganot*, although a strong case can be made for the Latinized *Petra Ganetorum* in an Inventory of Produce for Edward I in 1274, referring to Gannets' Rock on Lundy Island, and discussed by both Lockwood and J. Gurney.²⁴⁹

The semantic range of OE *ganot*

This section has shown that the linguistic and literary evidence does not justify us equating OE *ganot* with the bird known today as the gannet. Although the formula *ganotes bæð* shows that the *ganot* was linked with the sea, cognate evidence pre- and post-dating the Old English period shows that this was not necessarily the case for all birds known as the *ganot*. Although there is not any common ground in coloration, or even in the vocalisations, of the range of birds, it is possible to outline a common defining feature of them all: they are birds with relatively squat bodies and relatively long necks.

While it is not possible, for the majority of *ganot* attestations, to single out a single species (by modern conceptions) being referred to, there are occasions where it is possible to be more specific. One such occasion is in *The Seafarer*, where we are given both circumstantial data (the coastal and winter setting), and possibly an implicit comparison for the sound of the *ganot*. Indeed, the combination of circumstantial data and implicit comparisons in *The Seafarer* means that it is possible to identify the birds in the poem with more accuracy than is possible on lexical and ornithological grounds alone, though many of the methods used above are necessary to assist in the identification process. In the next section I do exactly this for all of the birds of *The Seafarer*, and bring taxonomic implications to bear on the species referred to by each of the Old English terms.

²⁴⁹ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. 'gannet', J. Gurney, *Early Annals of Ornithology* (London: Witherby, 1921), pp. 59-60.

The Birds of *The Seafarer* – revisited

So far, we have seen how a combination of philological and ornithological data can be used to identify the species and taxonomies of birds in Old English. In this section, my goals are twofold. On the one hand, *The Seafarer* provides us with more information, both implicitly and explicitly, than other Old English poems do about their birds, particularly in the realm of aural descriptions and comparisons. I have already stressed the importance of aural experience in the naming of birds; here I wish to show how *The Seafarer* uses auralness to capture specific experiences of them. On the other hand, there has been no serious reconsideration of, or engagement with, the identities of the birds of *The Seafarer* since Goldsmith's 1954 article. While many of Goldsmith's suggestions have been widely accepted (e.g. identifying the *huilpe* as the curlew), some have been almost completely neglected (e.g. her argument for *ganet* being an appositive appellation for the *ylfete*) without remark.²⁵⁰ As her arguments are based on good ornithology, they deserve critical engagement. Moreover, Goldsmith's ornithological analysis did not take into account either the importance of the sounds of the birds or, despite her nod towards acknowledging it, the issues surrounding taxonomies in Old English.

Previous identification

Nowhere in Old English literature are the birds as ubiquitous as they are in the first half of *The Seafarer*. It is not just the impressive assembly of birds which cluster in the first sixty-odd lines of the poem which is so notable, but also the vivid and lively way in which the birds complement the narrator's needs and contrast with his stark circumstances. Before we can ascertain the precise nuances of the birds of *The Seafarer*, we must first identify them.

²⁵⁰ See, for example, the commentaries in *The Seafarer*, ed. by I. L. Gordon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 35 and A. L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (McGill: Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 128-9.

There are eight possible birds in *The Seafarer*, though the number varies based on interpretation.²⁵¹ In order of appearance, the separate candidates are: *ylfetu*, *ganet*, *huilpe*, *mæw*, *stearn*, *earn*, *geac* and the *anfloga*. In the following analysis I shall take each of these individually and assess whether they are birds, and if so, what species they may be. This analysis will not only rely on the philological methods used above, but also on an untapped resource in *The Seafarer*: the poem's aural descriptions of the birds. In addition to using a variety of nouns and verbs to describe the calls of the differing birds, there are similes which can possibly, if we accept some sort of literal basis for them, be used to identify the sounds being alluded to, and subsequently, the birds which make these sounds. Furthermore, the seasonal and geographical descriptions – particularly the winter coastal setting for the first six birds – can be used to furnish our identifications too.

Ylfetu

The first bird in *The Seafarer* is one of the easiest for us to identify, as we are fortunate enough to have a considerable number of attestations consistently referring to very similar species of birds, as well as consistent cognate evidence.²⁵² *Ylfetu* is found twelve times in the Old English corpus.²⁵³ It is clear that the *ylfetu* in *The Seafarer* is some sort of swan; it is unclear, however, which of the three species of swan which winter along British coasts the *ylfetu* is. The Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) and Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) look so similar that even the modern ornithologist struggles to differentiate them. Their calls are not dissimilar either, varying really only in pitch and not in timbre.²⁵⁴ The Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), on the other hand, is both visually and aurally different from the others: its bill

²⁵¹ Goldsmith, 'The Seafarer and The Birds', 228, would view the *ganot* and the *ylfete* as the same bird, for example, putting her count at six; she does not view the *anfloga* as a bird.

²⁵² The best survey of cognate evidence is still Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, pp. 406-410.

²⁵³ *The Seafarer* 1.19a; the *Old English Hexameron* 1.253 (S. J. Crawford, ed., *Exameron Anglice: or, The Old English Hexameron* Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 10 (Hamburg: Grand, 1921)), Ælfric's glossary (p. 307, 1.5); Second Antwerp 1.977; Brussels Glossary 1.5; Stowe 57 glossary 1.22; Épinal-Erfurt 1718; Bodley 730 1.63, Second Corpus O.152, and two glossaries collected by Sievers and Steinmeyer (nos. 40(a) and 40(b)), on 1.3 (*Die althochdeutschen Glossen*, ed. by E. von Steinmeyer and E. Sievers, 5 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1879-1922)).

²⁵⁴ *BWP*, I, 383.

is orange where the others have yellow; it is much larger and bulkier than the others; and its grunting vocalisations are quite distinct from the bugle-like qualities of the Bewick's and Whooper Swans.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Mute Swan is able to produce a throbbing sound with its wings, audible up to 1-2 km away,²⁵⁶ and this detail is referred to twice elsewhere in Old English: once in *The Phoenix* 1.137b in a list of beautiful sounds which pale in comparison to the phoenix's song, and alluded to again cryptically in Exeter Riddle 7's description of a creature whose garments only makes sound in the air. Kitson proposes a neat division in which OE *ylfetu* refers to the Bewick's and Whooper Swans and OE *swan* refers to the Mute Swan.²⁵⁷ There is much evidence for this distinction: *The Phoenix* 1.137b refers specifically to *swanes feðre* ('the wing of a swan'), not ***ylfetan feðre*, Ælfric seems to understand *swanas* and *ylfettan* as distinct creatures in his *Hexameron* (ll.250-4),²⁵⁸ and Dieter Bitterli has made a convincing case for Exeter Riddle 7 playfully pointing towards its solution, *swan*, through the repetition of verbs beginning /sw/ (*swigað*, 1.1a, *swogað*, 1.7a, and *swigað*, 1.7b).²⁵⁹ However, in spite of the merits of Kitson's approach, he surely goes too far when he says that *swan* and *ylfetu* 'remain distinct throughout the period'.²⁶⁰ If they were so distinct, why do we have both *swan* and *ylfetu* co-glossing *olor* in the First Cotton Cleopatra glossary (ll.354 and 4494)? This could of course be the result of the idiosyncrasies of an individual glossator, but we also have a more common glossorial tendency to explain away: the use of OE *ylfetu* to gloss Latin *olor* and *cignus* (both swan-words) when they jointly form the lemmata,²⁶¹ despite the general trend for rendering *olor* by itself with *swan*.²⁶² Furthermore, we also have instances of *swan* glossing *cygnus*, where the *cygnus* was known in Latin literature

²⁵⁵ BWP, I, 377.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 16. See also P. Kitson, 'Swans and Geese in Old English Riddles', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology*, 7 (1994), 79-84, esp. 79-82.

²⁵⁸ See also Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 16.

²⁵⁹ D. Bitterli, *Say What I am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 45.

²⁶⁰ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 16.

²⁶¹ Ælfric's glossary p. 307, 1.5, Épinal-Erfurt 1.718, Second Corpus O.152.

²⁶² Brussels glossary 1.12, Second Corpus O.141, Épinal-Erfurt 1.700, Second Cleopatra 1.16, Harley 107 1.4, Bodley 730 1.52.

for its song.²⁶³ Bitterli also criticizes Kitson for extrapolating from a ‘distinction [which] is not consistently maintained.’²⁶⁴

We have very few physical descriptions of swans in Old English which can help us distinguish between *ylfetu* and *swan*. Ælfric’s *Hexameron* translation mentions both, but only remarks that *sum [fugelaz] beoð langsweorode, swa swa swanas ond ylfettan* (‘some [birds] are long-necked, like ?mute swans and ? Bewick’s/whooper swans), which tells us little beyond the fact that both the *swan* and the *ylfetu* are just two of many long-necked birds. Exeter Riddle 7, *The Phoenix*, and some glosses which render *Diomedea* with *swan* (see below) are helpful for identifying the *swan* for us, but we have no equally useful descriptions of *ylfetu*. The etymologies of *ylfetu* and *swan*, however, can give us some insight. *Ylfetu*, attested in early glossaries in the form *aelbitu*, seems to be derived, ultimately, from the same root as *ylf* (‘elf’) – that is, PIE **albo-*, ‘white’.²⁶⁵ Orel makes the same connection, positing **albatiz* and *albetiz* as possible Common Germanic etyma for *ylfetu*.²⁶⁶ The original meaning of *ylfetu*, then, was probably ‘thing endowed with whiteness’, if not ‘white thing’, which has every appearance of being an indiscriminate group name rather than referencing a single particular creature.

Swan, on the other hand, has a slightly more unusual etymology. Its closest non-Germanic cognates are not other bird-names,²⁶⁷ but abstract nouns: Latin *sonus* and Sanskrit *svaná-*, both of which mean ‘sound’, ‘noise’.²⁶⁸ While this etymology is widely accepted, I have not found any convincing attempts to explain why a word which, as far as we can confidently reconstruct it, originally meant ‘sound’ came to be applied to a specific bird. Suolahti, for example, suggests that the ‘sound’ being referred to was the melodic call of the Whooper Swan.²⁶⁹ Yet many birds make melodic calls, and in any case, the root of ‘swan’ seems to merely be derived from an

²⁶³ *Etymologiae* XII.7.9 and XII.7.18, and see also André, *Les noms d’oiseaux en Latine*, s.v. ‘cycnus (cygnus)’.

²⁶⁴ D. Bitterli, *Say What I am Called*, p. 39 n.13.

²⁶⁵ The form given here is Watkins’, in *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, s.v. Hall’s etymology is in A. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 54-55, and is discussed further in his appendix, pp. 176-9. See also IEW, s.v.v. ‘albho-’, ‘albhi-’, and Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. ‘*albatiz ~ *albetiz’.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ For a list of Germanic cognates, all of which mean ‘swan’, see Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 408.

²⁶⁸ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird-Names*, s.v. ‘swan’. Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. ‘*swanaz’.

²⁶⁹ Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 408.

Indo-European root which merely meant ‘sound’, not necessarily ‘melodic sound’. The answer to this particular conundrum lies, I suspect, not so much in the quality of the sound made by the bird, but in the unusual method by which sound is made. The Mute Swan’s unique ability to generate such bright and far-ranging noises by beating its wings, and its ability to produce these sounds in flight (cf. Exeter Riddle 7), seems to be adequate grounds for naming the bird merely after ‘sound’.²⁷⁰

The etymologies of both *swan* and *ylfetu* could suggest that from very early on there was a taxonomic system: *ylfetu*, derived, ultimately, from PIE **albo-* (‘white’), suggests a Level IA or Level II term encompassing ‘white things’, or specifically ‘white birds’; *swan*, derived from PIE **swen-*,²⁷¹ suggests a Level III term denoting the Mute Swan specifically, and its ability to produce noise in an unusual way. This taxonomy was certainly in place by the time of Old English: whenever we find two lemmata pertaining to swans in the earliest glossaries, the interpretamentum is always *ylfetu*, never *swan*. The Corpus and Épinal-Erfurst glossaries are especially interesting in this regard, as *olor* by itself is glossed differently to *olor* accompanied by *cignus*: in Corpus *olor* by itself is glossed *suon* (O.141) but *olor cignus* is glossed *aelbitu* (O.152); Épinal-Erfurst glosses *olor* with *suon* (1.700) but *olor* and *cignus* are glossed *aelbitu/æbitu* (1.718). The Second Antwerp glossary seems to understand *Cignus* and *cicinus* as two different lemmata and has them both glossed *ylfetu* (1.277), and in Ælfric’s glossary both *olor* and *cignus* are translated *ylfette* (p.307, l.5). There is also an instance in the First Cotton Cleopatra glossary where *swan* is possibly not recognised as an Old English word: *Olor swon, ilfetu, swan*.²⁷² Earlier on in the First Cotton Cleopatra glossary we find the entry *Aluor swon [uel] ilfutu*,²⁷³ which suggests that for some *swan* and *ylfetu* were the same thing.

There are unusual cases where *swan* glosses both *Diomedia* and *olor*. This gloss is attested only twice: in the Brussels glossary (1.62: *Diomedia gr [uel] herodios swan*) and in the Second Antwerp glossary (1.984: *Diomedia [uel] olor swan*). In neither of these cases, however, are both the lemmata swan-words, unlike the above, and for this reason I would not consider them exceptions to the tendency to use *ylfetu* to

²⁷⁰ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘swan’, comes to much the same conclusions.

²⁷¹ This is the form given by Watkins, *Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, s.v. ‘swen-’; *IEW*, gives *syen-* (s.v.).

²⁷² First Cleopatra 1.4494.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1.354.

gloss combinations of Latin swan-words. It is worth digressing briefly, however, to consider the reasoning behind these glosses. The veracity of the existence of the birds of Diomedea would have been confirmed by sources such as Isidore's *Etymologiae* (XI.4.2), and to judge by the Brussels glossary entry, Isidore's *Etymologiae* XII.7.29 is the source of these glosses. It is unclear where the *olor* of the Second Antwerp glossary comes from, as Isidore's Latin uses *cygnus* when describing the birds of Diomedea (*magnitudine cygnorum*, 'as large as swans', XII.7.28), and is presumably therefore the product of scribal confusion at some point in the gloss's transmission. The use of *swan* to render *Diomedea*, however, may have been prompted by a description of the behaviour of the birds of Diomedea:

Nam si Graecus est, propius accedunt et blandiunt; si alienigena, morsu
inpugnant et vulnerant, lacrimosis quasi vocibus dolentes vel suam
mutationem vel regis interitum.

(*Etymologiae*, XII.7.29)

If someone is Greek, they come up close and fawn on him, but if someone is of alien birth, they attack and wound him by biting, grieving as if with tearful voices either their own transformation or the death of their king.

Mute swans, the species of swan usually denoted by *swan* (as in Exeter Riddle 7 and *The Phoenix*) are highly aggressive, and hiss while exhibiting aggressive behaviour.²⁷⁴ The mute swan is also known, even if largely on anecdotal evidence, to act aggressively towards humans.²⁷⁵ The use of *swan* to gloss *Diomedea* seems to have been prompted both by the description of a bird *magnitudine cygnorum* and by the description of aggressive activity suitable for the mute swan.

There is a clear basis for Kitson's division of mute swans into *swan* and whooper and Bewick's swans into *ylfetu*. As careful as this is, however, it needs to be modified. Although the linguistic and literary evidence suggests that *swan* generally denotes the mute swan, the use of *swan* to gloss *cygnus* suggests that the shift of meaning, from specialised Level III term to a generalised Level II one, had already

²⁷⁴ BWP, I, 376, 377; M. Conover, *Resolving Human-Wildlife Conflicts: The Science of Wildlife Damage Management* (Boca Raton: Lewis, 2000), pp. 40-41.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

begun during the Old English period.²⁷⁶ Similarly, there is no conclusive evidence that *ylfetu* had a specialised Level III meaning referring to the whooper and Bewick's swans. Indeed, if we can trust the glossary evidence where *ylfetu* renders both *cygnus* and *olor*, and if we can read into the general meaning of its etymology ('white one'), then *ylfetu* would seem to be a Level II general term potentially covering all three British swan-types. What this means, in regards to *The Seafarer*, is that we cannot use the name *ylfetu* alone to identify which of the three possible swans is meant. It may be possible, however, to identify which swan is meant on other grounds. *The Seafarer* reads: *Hwilum ylfete song/ dyde ic me to gomene* ('At times the swan's song served as my entertainment').

The key description here is that the song of the *ylfete* served for *gomene* ('entertainment'). The *DOE* gives 'an amusement, entertainment, game, pastime' as one meaning of *gamen*,²⁷⁷ and thus there could be the implication of novelty in the *ylfete song*. If we are justified reading this aspect of novelty into *The Seafarer* here, then this *song* could refer to the wingbeats of the mute swan – there is no reason, after all, that *song* must refer to a vocally-produced sound.

Ganet

As we have seen, OE *ganet* has a very large semantic field, and could refer to any bird with a squat body and comparatively long neck. Margaret Goldsmith, who argued for *ganet* being an appositive term for the swan, also recognised the large semantic field of *ganet*, though this particular idea of hers has not been generally accepted.²⁷⁸ Subsequent commentators and editors have been quite content to overlook the complexity of *ganet* and equate it with its present-day reflex 'gannet'. Kitson's terse remark 'the gannet *ganot* is well attested in both literature and glossaries' betrays no awareness of the complications of its etymon or other cognates, and Ida Gordon's edition of *The Seafarer*, despite drawing on Goldsmith's

²⁷⁶ *MED*, s.v. 'swan (n.)'; *OED* s.v. 'swan, n.'

²⁷⁷ *DOE*, s.v. 'gamen'.

²⁷⁸ Goldsmith, 'The Seafarer and The Birds', 227-8.

article, selectively ignores Goldsmith's argument here while repeating her data on gannets.²⁷⁹ Although I have no intention of endorsing Goldsmith's arguments here either, I will instead draw attention to a fallacy in the over-enthusiastic application of Occam's razor, despite the availability of Goldsmith's problematising of the meaning of *ganet*. We do not, for example, translate OE *cniht* or *deor* ('animal') with their modern English reflexes – so why should *ganet* be any different?

The Seafarer, despite being rather helpful generally in providing descriptive clues for its seabirds, provides us with some difficulties here. The noun *hleopor*, used of the *ganet*'s cry, means 'sound' or 'noise' generally: this precludes the possibility of using its meaning to help pinpoint the identity of the bird described.²⁸⁰ Equally problematic is the ambiguous syntax of *The Seafarer* here. It is not clear whether we Goldsmith's reading of *ganetes hleopor* in apposition to *ylfete song* is preferable here or whether *ganetes hleopor*, along with *huilpan sweg* ('the *huilpe*'s song', 1.20a), substitutes the *hleahtor wera* ('the laughter of men', 1.20b) for the narrator.²⁸¹ Generally, editors of the poem have opted for the latter reading, and I am inclined towards this too: there is a pleasing verbal echo between *hleopor* and *hleahtor* which is surely too neat to be coincidence. If we accept that both the *ganet* and *huilpe* are being compared to *hleahtor wera*, then we can use the poem's auralty to help identify, or at least narrow down the candidates for, the *ganet* and *huilpe* respectively.

In spite of the physical vagueness of what constitutes a *ganet*, *The Seafarer* provides us with the following details to help us identify the specific bird meant here:

- 1) It winters off British coasts.
- 2) It makes noise during winter.
- 3) Its noise is comparable to the laughter of men.

A number of physically suitable birds match point 1). Plausible candidates include the whooper swan and Bewick's swan, the gannet, the great crested grebe,²⁸² and a

²⁷⁹ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 22; *The Seafarer*, ed. by Gordon, p. 35 n.19^b f.

²⁸⁰ *BT* s.v. 'hleóðor'.

²⁸¹ Goldsmith, 'The Seafarer and The Birds', 227.

²⁸² Although this bird spends much of the year inland, it winters along coasts (*BWP*, I, 79); it is also worth noting that this is in places still known as a 'gaunt', a modern reflex of OE *ganot*.

whole host of divers: the red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*), the black-throated diver (*G. arctica*) and the great northern diver (*G. immer*). However, many birds are completely silent in winter, and those which are not are usually much less active. The divers are all completely silent in winter, and this precludes the possibility of any of the divers being referred to here in *The Seafarer* (though not in formulaic expressions such as *ganotes bæð*),²⁸³ but still leaves the swans, the gannet and the great crested grebe. This brings us onto the third criterion. The winter vocalisations of these birds are transcribed in table 7, below:

Table 1.7: Winter vocalisations of *ganet* candidates

Bird	Transcription/Notes
Whooper swan	1) 'brief melodious notes... resembling deep nasal 'ang'', 2) 'whoop whoop', 'whoop-a', 3) 'krow' 4) 'wak'. ²⁸⁴
Bewick's swan	'Of similar range and significance to that of Whooper Swan <i>C. cygnus</i> , but of a less trumpeting and more honking, crooning or barking character'. ²⁸⁵
Gannet	'urrah' ²⁸⁶
Great crested grebe	1) Barking 'rah-rah-rah', 2) Growling 'g(h)arr' or 'gorr', 3) Snarling 'gaaaa...', 4) Twanging, metallic 'ung', 5) Clicking 'kek'. ²⁸⁷

The two species of swans have more melodious sounds, but there is no reason why such consonant calls could not be considered laughter-like. The great crested grebe's 'barking' call is not usually likened to laughter today, but again there is no reason why this sound could not be compared to the laughter of men. The gannet's cry is

²⁸³ *BWP*, I, 42.

²⁸⁴ *BWP*, I, 389-90.

²⁸⁵ *BWP*, I, 383.

²⁸⁶ *BWP*, I, 196: 'Vocabulary limited... Mainly silent away from breeding grounds, but utters rapid, excited 'urrah' calls when competing for fish offal, and when fishing communally, when often noisy'.

²⁸⁷ *BWP*, I, 86.

not normally compared to laughter in ornithological literature but has generally been accepted as a plausible referent for *The Seafarer* 1.120b nonetheless. All four of these birds, therefore, meet the criteria provided by the semantic field of *ganet* and the details of *The Seafarer*, and subsequently are all suitable candidates for the bird referred to here. Indeed, it could be that any one of these birds came to mind for any given Anglo-Saxon hearing or reading this line, in much the same way that the MnE. words ‘parrot’ and ‘raptor’ conjure a whole host of birds of different genera.²⁸⁸ This analogy holds true not just for the semantic field of *ganot*, but the way in which an individual, consciously or unconsciously, modifies the imagined referent based on circumstantial data (e.g. would imagine different birds based on whether a ‘raptor’ was described being in a thick forest or on a snowy mountaintop).

This brings us to the more theoretical problem of how to translate *ganet* in *The Seafarer*. Although this analysis lends credence to Goldsmith’s proposal that the *ganet* is used as an appositive appellation for the *ylfete*, I would not wish to personally endorse such a solution. Similarly, although MnE ‘gannet’ is a suitable translation for OE *ganet*, I would not wish to endorse this either because of the way it oversimplifies the complex semantic field of *ganet*, and indeed, any individual bird-name, though we can narrow it down to four candidates, is prone to causing the same problem. An easy, but unsatisfying, solution would be to leave it untranslated: we do this fairly commonly for complex concepts in modern languages (e.g. German *Zeitgeist*) but tend to avoid it when dealing with older languages (e.g. translating OE *forðgesceaft* ‘creation’ or ‘future’, as in the DOE,²⁸⁹ despite its more sophisticated literal meaning along the lines of ‘that which is created going forwards’). A more satisfying solution is difficult because of the lack of comparable concepts, and attempts at translating the concept (e.g. ‘goose-like bird’ or ‘longer-necked bird’) are awkward. Nor does modern scientific terminology provide us with an easy solution, as birds of diverse genera, orders and families are grouped under OE *ganet*. Practically speaking, we have no alternative other than selecting any one of the candidate birds (which, for reasons of precedence and convenience, is likely to be ‘gannet’ more often than not), while indicating some awareness of the issues surrounding mapping Old English taxonomies on to our own.

²⁸⁸ *OED*, s.v.v. ‘parrot, n.1’, ‘raptor, n.(3a)’.

²⁸⁹ *DOE*, s.v. ‘forð-ge-sceaft’.

Huilpe

The identification of the *huilpe* generally poses fewer problems than that of the *ganet*. We are able to use the same three criteria used of the *ganet*, above, but in the first place can narrow down our search to a few candidate species on lexical grounds alone. Although *huilpe* is only attested in *The Seafarer* in Old English, we have some Germanic cognates which refer to plovers (Regenpfeifer) and snipes (Schnepfen) generally.²⁹⁰ The curlew (*Numenius arquata*) has long been favoured as the translation for *huilpe*, largely on the strength of the Dutch cognate *wulp* ('curlew').²⁹¹ Further evidence to support this could be adduced from the northern and Scottish dialectal name for the curlew, 'whaup', which is clearly allied with OE *huilpe*, though it is not attested before 1538.²⁹² As the curlew's call has a fluttering laughter-like tone to it, and as it winters on British coasts,²⁹³ this long-standing candidate for *huilpe* is a good match for the criteria provided by *The Seafarer*. It is not the only suitable candidate, however: Kitson, following James Fisher, recognises that the whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) is superficially similar enough to the curlew to have not been differentiated from it, and furthermore, Fisher thinks the whimbrel's call better compares to the laughter of men than the curlew's does.²⁹⁴ I agree with both Kitson and Fisher that the curlew and whimbrel could hardly have been distinguished, though I am more cautious about Fisher's assessment of the whimbrel's cry better comparing to the *hleahþor wera*. Both birds have laughter-like calls which can be heard in winter, and as such both are equally good candidates.

Mæw

Compared to the birds above, *mæw* is refreshingly straight-forward. Like its modern

²⁹⁰ Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 269.

²⁹¹ Goldsmith, 'The Seafarer and The Birds', 228; Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 2.

²⁹² Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. 'Whaup'; *OED*, s.v. 'whaup, n.'

²⁹³ *CBG*, p. 158.

²⁹⁴ Kitson, 'Old English Bird-Names (II)', 3; Fisher, *The Shell Bird Book*, p. 45.

reflex ‘mew’, the name accurately captures the wailing cries of almost all of the *Larus* genus, and as many ornithologists, let alone casual observers, cannot tell gull species apart, there is no reason to assume that any of the speakers of early medieval Germanic languages did either. G. P. Cubbin, Kitson and Suolahti, however, are reluctant to attribute an ideophonic origin to OE *mæw* and its cognates, and Kitson and Cubbin endorse Suolahti’s tentative proposal for Common Germanic **maihwa-*, which Suolahti links with Sanskrit *mécaka-* (‘dark blue’, ‘black’, ‘blue-grey’).²⁹⁵ Orel, on the other hand, drawing on Slavic and Latvian evidence omitted by the others, agrees with Lockwood’s ideophonic origin for the name, and furthermore, endorses Pokornoy’s etymology from words denoting babbling murmuring.²⁹⁶

Stearn

The *stearn* has caused some consternation. It occasionally glosses Latin *sturnus* (‘starling’), presumably because of confusion with OE *stær* (‘starling’), as well as other Latin names of uncertain meaning (such as *fida* and *beacita*),²⁹⁷ but has been linked, etymologically, with a folk-name for the tern, which is more appropriate in the context of *The Seafarer*.²⁹⁸ However, as Goldsmith has pointed out, it is not entirely appropriate given that no species of tern winters along British coasts.²⁹⁹ Goldsmith therefore favoured the Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), though she cautions that ‘we must (...) avoid Turner’s mistake of limiting the meaning of the word *stern* to one particular species, defined by modern scientists.’³⁰⁰ Many editors and translators of *The Seafarer* have followed Goldsmith’s suggestion,³⁰¹ though it seems to me that there is at least an equally good candidate for *stearn* in the Little Gull

²⁹⁵ G. P. Cubbin, ‘A case of homonymic clash in Germanic’, *Indogermanische Forschungen*, 84 (1979), 226-236, at 227; Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, 21; Suolahti, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, pp. 397-8.

²⁹⁶ Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. ‘*maiwaz’ (< *maiwjanan, s.v.); Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Mew’; *IEW*, s.v. ‘1 mū-’.

²⁹⁷ Goldsmith, ‘*The Seafarer* and The Birds’, 230.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 230-234, Kitson, ‘Old English Bird-Names (II)’, 22, Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Starn’.

²⁹⁹ Goldsmith, ‘*The Seafarer* and The Birds’, 230-234.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

³⁰¹ E.g. Gordon, *The Seafarer*, p. 36 and Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, p. 129.

(*Hyrdocoloeus minutus*). This tiny gull is tern-sized and resembles a tern in flight – the key difference, however, is that terns are summer visitors while Little Gulls only appear along the British coasts in winter.³⁰² As many gulls change plumage between summer and winter, it would have been easy to assume that Little Gulls were merely terns in winter plumage. This suggestion is not intended to displace Goldsmith’s Kittiwake offering – which is still valid – but rather is intended to heed her caution and suggest other species which may have come under *stearn*. If we extrapolate backwards from early ornithologists,³⁰³ *stearn* seems to have been either a Level II or III term which, depending on the individual, may or may not have been subordinated to a Level II *mæw*.

Earn

The identity of the *earn* is a straightforward matter. Although the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) was probably included under this name, the main referent for it must have been the white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), which was much more common in the Anglo-Saxon period.³⁰⁴ The coastal setting, in any case, means we most probably have the white-tailed eagle before us here.³⁰⁵ It is worth noting that this eagle is much more vocal than most other large raptors, frequently calling in flight.³⁰⁶ Although Goldsmith notes M.F.M. Meiklejohn’s observation that birds in storms would be too exhausted to cry out in her article, this need not be a problematic issue for our yelling eagle in *The Seafarer*.³⁰⁷ If we liberally interpret the *stormas* of *The Seafarer* 1.23a to include rough seas, then the detail that *ful oft þæt earn bigeal* (‘very often that eagle yelled about’) looks highly naturalistic.

³⁰² *CBG*, pp. 192, 198-200.

³⁰³ For these see Goldsmith, ‘*The Seafarer and The Birds*’, 231-4.

³⁰⁴ Yalden and Albarella, *The History of British Birds*, pp. 124-5.

³⁰⁵ *BWP*, I, 49.

³⁰⁶ *BWP*, I, 55-6. The White-tailed Eagle produces a range of noises: the ‘knocking’ alarm call (*BWP*, I, 56) seems to lie behind the *uoces animantium’s aquila clangit*. See Lendinara, ‘Contextualized Lexicography’, p. 118.

³⁰⁷ Goldsmith, ‘*The Seafarer and The Birds*’, 229.

Geac and the anfloga

There is no debate surrounding the identity of this bird: the *geac* is universally acknowledged to be the (Common) Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*). It is necessary, however, to consider the arguments of those who identify the *anfloga* and the *geac*, though the argument has not seen any proponents since Peter Orton last endorsed it in 1982.³⁰⁸ As far as I am aware, it was first suggested by Ernst Sieper in his translation of *The Seafarer* into German, presumably motivated by the correlation between the verbs of incitement (*geac monað*, ‘the cuckoo compels’, l.53a; *gielleð anfloga / hweteð on hwælweg*, ‘the lone-flier cries out, impels [me] over the whale’s path’, ll.62b-63a) as well as the solitary migratory flight of the cuckoo.³⁰⁹ These same reasons motivated Gordon to identify the *anfloga* with the *geac*, though she further reasons that the cry of the *anfloga* ‘could have little or no metaphorical significance’.³¹⁰ Indeed, it was this reasoning which swung Orton in favour of the *geac* – *anfloga* identification.³¹¹ In the next chapter I shall refute this particular point in detail; for now it is sufficient to say that the *anfloga*’s cry, because it draws on imagery of augury, has metaphorical significance.³¹² Instead, here I will show that the *anfloga* should be identified with the *hyge* which leaves the Seafarer’s *hreþerlocan* on l.58.

For þon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
min modsefa mid mereflode,
ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
gifre ond grædig; gielleð anfloga,
hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu, for þon me hatran sind
Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif

³⁰⁸ P. R. Orton, ‘*The Seafarer* 58-64a’, *Neophilologus*, 66 (1982), 450-9, at 454-6.

³⁰⁹ *Die altenglische Elegie*, ed. and trans. by E. Sieper (Strassburg: Trübner, 1915), p. 277.

³¹⁰ Gordon, ed., *The Seafarer*, p. 41 n.62b.

³¹¹ Orton, ‘*The Seafarer* 58-64a’, 450-1.

³¹² See R. North, *Pagan Words*, pp. 99-121.

læne on londe.

(ll.58-66a)

Therefore my mind now moves out of my rib-cage, my intellect over the seawater, over the home of the whale, it moves widely over the expanse of the earth, comes back to me, eager and greedy; the *anfloga* ('lone-flier') yells, impels the restless breast over the whale's path, ofer the lakes of the sea, because the Lord's joys are hotter to me than this dead life, transient on the land.

Several studies have argued for a connection between the *hyge* and *anfloga*; I will not repeat their arguments here for constraints of space,³¹³ though attention deserves to be drawn to Leslie Lockett's survey of the mobile nature of the mind in Old English, as this lies at the heart of all the *hyge-anfloga* arguments.³¹⁴ Instead, I will supplement the *hyge-anfloga* arguments by going back to the basics and seeing what a close reading of the poem can tell us – with particular focus on the poem's auralty, as *The Seafarer* stresses this throughout, from the sounds of the seabirds (ll.19b-26), which are ideophonic as well as carrying aural comparisons, to the melancholy voice of the cuckoo and the climactic flight of the *anfloga*.³¹⁵

One of the most remarkable features about the *anfloga* passage (which, for our purposes, shall be defined as ll.58-66) is the prominence of 'h' alliteration. Almost

³¹³ The major studies which identify the *anfloga* with the *hyge* are *Ibid.*, pp. 100-110; P. Clemons, 'Mens absentia cogitans in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*', in *Medieval Literature and Civilisation: Studies in Memory of G.N. Garmonsway*, ed. by D. A. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (London: Athlone, 1969), pp. 62-77; M. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by H. Gneuss and M. Lapidge (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 271-98; A. Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry*, Costerus New Series 143 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p. 145.

³¹⁴ The authoritative work on the mind and its mobile properties is now L. Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), esp. pp. 33-41.

³¹⁵ For the cuckoo's melancholy voice, which almost certainly has affinities with early medieval Welsh literature, see J. Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: a Study and Edition of the 'Englynion'* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 194-6, 202-5 and 225; H. Pilch, 'The Elegiac Genre in Old English and Early Welsh Poetry', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 29 (1964), 209-24, at 215-71; S. L. Higley, 'Lamentable Relationships? "Non-Sequitur" in Old English and Middle Welsh Elegy', in *Connections between Old English and Celtic Literature*, ed. by P. K. Ford and K. G. Borst, Old English Colloquium Series No.2 (Berkeley: University Press of America, 1982), pp. 45-66, at pp. 46-50; *idem.*, *Between Languages: The Uncooperative Text in Early Welsh and Old English Nature Poetry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), pp. 47-50; P. L. Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric* (London: Allan & Unwin, 1966), pp. 70, 74-5, 135-6, and 147-8. I have an article reappraising this in detail in preparation.

half of the lines (four out of nine) alliterate on ‘h’ (ll.58, 60, 63 and 64), and this stands out in the immediate context of the passage because there has been no ‘h’ alliteration for thirteen lines (i.e. since l.44). This proliferation of /h/ phonemes is even more pronounced because two of the four ‘h’-alliterating lines triple alliterate (ll.58 and 63), i.e. with double alliteration on the a-verse. On a larger scale the ‘h’ alliteration stands out too. Muriel Cornell examines the frequency of alliterating phonemes in Old English poetry generally,³¹⁶ and finds that, in order of frequency, vowels bear the alliteration most frequently, and then w, g, s, f and h follow respectively (though she does not give percentage figures for this).³¹⁷ There is an intricate link of associations across the alliterating words: on l.58 *hyge*, *hweorfeð* and *hreþerlocan* stress the mind’s escape from its bodily confines; on l.60 the alliteration of *hwæles* (*epel*) and *hweorfeð* emphasizes its journeying across the sea. The alliteration on l.63 is crucial for our understanding here. *Hweteð* and *gielleð* are the two verbs which have unanimously been ascribed to the *anfloga*, and on l.63 we see double alliteration on *hweteð*, *hwælweg*,³¹⁸ in the a-verse, and *hreþer* in the b-verse, linking the incitement, the sea and the Seafarer. I take *hreþer* (‘breast’) here to refer to the narrator, as his *hyge* previously leaves his *hreþerlocan* (‘rib-cage’). It is noteworthy too that *hreþer* is used strictly of the physical receptacle containing the ‘mind’ in Old English, and never for the mind itself.³¹⁹ The culmination of this alliteration suggests that the *hyge*, which soars over the seas, is the same thing – or at least closely linked with – the agent of the verb *hweteð*.

Moreover, the verb *hweteð* and its impelling of the *hreþer*, as opposed to the mind (whether *mod*, *hyge* or *modsefa*), disassociate it from the *geac*. Although semantically similar, the verb used of the cuckoo’s incitement is *monað*, a verb which occurs twice elsewhere in the poem (ll.36a and 50a) in the build-up to the *anfloga*’s flight. As *monað* is used throughout, we must question why it is not used again here. Similarly, previous uses of *monað* refer to the compulsion of the mind (l.36a, *monað modes lust* ‘impels the longing of the mind’; ll.50-1a, *ealle þa*

³¹⁶ M. Cornell, ‘Varieties of Repetition in Old English Poetry, Especially in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*’, *Neophilologus*, 65 (1981), 292-307.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 293.

³¹⁸ This is accepting, as most editors do, the emendation of MS *wæl weg* to *hwælweg*. See Gordon’s note on *The Seafarer*, p. 42.

³¹⁹ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 62; Harbus, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 34; North, *Pagan Words*, p. 71.

gemoniað modes fusne / sefan to sipe ‘all these impel the eager of mind, the intellect to journey’). They are not, like *hreper*, references to the Seafarer as a physical entity.

Likewise, the double alliteration on l.162 links *gifre*, *grædig*, in the a-verse, and *gielleð*, in the b-verse.³²⁰ Gordon’s reading tries to separate these out, so that *gifre* and *grædig* applies to the returning *hyge* and *gielleð* applies to the *anfloga*, but the alliteration at least suggests that it is the *anfloga* who is *gifre ond grædig*. This phonetic aspect endorses the arguments of Vivian Salmon, Peter Clemoes and Frans Diekstra, who all regard *gifre ond grædig* as referring to both the returning *hyge* and the *anfloga*.³²¹

Phonological analysis, then, suggests that the *anfloga* is not the cuckoo, and in the next chapter I will return to this passage to discuss what the *anfloga* is – or, to be more specific, what imagery the *anfloga* is drawing on. This phonological analysis, however, is symptomatic of a much wider phenomenon which has been traced throughout this chapter, and that is the fundamentally aural experience of birds in Anglo-Saxon England. The birds of *The Seafarer* stand out because we have no physical descriptions of them (beyond the formulaic ‘X-feathered’ adjectives, one of which is probably a sign of textual corruption), rather, they are noticed because of, and noted for, their sounds. Bird-names themselves often indicate this primarily aural perception, but we have seen that this carries through into the literature too, whether in regards to *The Seafarer*’s birds or the *Corvidae* examined earlier. This aural theme is continued in the next chapter, where our attention will move away from strictly naturalistic presentations of birds to the place of aurality in more stylised, and ostensibly less naturalistic depictions of them.

³²⁰ Palatal and velar <g> alliterate in early verse but not in late poetry; this has implications for the dating of *The Seafarer*. See R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 258-9 and J. Terasawa, *Old English Metre: An Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 13-14.

³²¹ V. Salmon, ‘The Wanderer’ and ‘The Seafarer’ and the Old English Conception of the Soul’, *Modern Language Review*, 55 (1960), 1-10, at 1 and 6-7; Clemoes, ‘*Mens absentia cogitans* in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*’, pp. 62-77.

Chapter Two:

Augury in Anglo-Saxon England

In the previous chapter we saw the importance of the sounds of birds in the Anglo-Saxon experience of their natural world. Birds were noticed for, and called after, their cries, and even similar looking birds were distinguished if their cries were noticeably different. In this chapter, we will continue to examine the primacy of aural experiences of birds, though this time in a sphere that was still a part of the natural world for Anglo-Saxons even if it is no longer part of it by modern conceptions: the realm of the supernatural.¹ This chapter begins with the well-known ‘beasts of battle’ topos, and by comparing the depictions of birds in it – particularly ravens – to representations of corpse-hungry ravens in Old Norse.² Although Judith Jesch has emphasized the differences between the ‘beasts of battle’ topos in Old English and Old Norse, we will see that this difference has been overexaggerated, and that both traditions, at least as far as avian aurality go, are more similar than they are different.³ Moreover, my analysis here stresses the under-examined supernatural element of the topos, recently noticed also by Joseph Harris.⁴ I then move on to an ethological discussion of the ‘beasts of battle’, arguing that the appearance of these creatures before battle has its foundation in natural behaviour of the wolf and raven, and that this natural behaviour either gave rise to, or endorsed, a belief in these animals having prophetic abilities. Moving away from the ‘beasts of battle’, I demonstrate just how pervasive the belief in information-bringing birds was in Old Norse and Old English, and finish this chapter by adducing evidence for this belief being real, and not just a literary confection.

¹ See the discussion in J. Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, CSASE 27 (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 2-3.

² Despite the emphasis I place on the semantic range of *hrefn* in the previous chapter, in this and subsequent chapters I use the modern English ‘raven’ when referring to *hrefn* (and ON *hrafn*) out of convenience: in addition to being cognate words, the intelligence, size and symbolic magnitude which are ascribed to the raven today are appropriate, and fitting, points of comparison with the referents of the OE and ON words. It has also been convenient, particularly when embarking on ethological research and analysis, to focus on this single (most conspicuous) corvid species.

³ J. Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves: Beasts of Battle, Symbols of Victory and Death’, in *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by J. Jesch, *Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology* 5 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), pp. 251-280.

⁴ J. Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. by C.D. Wright, F. M. Biggs and T. N. Hall (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007), pp. 3-25.

Beasts of Battle

The ‘beasts of battle’ topos involves the appearance of some combination of the eagle, raven and wolf before, during or after battle. There is usually reference to their hunger, whether in anticipation of the forthcoming feast or in being sated, and likewise there is usually reference to their vocalisations.⁵ The topos is variously called a topos, type-scene, theme (both in the strict oral-formulaic sense espoused by Albert Bates Lord and in the more general sense) and motif;⁶ the distinction is especially important for formalists,⁷ but for non-formalists these are all roughly synonymous.⁸ I use ‘topos’ consistently to avoid oral-formulaic associations and to account for the fact that several motifs are found within it.⁹

Despite the significant body of scholarship contributed to the subject by formalist enquiries, I have chosen not to define, or indeed analyse, the topos from this sort of perspective. My concern is not with examining or understanding the topos as a compositional unit, but with understanding its wider cultural nuances and its origins. Indeed, Mark Griffith, in one of the most theoretically rigorous formalist studies, is forced to admit that ‘Formalist analysis of conventions cannot, perhaps, adequately prepare us for this kind of free treatment’ when faced with the *Beowulf*-poet’s handling of the topos.¹⁰ Harris also notes this and suggests that ‘[t]he limitations of formalism seem to call for a broader and looser approach.’¹¹ The methodologies I have used throughout this thesis have therefore seemed more appropriate.

⁵ For definitions of the topos see F. P. Magoun, ‘The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 56 (1955), 81-90, at 82-3, and M. S. Griffith, ‘Convention and originality in the Old English ‘beasts of battle’ typescene’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 22 (1993), 179-199, at 184.

⁶ For the oral-formulaic definition of ‘theme’ see A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 2nd edn, ed. by S. Mitchell and G. Nagy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 68-98.

⁷ Griffith, ‘Convention and originality’, 179-180.

⁸ E.g. as they are for Harris. ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, p. 3, who groups them all as forms of ‘compositional unit’.

⁹ For a list of motifs found within the topos, see Griffith, ‘Convention and originality’, 185.

¹⁰ Griffith, ‘Convention and originality’, 196.

¹¹ Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle: South and North’, p. 5.

Fourteen passages are canonically considered to reflect the ‘beasts of battle’ topos. These passages are:¹²

Battle of Brunanburh ll.60-65a

Battle of Maldon ll.106b-107a.

Beowulf ll.3024b-7

Elene ll.27b-30a, 52b-53a, 110b-13a

Exodus ll.162-8

The Finnsburh Fragment ll.5b-6a, 34b-35a

Genesis A ll.1983b-1985a, 2087b-2089a, 2159b-2161

Judith ll.205b-212a, 295-296a

A number of other texts have been suggested as part of this group. Francis Peabody Magoun, the first to write on the ‘beasts of battle’ topos in English,¹³ identified twelve instances of the topos, omitting *Elene* ll.52b-53a, *Genesis A* ll.2087b-2089a and ll.2159b-2161, and adding *The Wanderer* ll.81-3.¹⁴ Eric Stanley added the extra *Elene* passage to Magoun’s list as well as *Genesis A* ll.2157-61, and further suggested adding two passages from *The Fortunes of Men*: ll.10-14 and ll.33-42. In spite of this last addition, Stanley comments on *The Fortunes of Men* and *The Wanderer* both lacking explicit references to battle, though he suggests that an Anglo-Saxon audience may have adduced a connection to one because of the presence of the beasts of battle.¹⁵ Thomas Honegger identified creative use of the topos in Ælfric’s *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis* (ll.154-63),¹⁶ although this is absent in Joseph Harris’s list of ‘marginal passages that seem not so much to deploy the topos itself as – in some cases debatably – to play off its familiarity’: *Beowulf* l.2448a, 2941a, *Maxims II* ll.18b-19a, Exeter Riddle 24 ll.4-5a and Riddle 93 ll.28-

¹² This list is also given in J. Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, pp. 3-4, but ultimately derives from Griffith, ‘Convention and originality’, 197-9.

¹³ Magoun, ‘The Theme of the Beasts of Battle’, 81-90. Before Magoun we have G. Neckel, ‘Die kriegerische Kultur der heidnischen Germanen’, *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 7 (1919), 26-33, though the beasts are not the main subject of Neckel’s enquiry.

¹⁴ Magoun, ‘The Theme of the Beasts of Battle’, p. 88.

¹⁵ E. G. Stanley, ‘Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Penitent’s Prayer*’, *Anglia*, 73 (1955), 413-66, at 442-3.

¹⁶ T. Honegger, ‘Form and Function: The beasts of battle revisited’, *English Studies*, 79 (1998), 289-98, at 290-1.

9.¹⁷ We could further supplement this list with the *hrefn blaca* of *Beowulf* ll.1801-2a, Dæghrefn's name in ll.2501-2, the allusion to the wolf in *Maxims I* ll.146-151, and, as Mark Amodio, Harris, and Gustav Neckel long before them, have suggested, with the carrion-greedy gull that circles Andreas and his ship in *Andreas* ll.371b-2a.¹⁸

The supernatural aspect

Out of the fourteen 'canonical' passages, the beasts appear before battle 7 times,¹⁹ after battle 5 times,²⁰ and during battle twice.²¹ It is easy to claim that those instances where the animals appear before battle is mere literary technique, intended to heighten the tension in anticipation of impending slaughter. It most certainly does this, but the prophetic aspect of the beasts' appearances is often overlooked. Consider the following passage in *Elene*, the first of three occurrences of the topos in the poem, which comes after a description of the advance of the Huns and their allies against the Romans:

Fyrdleoð agol

wulf on wealde, wælrune ne mað.

Urigfeðera earn sang ahof

laðum on last.

(ll.27b-30a)

The wolf in the woods sang a battle-song, did not conceal the secret of (forthcoming) slaughter. The dewy-feathered eagle raised a song in the tracks of the hostile ones.

¹⁷ Harris, 'Beasts of Battle, South and North', pp. 4 and 16 n.3.

¹⁸ M. C. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition. Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), p. 53; Harris, 'Beasts of Battle, South and North', p. 4, calls it 'an example of the *Andreas* poet's malapropian handling of a formula from the topos comparable to his relation to poetic tradition elsewhere'. See also Neckel, 'Die kriegerische Kultur', 28.

¹⁹ *Battle of Maldon* ll.106b-7a, *Elene* ll.27b-30a, 52b-53a, 110b-113a, *Exodus* ll.162-7, *Judith* ll.205b-12a, and *Genesis A* ll.1983b-1985a.

²⁰ *Judith* ll.295-6a, *Genesis A* ll.2087b-2089a, 2159b-2161a, *Battle of Brunanburh* ll.60-65a, and *Beowulf* ll.3024b-3027.

²¹ Both of these instances are in the *Finnsburh Fragment*: ll.5b-6a and 34b-3.

As there has been no fighting yet, the *wælrune* ('secrets of slaughter') must refer to secrets regarding the forthcoming bloodshed. The phrase *ne mað* occurs twice elsewhere in Old English, and in both other instances it is concerned with revealing the truth. Later in *Elene*, Cyriacus prays to God on Calvary for the location of the nails from Christ's cross, and while doing so *hygerune ne mað* ('did not hide secret thoughts', l.1098b). As a result of not hiding any secret intentions, God raises a pillar of fire to mark the point where the nails are buried. The other place *ne mað* occurs is in *Guthlac B*, when Guthlac's servant does not hide the news of his master's death. Reading the earlier *Elene* passage alongside these, the phrase *wælrune ne mað* can hardly mean anything other than the wolf possesses and at this point in the poem reveals, occult knowledge about the forthcoming slaughter.

As we shall see in my analysis later on in this chapter, the verb used of the wolf's battle-song, *agol*, is closely linked with the verb used of magic elsewhere in early medieval Germanic literatures, and *leoð* is commonly used of songs communicating meaning through language.²² The implication is that the wolf possesses knowledge regarding the impending deaths, and the eagle, following the footsteps of the doomed, seems to be privy to this knowledge too. A similar link is clear in *The Battle of Maldon*, where just before the fighting breaks out:

Ða wæs feohte neh,
 tir æt getohte. Wæs seo tid cumen
 þæt þær fæge men feallan sceoldon.
 Þær wearð hream ahafen hremmas wundon
 Earn æses georn; wæs on eorþan cyrm.

(ll.103b-107)

Then the fight was near, glory at battle. The time had come when fated men
 should fall. Shouting was raised there, ravens wound around, eagles eager for
 carrion; there was uproar on the earth.

²² *BT*, s.v. 'leōþ.' Griffith, 'Convention and originality', 186 also notes that the birds are 'speaking or singing on fourteen occasions.'

The appearance of the raven and eagle confirms that that time had indeed come for the fated to fall. In *Judith* ll.207b-9a, the raven and the wolf *wistan begen/ þæt him ða þeodgumian þohton tilian/ fylle on fægum* ('both knew that the men of the nation intended to serve them their fill in fated men'), and in *Elene*, the beasts immediately precede the departure of fated souls (*fleah fæge gæst*, 'the fated soul flies away', l.169a). Also, similarly to the *fyrðleoð* in *Elene*, the wolves in *Exodus* sing *atol æfenleoð ætes on wenan* ('terrible evening-songs in anticipation of the slaughter', l.166). Towards the end of *Beowulf*, we once again find this idea of the beasts knowing about the fated:

... ac se wonna hrefn
 fus ofer fægum fela reordian,
 earne secgan hu him æt æte speow,
 þenden he wið wulf wæl reafode.

(ll.3024b-27)

... but the raven, eager for the fated to die, tells many speeches to the eagle,
 how he succeeded at the feast when he plundered the corpses against the
 wolf.

The editors of the recent fourth edition of Klaeber's *Beowulf* rightly connect this with the 'beasts of battle' motif found elsewhere in Old English literature, and note that unlike in other poems it does not immediately precede a description of battle.²³ Instead, Beowulf is dead and the now kingless kingdom stands open to invasion by the Swedes; Wiglaf invokes the image of the eagle, raven and wolf in his bleak appraisal of their future. What the Klaeber editors do not mention, however, is that the closest parallels to this passage are found not in Old English but in Old Norse. Two ravens discuss how pleased they are at the birth of Sigmund's son Helgi in *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* stanzas 5-6 because of the corpses he will leave in his wake, and in *Brot af Sigurðarqviðu* ('Fragment of a poem about Sigurðr'). In one instance, Gunnar lies awake worrying over the consequences of he and his brother Högni murdering Sigurðr:

²³Klaeber's *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, R. E., Bjork, and J. D. Niles, 4th edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) p. 263, n.3024b-7.

Fót nam at hrora, fiold þ nam at spialla,
hitt herglötuðr hyggja téði,
hvat þeir í bápmi báðir sǫgðo,
hrafn ey oc ǫrn, er þeir heim riðo.

His foot began to twitch, he began to
mutter a lot, the slayer of armies began
to consider what those two had said in
that tree (*bápmi*), the raven and eagle,
when they rode home.²⁴

(stanza 13)

As in *Beowulf*, the eagle and raven are seen to be conversing, and in both cases the conversing is both retrospective and prophetic. In *Beowulf* the reflection on the eponymous king's death leads to Wiglaf thinking of the future, in the *Brot* the eagle and raven both mark the slaying of Sigurðr and look forward to Gunnar and Högni's deaths at the hands of Atli. The other parallel in the *Brot* is when the bird's prophecy is related earlier in the poem, though this time only the raven is mentioned:

Soltinn varð Sigurðr sunnan Rínar,
hrafn at meiði hátt kallaði:
“Ycr mun Atli eggjar rióða,
muno vígscá of viðá eiðar.”

Sigurd was dead on the south-side of the Rhine,
A raven called loudly from a tree:
“With your blood Atli will redden his blade,
your oaths have been broken in battle.”²⁵

(stanza 5)

The way this raven loudly bodes Gunnar's and Högni's fate could plausibly be understood as this raven being *fus ofer fægum* ('eager for the fated to die') – as when

²⁴ There is some dispute over this reading. *The Elder Eddas of Sæmund Sigfusson and the Younger Eddas of Snorre Sturleson*, ed. and trans. by B. Thorpe (London: Norrœna Society, 1906), p. 204, suggests emending MS *bápmi* to *bǫðvi*, and translates 'what those two had said in conflict'; *The Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. by C. Larrington (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p. 175, presumably follows this emendation but translates it 'what those two had said in curses'. It seems unnecessary to emend the MS reading when *bápmi* makes good sense: *The Elder Eddas of Sæmund Sigfusson and the Younger Eddas of Snorre Sturleson*, ed. and trans. by H. Bellows (London: Norrœna Society, 1906), p. 204, presumably following Bugge's MS transcription of *bápmi*, translates as I do - see *Edda Sæmundar: Norræn fornkvæði*, ed. by S. Bugge (Christiana: Malling, 1867), p. 430. Analogous support for this reading can also be found in *Helgaqviða hundingsbana in fyrri*, where two ravens discussing the protagonist and his future potential for feeding them are also explicitly stated to be sitting in a tree (*sat á hámm meiði* 5.3).

²⁵ The reading of this passage is disputed too. ON *vígscá* is clearly derived from *víg* ('battle'), but the precise nuance is unclear. Larrington, in *The Poetic Edda*, p. 174, takes it to be an adjective describing Gunnar and Högni: 'your oaths will destroy you, you warlike men'; I think Thorpe, *The Elder Eddas*, p. 204 is much nearer the mark with 'the oaths you have sworn your slaughter shall dissolve'. I cannot understand why Bellows, *The Elder Eddas*, p. 405, translates it 'your oaths shall bind you in chains'.

Atli ‘reddens his blade’ with their blood, the raven will be able to feast. It is probable that there was a widespread belief in these animals deciding, if not merely being aware of, the forthcoming deaths. In the Old Norse-Icelandic *Reginsmál*, the wolf and the eagle are reckoned among the animals beneficial to encounter before battle:

“Morg ero góð, ef gumar vissi,
heill at sverða svipon;
dyggia fylgio hygg ec ins dœcva vera
at hrottameiði hrafns.

....

Pat er iþ þriðia, ef þú þjóta heyrir
úlf und asclimom:
heilla auðit verðr þér af hiálmstofum,
ef þú sér þá fyrri fara.
(stanzas 20, 22)

There are many good omens, if men know them, for the swinging of swords; the dark raven is a good companion, I think, for the warrior.... This is a third [omen]: if it seems to you that you hear a wolf under the branches of the ash-tree, well-being is fated for you against warriors if you see those things first.

It seems likely that what we have in *Reginsmál* is the reflex of earlier beliefs. Arguments like Roberta Frank’s, which would see the ‘beasts of battle’ in Old English borrowed from the Old Norse,²⁶ do not properly account for Continental German parallels which hint at a Common Germanic origin of the topos.²⁷ Although there is a ‘beasts of battle’ topos in Old Norse, Judith Jesch, working from tenth-century skaldic poetry, has stressed its difference to the Old English tradition: she argues that the Old English topos is atmospheric, creating either a ‘sense of

²⁶ R. Frank, ‘Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 59 (1987), 338-355, at 347-52.

²⁷ Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, pp. 7-9. See also Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, pp. 254 and 271-2.

impending doom’, or an ‘elegiac mood’, and that the Old Norse is ‘upbeat and positive’, and is about ‘praising the warrior for his prowess in a campaign or in the whole of his career.’²⁸ We have already seen that this generalisation does not hold true for the Eddic poetry, as the ravens in the *Brot* create a tragic sense of impending doom rather than praise Gunnar and Hogni’s prowess. It is not possible to prove that this idea in the *Brot* is of any antiquity, let alone make any conclusive remarks about the poem’s dating.²⁹ There are indications in the earliest skaldic material, however, that the prophesying birds of the Edda had currency very early on in Scandinavia, and which may demonstrate that the pre-Christian origins of an association of the raven with battle-prognostication.

The poem now known as *Vellekla* (‘gold-shortage’), by Einnarr Helgason skálaglamm, probably originating in the early 980’s, is a fragmentary work.³⁰ One stanza relates Earl Hákon Sigurðarson taking battle-omens:

Flóttá gekk til fréttar
 felli-Njörðr á velli,
 draugr gat dolga Ságu
 dagrað Heðins váða,
 ok haldboði hildar
 hrægamma sá ramma;
 Týr vildi sá týna
 teinlautar fjor Gauta.

²⁸ Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, p. 254. As Jesch points out, the treatment in tenth-century skaldic poetry is more similar to what David Klausner has called the ‘beasts of battle’ in early Welsh, where the idea of feeding the beasts reflects on the battle prowess of the individual warriors. See D. N. Klausner, ‘The Topos of the Beasts of Battle in Early Welsh Poetry’, in *The Centre and its Compass. Studies in Medieval Literature in Honour of Professor John Leyerle*, ed. by R. A. Taylor, J. F. Burke, P. J. Eberle, I. Lancashire, and B. S. Merrilees, *Studies in Medieval Culture* 33 (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1993), pp. 247-64.

²⁹ For an attempt at the dating of Eddic poetry, as well as description of the issues surrounding this, see B. Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry. A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* 41 (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1999).

³⁰ *Longman Anthology of Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures*, ed. and trans. by R. North, J. Allard and P. Gillies (London: Longman, 2011), p. 558; R. North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* CSASE 22 (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 99 suggested c.985. The text – and the stanza in question, are old enough to have been cited, and attributed to Einarr, by Snorri. See R. Frank, ‘Skaldic Poetry’, in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by C. J. Clover and J. Lindow, with a preface by T. M. Andersson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 157-98, at p. 162.

(stanza 30)³¹

The felling-Njorðr of the fleeing ones [=Hákon] went to enquire (of omens) on the field: the tree of Heiðinn's clothing [=armour, 'tree of' = Hákon] got the advised day from the Ságu [=goddess] of wounds [=valkyrie], and the strength-boder of battle [=Hákon] saw mighty corpse-vultures [=ravens]; that god of the twig-hollow [=shield, 'god of'=Hákon]³² desired to obliterate the lives of the Gautar.

There seem to be two parts Hákon's battle-prophecy. Firstly there is the revelation of the best day to go to war (the *dagráð*) by a valkyrie, secondly there is the appearance of ravens, which Hákon (rightfully) believes bode victory for his coming conflict against Earl Óttarr.³³ The appearance of the ravens before battle is linked to their feasting on corpses afterwards, but they clearly also denote a supernatural knowledge of forthcoming events. In this respect it is very similar indeed to the 7 instances of the 'beasts of battle' topos in Old English where the beasts are present even before the fighting begins.

The poem variously titled *Haraldskvæði* or *Hrafnsmál* is attributed to Þórbjorn hornklofi, a poet who lived at the close of the ninth century – long before the conversion of Norway to Christianity in 1000 – and his poem takes the form of a dialogue between a valkyrie and raven.³⁴ We are told of the valkyrie that she *foglsrødd kunn*i ('knew the language of birds', 2.2), and she asks a group of ravens for their *dæmði* ('opinion', 'judgement', 1.8). They answer a series of questions regarding the present circumstances of King Haraldr Hárfagri (850-c.933) regarding his generosity (stanza 8) and his court (stanzas 9-15). The text is incomplete but the valkyrie's enquiry of tidings from the ravens is reminiscent of Óðinn's consultation of Huginn and Muninn:

³¹ *Skj B.1*, p. 122.

³² R. Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden* (Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder, 1921), p. 168 suggests that *laut*, 'hollow', might mean 'shield'.

³³ *Heimskringla*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 26, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941), p. 125.

³⁴ *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*, ed. and trans. by N. Kershaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 76-7.

Úti vill jól drekka	If he alone counsels it,
ef skal einn ráða	the prime-spirited king
fylkir inn framlyndi,	will drink his Yule out at sea
ok Feys leik heyja, ³⁵	and play Freyr's game (=battle)

(stanza 6.1-4)

Furthermore, the course suggested by the ravens here is very similar to the suggestion of a crow (*kráka*) in *Rígsþula*. This text was probably composed somewhere in northern England sometime in the late tenth to early eleventh century,³⁶ but it probably contains some very old ideas.³⁷ It is not a significant barrier to interpretation here that the bird is a *kráka* rather than a *hrafñ*. In chapter 1 of *Völsunga Saga* Óðinn sends an *óskmey* ('wish-maiden', or 'adoptive daughter'), who takes the form of a 'crow' (*bra a sig kraku ham*), to deliver an apple to King Rerir and his wife in order to grant them the child Volsung, testifying to a link between Óðinn, this bird, and divine intervention.³⁸ Moreover – and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine this in any more detail – there is the possibility of overlapping semantic fields between *kráka* and *hrafñ* in Old Norse (as in Old English *hroc*, *hrefn* and *crawe*) and this is suggested by the near-homophone *krákr* ('croak') listed by Snorri as a *heiti* for the *hrafñ* in *Skáldskaparmál* 75. In *Rígsþula*, the *kráka* advises the young Konr Ungr ('young nobleman'), who has been shooting down birds with his sling, and who is able to understand the voice of birds (*Klök nam fugla*, 45.1), to stop wasting his time:

Dá kvað þat kráka	Then that crow,
sat kvisti ein:	sat alone on a branch, said:
‘Hvat skaltu, Konr ungr,	“Why should you, young Nobleman
kyrra fugla?	be silencing birds?
Heldr mætti þér	Rather you could be

³⁵ *Skj* B1, 23.

³⁶ *The Poetic Edda: Volume II Mythological Poems*, ed. and trans. by U. Dronke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) pp. 202-208. All references to *Rígsþula* are from this edition.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, e.g. pp. 178-9, 187-90.

³⁸ *Völsunga Saga*, ed. and trans. by K. Grimstaad, *Bibliotheca Germanica, Series Nova*, vol 3 (Saarbrücken: AQ, 2000), p. 78. See also the similar comments by Dronke in *PE* II, pp. 235-6.

hestum ríða, [hiǰrum bregða]	riding horses [brandishing weapons]
ok her fella.’	and felling armies.
‘Á Danr ok Danpr dýrar haller, œðra óðal en ér hafið. Peir kunnu vel kióli at ríða, egg at kenna, under riúfa.’	‘Danr and Danpr own extravagant halls, greater property than you possess. They know well how to sail ships and greet with the blade, cleaving wounds.
(st.48-9)	

It is important to note that in both cases the corvids are speaking in their own tongue: the valkyrie and Konr Ungr only understand them because they possess the special ability to do so. The implication, therefore, is that the normal vocalisations of these birds contain hidden messages that may be understood by the appropriately endowed inquirer, and that these vocalisations relate to future martial exploits. We may compare this with the *wælrune* disclosed by the wolf in *Elene* 28b, and the anticipatory discussion of the ravens in *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* 5-6. I will return to the idea of talking birds later in this chapter; for now it is worth noting that the association of ravens with battle is underpinned by the ascription of prophetic knowledge to these birds.

Returning to the Old English evidence, there are prophetic overtones even in those instances where fate is not mentioned explicitly. There has been much discussion, for example, over the description of the raven as *wonn wælceasega* (‘the dark chooser of the slain’) in *Exodus* l.165a. The likelihood of an early dating of this poem precludes the possibility of Norse influence and therefore the import of the *wælceasega* of

l.64b as a loanword/loan concept.³⁹ It must be admitted that the morphological composition of *wælceasega* is not identical to that of *valkyrjur* (OE *wælcyrge*), but the semantics are. It is thus probable that the *wælceasega* of *Exodus* is not a variant of OE *wælcyrge*, but a conscious allusion to it. *Wælcyrge* and variant forms are littered throughout glossaries dating from the eighth to eleventh centuries, demonstrating both early and ongoing knowledge of the *wælcyrge* to the Anglo-Saxons.⁴⁰ Wulfstan, writing at the beginning of the eleventh century, uses the term *wælcyrrian* in his homily *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, and given the intended audience we must assume this word would have been commonly known;⁴¹ further evidence for its common knowledge may be seen in Cnut's use of *wælcyrgean* in his letters.⁴² The term is interesting and deserves fuller treatment than is possible here; some brief remarks will have to suffice. OE *wælcyrge* occurs most often in the glossaries, where it usually glosses one of the three Furies,⁴³ but also glosses the goddesses Bellona and Venus.⁴⁴ Additionally, it turns up twice in the Old English *Wonders of the East*: firstly, among the fauna of *Lentibelsinea* are creatures which *habbað eahta fet ond wælcyrrian eagan* ('have eight feet and valkyrie's eyes');⁴⁵ secondly, an adjectival form of *wælcyrge* is used to translate *Gorgoneus*.⁴⁶ As both Alaric Hall and Hilda Ellis have pointed out, these usages connect the *wælcyrge* with fate and violence,⁴⁷

³⁹ *Exodus*, ed. by P. Lucas (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), pp. 66ff, E. G. Stanley, 'Old English "-calla", "ceallian"' in *Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G.N. Garmonsway*, ed. by D. A. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (London: Athlone, 1969) pp. 94-9. See also S. M. Pons-Sanz, *Norse-Derived Vocabulary in Late Old English Texts* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2007), pp. 62-3.

⁴⁰ H. Damico, *Beowulf's Wealththeow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 44

⁴¹ *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, p. 363 n.160-6. It is interesting to note, however, that Wulfstan does not include this term in near-identical lists in earlier homilies.

⁴² H. Damico, 'The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature', in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. by H. Damico and A. H. Olsen (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 176-190, at pp. 177 and 189 n.10. It must also be stated that in late Old English, *wælcyrge* refers to something like witches. See J. R. Hall, 'Exodus 166b, *cwyldrof*; 162-67, the beasts of battle', *Neophilologus*, 74 (1990), 112-21, at 118 and 120 n.32.

⁴³ Alecto in First Cleopatra l.299 and Third Cleopatra l.2080, Tisiphone in the sixth Antwerp Glossary l.741 and Second Corpus T.159, and Erinyes in First Cleopatra l.2983 and the Second Corpus Glossary E.351 and H.87.

⁴⁴ Bellona: First Cleopatra l.754 and Third Cleopatra l.1847. Venus: in the copy of Aldhelm's prose *De laude virginitatis* preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 146, *ueneris* is glossed by both *gyden* (goddess) and *wælcyrrie*. See *Old English Glosses*, ed. by Napier, p. 115, l.4449.

⁴⁵ The edition used is A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 186, §4.4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190, §9.1: *Capi hatte seo ea in ðære ylcan stowe þe is haten Gorgoneus, þæt is Wælcyringc* ('Capi is the name of the river in that same place which is called Gorgoneus, that is 'valkyriean').

⁴⁷ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 86; H. E. Ellis, *The Road to Hel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1943), p. 71.

and if the *wælceasega* of *Exodus* 1.64b is, as I suggest, an allusion to the *wælcyrge*, then it too is loaded with associations of fate.⁴⁸ More generally, Donald Fry has noted that these beasts ‘generally follow the winning side *before* the battle and prey on the losers afterwards.’⁴⁹ In relation to the *Elene* passage, above, where the beasts first seem to be following the Huns, Mark Amodio has pointed out that ‘Cynewulf strongly signals the impending defeat of the outnumbered Romans... [b]ut in finally aligning the raven with the soon-to-be victorious Romans (52b-53a), Cynewulf dispels whatever tension may have attended the beasts’ earlier association with the Huns.’⁵⁰

Adrien Bonjour surmised that the topos had its origins in ‘a striking and well-attested fact, namely, that the corpses of warriors fallen in battle were subsequently eaten by ravens and wolves, if left exposed on the *wælstowe* [‘slaughter-field’].’⁵¹ However, for Joseph Harris, who examines the topos in both Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England, ‘only ultimately religious roots can account for the persistent supernatural features, connections with the future and death, and the survival into later folklore.’⁵² Harris is certainly correct, and later in this chapter I adduce evidence for the ‘religious roots’ of the topos. There is a more pressing issue that must be dealt with first. In relation to religious ideas involving animals, however, Aleks Pluskowski notes that ‘[t]he ecology of early Anglo-Saxon England represents an important backdrop for situating the use of animals in the symbolic repertoire.’⁵³ In the next section, then, I examine wolves, eagles, and ravens from an ethological perspective to see if there is, indeed, some natural basis for the religious and supernatural ideas associated with the beasts of battle.

⁴⁸ I agree with Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, p. 350, that *wælceasega* is ‘made in imitation of Old English *wælcyrige*’, but cannot accept her subsequent suggestion that this reflects Old Norse influence. See Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, p. 9.

⁴⁹ D. K. Fry, ‘Themes and Type-Scenes in *Elene* 1-113’, *Speculum*, 44 (1969), 35-45, at 36. The emphasis is his.

⁵⁰ Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, p. 52.

⁵¹ A. Bonjour, ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 72.4 (Sept. 1957), 563-573 at 565.

⁵² Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, p. 15.

⁵³ A. Pluskowski, ‘Animal Magic’, in *Signals of Belief in Early England*, ed. by M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple (Oxford: Oxbow, 2010), pp. 103-127, at 105.

The natural basis: analogous evidence and historical speculation

It is here that our distinctions between what is natural, supernatural, or preternatural start to break down. In this section I argue that it was in fact normal behaviour for wolves, ravens and eagles to appear at battlefields before the fighting broke out, and that, furthermore, these creatures actually would have followed bands of armed men to battle-sites while communicating vocally. This has significant implications. On the one hand, it means that we will have to move beyond discussing the topos as a purely literary construction. On the other hand, it raises difficult questions about the boundary between the magical and the natural. We will return to this latter implication later with regards to birds and their vocalisations more generally in Old English literature.

Although wolves are now extinct in Britain and white-tailed eagles are very nearly so, it is possible to get an impression of the ecological relationship that would have existed between wolves, eagles and ravens by examining their modern counterparts in Scandinavia and North America; the latter is especially well-documented. This assumes that the behaviour of these animals has not significantly altered over time⁵⁴ and that they occupy similar ecological niches in the American and Scandinavian environments.⁵⁵ In and of themselves these are not unreasonable assumptions, but we must remain open to the possibility that the three creatures could have behaved quite differently in Anglo-Saxon England – especially the raven, which has been shown to adapt very quickly.⁵⁶ In defence of these suppositions, however, is the probability

⁵⁴ A. Eastham, 'The potential of bird remains for environmental reconstruction', *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*, 7 (1997), 422-9, at 422-3.

⁵⁵ The biggest objection may be that the white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) is not present in America. However, the closely related bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) occupies the same ecological niche: both are kleptoparasites, predators and scavengers. Compare the notes on feeding habits in J. Ferguson-Lees and D. A. Christie, *Raptors of the World* (London: Helm, 2001), pp. 401 and 405.

⁵⁶ B. Heinrich, *Ravens in Winter* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 32: 'No other bird in the world has a wider distribution or shows more adaptability than the raven.' Heinrich also provides other (largely anecdotal) evidence of the raven's adaptability, pp. 111-6, and 267. There are many studies testifying to the marvellous behavioural development of *Corvidae* generally (for some examples of which, see J. M. Marzluff and T. Angell, *In The Company of Crows and Ravens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 218-252 and 281-302), but two lesser-known findings deserve to be singled out here. One is T. Bugnyar, M. Stöwe, and B. Heinrich, 'Ravens, *Corvus corax*, follow gaze direction of humans around obstacles', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B*, 271 (2004), 1331-6, which strongly suggests that ravens are able to understand what conspecifics in their environment can

that the mechanisms underlying ‘the raven-wolf relationship is an ancient evolved one’.⁵⁷

Bernd Heinrich gathered anecdotal evidence for the preferential socialisation of ravens with wolves in Yellowstone National Park,⁵⁸ and subsequently much more systematic research has confirmed this relationship.⁵⁹ It is important to note that the relationship benefits ravens more than wolves: the ravens are attracted to wolf howls⁶⁰ and spend time around packs, mostly (but not always) those on the move, in order to opportunistically steal fresh wolf kills.⁶¹ Ravens are unable to open some carcasses, let alone kill large animals, and so take advantage of the wolves’ abilities to do both these things.⁶² Furthermore, ravens are neophobic, and are reluctant to approach even carcasses at first⁶³ – unless wolves are present.⁶⁴ Although the ravens do not lead the wolves to carcasses, there may be some advantages for them: there have been observations of ravens harassing weak and injured ungulates, ‘apparently drawing the attention of wolves’.⁶⁵ The presence of ravens at wolf-kills is ubiquitous wherever there is a wolf population,⁶⁶ and in spite of the food-gains, the ravens run the risk of being killed.⁶⁷

and cannot see; the other is C. White, ‘Hunters Ring Dinner Bell for Ravens: Experimental Evidence of a Unique Foraging Strategy’, *Ecology*, 86 (2005), 1057-60, which demonstrates that wild ravens in some environments have learned to fly towards gunshots in order to scavenge from hunters’ gut piles.

⁵⁷ D. Stahler, B. Heinrich, and D. Smith, ‘Common ravens, *Corvus corax*, preferentially associate with grey wolves, *Canis lupus*, as a foraging strategy in winter’, *Animal Behaviour*, 64 (2002), 283-90, at 290, where they also note, ‘[i]t is significant that ravens associated strongly with wolves in [Yellowstone National Park] immediately following the 1995-1996 reintroduction of this predator [i.e. the wolf] after a 70-year absence in the ecosystem’; this length of time precludes the possibility of learned behaviour being transmitted across time, and strongly points towards the relationship being an innate response in ravens. Interestingly, Heinrich found, working with vastly different raven population in Nova Scotia, that neophobia could be suppressed by the presence of captive wolves. See B. Heinrich, ‘Sociobiology of ravens: conflict and cooperation’, *Sitzungsberichte der Gesellschaft Naturforschender Freunde zu Berlin*, 37 (1999), 13-22.

⁵⁸ B. Heinrich, *Mind of the Raven. Investigations and Adventures with Wolf-birds* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), pp. 229-235.

⁵⁹ Stahler, et al., ‘Common ravens... preferentially associate with grey wolves’, *passim.*; J. A. Vucetich, R. O. Petersen, and T. A. Waite, ‘Raven scavenging favours group foraging in wolves’, *Animal Behaviour*, 67 (2004), 1117-1126.

⁶⁰ F. H. Harrington, ‘Ravens Attracted to Wolf Howling’, *The Condor*, 80 (1978), 236-7.

⁶¹ Stahler, et al. ‘Common ravens... preferentially associate with grey wolves’, 284; Vucetich, Petersen, and Waite, ‘Ravens scavenging’, 1118

⁶² Stahler, et al. ‘Common ravens... preferentially associate with grey wolves’, 284.

⁶³ B. Heinrich, ‘Why do ravens fear their food?’, *Condor*, 90 (1988), 950-52.

⁶⁴ Stahler, et al. ‘Common ravens... preferentially associate with grey wolves’, 289: ‘discovery of wolf-killed carcasses attended by wolves resulted in an apparent suppression of this fear response.’

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

It takes very little stimulus to encourage behaviour out of young ravens.⁶⁸ Heinrich relates how the ethologist Konrad Lorenz inadvertently trained his pet raven Roa to steal laundry on an occasion where he was actually rewarding him for returning when called,⁶⁹ and the innate mechanisms for preferential association with wolves seems to be transferable; in other environments ravens will follow polar bears instead, for example.⁷⁰ Taken together, and on analogy with the recently discovered attraction of ravens to gunshots, it seems very probable that ravens had learnt to follow groups of armed men. However, despite the close relationship between ravens and wolves, wolves have not generally been documented following ravens to carcasses; it is possible that they would have independently learnt to follow bands of armed men. There is no conclusive study to date on this issue, but anecdotal evidence suggests that wolves today are able to differentiate armed men from unarmed men.⁷¹

Furthermore, there are reports of habituated wolves (i.e. wolves accustomed to human presence) pacing alongside people. The reasons are unclear, but ‘may have reflected allelomimetic behavior ... i.e., a tendency among wolves to mimic or follow conspecifics, thereby facilitating coordination of pack activities’.⁷² However, for wolves to become habituated they must experience ongoing ‘nonconsequential human encounters’.⁷³ While there was certainly conflict between people and wolves,⁷⁴ there is actually very little reliable evidence in the way of early Anglo-Saxon (or indeed, early Scandinavian) interaction with wolves.⁷⁵ Pluskowski suggests that ‘it is possible ... that the probability of wolf attacks rose from the early to high medieval period in Britain and Scandinavia on the basis that people came

⁶⁸ B. Heinrich, ‘Neophilia and exploration in juvenile common ravens, *Corvus corax*’, *Animal Behaviour*, 50 (1995), 695-704.

⁶⁹ Heinrich, *Mind of the Raven*, p. 64.

⁷⁰ Heinrich, *Ravens in Winter*, pp. 21, 32 and 56.

⁷¹ V. G. Heptner and N. P. Naumov, *Mammals of the Soviet Union: Vol.2, Part 1a*, trans. by B. A. M. Botros, H. Tantawi, H. I. Youssef, and A. A. M. Moussa (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Libraries and The National Science Foundation, 1998), p. 175.

⁷² M. McNay, ‘Wolf-Human Interactions in Alaska and Canada: A Review of the Case History’, *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, 30 (2002), 831-43, at 839.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 840.

⁷⁴ A. Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), pp. 73-93.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-7.

into more regular and closer contact with the wolf's environment',⁷⁶ but it is also possible that human-wolf interaction varied place by place, and that settlements closer to the forests may have had wolves venture into them at night, as happens in Abruzzo, Italy.⁷⁷ These wolves, then, would have had 'nonconsequential human encounters.' It is speculative, but no less speculative than Pluskowski's suggested rise of wolf attacks; the evidence is simply inconclusive.

Eagles are not complicit in the raven-wolf relationship, though they are often present scavenging independently. Eagles, like buzzards and ravens, prefer fresh carcasses in open areas (like a battlefield).⁷⁸ Unlike the raven and wolf, which I argue learned to follow groups of armed men to battle sites, I have found insufficient data to suggest that the eagle developed any behavioural responses to groups of armed men. There is the possibility that corvids and eagles have a mutually beneficial scavenging relationship (by increasing their ability to detect poison or danger), though it is difficult to tell how much of their simultaneous occurrences are results of similar stimuli and how much reflects intra-species social behaviour.⁷⁹ Both birds, for example, find carcasses by sight and prefer them to be fresh but with some parts removed (so as to ensure its suitability for consumption).⁸⁰ Furthermore, the two birds have a demonstrable preference for diurnal feeding, and thus were more likely to be seen eating corpses than nocturnal scavengers (such as foxes).⁸¹ Rather than stemming from behavioural responses, it is likely that the eagle was noticed because of its conspicuousness: the white-tailed eagle has a giant wingspan (200-240 cm)⁸² which dwarfs some of the next biggest birds in Britain,⁸³ and when searching for

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

⁷⁸ N. Selva, B. Jędrzejewska, W. Jędrzejewski and A. Wajrak, 'Factors affecting carcass use by a guild of scavengers in European temperate woodland', *Canadian Journal of Zoology*, 83 (2005), 1590-1601, at 1594 and 1599, and R. L. Knight and D. P. Anderson, 'Effects of Supplemental Feeding on an Avian Scavenging Guild', *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, 18 (1990), 388-394, at 391.

⁷⁹ See, for example, S. K. Knight and R. L. Knight, 'Aspects of Food Finding by Wintering Bald Eagles', *The Auk*, 100 (1983), 477-84, at 482-3, where a relationship between crows and eagles is speculated.

⁸⁰ Selva, Jędrzejewska, Jędrzejewski, and Wajrak, 'Factors affecting carcass use by a guild of scavengers', 1595 and 1599; Knight and Anderson, 'Effects of Supplemental Feeding on Avian Scavenging Guild', 391-2.

⁸¹ S. T. Killengreen, E. Strømseng, N. G. Yoccoz and R. A. Ims, 'How ecological neighbourhoods influence the structure of the scavenger guild in low arctic tundra', *Diversity and Distributions*, 18 (2012), 563-574, at 568.

⁸² *BWP*, I, 48.

⁸³ In comparison here are the wingspans of some of the largest British birds: the grey heron (135-195 cm, *BWP*, I, 302), the buzzard (113-128 cm, *BWP*, II, 177), the white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*, 155-165

food soars at altitudes of up to 200-300 m,⁸⁴ though rarely above 200 m when foraging over land.⁸⁵ As previously mentioned, white-tailed eagles were much more common in the Anglo-Saxon period than they are now, and inhabited most of Britain.⁸⁶ As battle sites were usually not near settlements,⁸⁷ and as soaring eagles are easily seen at distance, it is likely that these birds would have been encountered – even if only remotely – on the way to war. Certainly after battles, when there is a mass aggregation of carcasses in a relatively small time and space, eagles and ravens would have been very conspicuous; today they are the main consumer of hunter kills, which, when stockpiled in a relatively small area, can provide a modern-day analogy for the medieval battlefield.⁸⁸

It is worth noting that a degree of familiarity could have presented itself to medieval observers of three creatures beyond the preferential associations of ravens and wolves: ravens have the peculiar habit of pulling at eagle's tail-feathers while they feed at carrion, and in fact tug at wolves' tails too.⁸⁹ Their reasons for this mischievous-looking maneuver are unclear, particularly in light of the aggressive responses of the eagle and wolf, but it is easily interpreted as a display of petulant bickering or teasing.

Ethologically speaking, then, it is very probable that ravens and wolves learned to associate groups of armed men with food, and that they appeared before the fighting broke out. Indeed, Heinrich himself explicitly opines that ravens 'followed the Vikings for the same reason they now follow the wolves on caribou migrations: for food.'⁹⁰ It is not just the ethological data that bears out this interpretation; it is in the formulaic details of the topos too. Many of the appearances of the 'beasts of battle' mention the detail of the beasts following in the tracks of the warriors. Although

cm, *BWP*, I, 328) and the raven (120-150 cm, *BWP*, VIII, 206) are all much smaller, whereas the now-rare crane (*Grus grus*, 220-245 cm, *BWP*, II, 618) and the mute swan (208-238 cm, *BWP*, I, 372) are roughly the same size.

⁸⁴ *BWP*, I, 52.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸⁶ Yalden and Albarella, *The History of British Birds*, pp. 124-5.

⁸⁷ G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 215, notes that '[a]lthough large scale military activity was fairly common... the fortification of settlements was relatively rare'.

⁸⁸ For ravens at hunter kills, see Selva et al, 'Factors affecting carcass use', 1599.

⁸⁹ Heinrich, *Mind of the Raven*, p. 225, and Stahler, et al. 'Common ravens... preferentially associate with grey wolves', 289.

⁹⁰ Heinrich, *Ravens in Winter*, p. 22.

Griffith groups five passages together under the motif ‘in the wake of an army’, this overlooks the discrepancy between *The Battle of Brunanburh* (l.60) and the others: in *Elene* (l.30a), *Exodus* (l.167a), *Genesis A* (l.1984a) and *Judith* (l.209b), the creatures are in the wake of an army before the fighting breaks out.⁹¹ In *Exodus* ll.164b-7, the wolves sing their *atol æfenleod* while *beodan/ on laðra last* (‘waiting in the tracks of the hateful ones’) and in *Elene* l.27b-30a, a similar detail is ascribed to the eagle raising its song *on laðum last*, and repeated on l.111b-12a: *earn sið beheold/ wælhreowa wig* (‘the eagle beheld the journey of slaughter-savage men’). In *Judith* ll.209-10a the eagle once again flies in the tracks (*fleah on last*) of the troops. The *Genesis A* passage looks questionable: the wording describes *se wanna fugel* (‘the dark bird’, l.1983b) being *under deoreðsceaftum* (‘amid the arrow-shafts’, l.1984a). The semantics are right: this description is from before the battle begins between the kings and Sodom, and it describes the movement of the dark birds among the combatants, but it does not use *last* here as the others do. The formulaic nature of this motif suggests that these details must be of some antiquity, and the details are consistent with observations of wolves and ravens trailing troops on their way to battle.⁹² Similarly, the repeated motif of forest-dwelling, noted by Griffith,⁹³ is only ever applied to the wolf. Often this is a formulaic alliterative half-line (i.e. *wulf on walde* in *Brunanburh* l.65a, *wulf on wealde* in *Elene* l.28a, *wulf in walde* in *Judith* l.206a), but is on one occasion expressed as *holtes geleða* (‘companion of the forest’, in *Elene* l.113a). This too suggests an observational foundation: wolves do indeed live and stalk from the forest. Moreover, it is significant that neither the raven nor eagle are described as dwelling in the forest: we have seen above that eagles did not take carrion that was near the forest (or vegetative cover), and ravens would have been most visible, like the eagle, when flying overhead and following groups of armed men.

⁹¹ These are listed in Griffith, ‘Convention and originality’, 185, under (a).

⁹² The eagle, as mentioned above, probably did not follow troops to conflict, but may have been thought to do so anyway, as it would have been visually conspicuous as it soared searching for food.

⁹³ Griffith, ‘Convention and originality’, 185, under (e).

The religious aspects

It is easy to see how the seemingly uncanny ability of ravens, eagles and wolves to turn up at battlefields before fighting broke out could have resulted in them being endowed with occult knowledge (like the wolf knowing *wælrune* in *Elene* 1.28b), especially as the cries the wolves and ravens make to each other are clearly intended to convey meaning. An observer may have wondered what the content of their language was, and whether their ability to turn up before battle meant their language contained further information about it. However, very early on, this possession of occult knowledge seems to equate into their presence being auspicious (as in *Regismál* stanzas 20 and 22, if we accept these reflect much older knowledge). Presumably this is due to a belief that these animals would follow the group they knew would leave the most slaughter in their wake. As Harris has recently remarked, and William Chaney well before him, the ‘beasts of battle’ topos must be related to the presence, and capture of, raven banners.⁹⁴

Pluskowski and Neil Price are on the right track when they note the empowering abilities of the wolf, raven and eagle on the battlefield.⁹⁵ The evidence for ravens, eagles and wolves playing some part in the outcome of battles is attested in the material and onomastic evidence as well as in the literature. V. I. Kulakov and M. Yu. Markovets have shown how predatory birds, including ravens, function as war-companions and indicators of divine favour and prophetic information in early Germanic, and especially Scandinavian, iconography.⁹⁶ Tania Dickinson has proposed that the animal ornamentation on sixth-century Anglo-Saxon shields was apotropaic, and has shown that the predatory bird (which may be eagles or ravens or hawks) was the second most frequent figural ornament.⁹⁷ This matches well with the host of raven banners we hear of in late Anglo-Saxon England. The *Anglo-Saxon*

⁹⁴ Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, pp. 10-11, and W. A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970) pp. 132-3.

⁹⁵ Pluskowski, ‘Animal Magic’, pp. 118-119.

⁹⁶ V. I. Kulakov and M. Yu. Markovets, ‘Birds as Companions of Germanic Gods and Heroes’, *Acta Archaeologica*, 75 (2004), 179-88, passim.

⁹⁷ T. Dickinson, ‘Symbols of Protection: The Significance of Animal-ornamented Shields in Early Anglo-Saxon England’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 49 (2005), 109-63, at 157-163. The most frequent figural ornament are apparently aquatic creatures which she has argued are ‘underwater monsters’, at 156.

Chronicle reports the capture of the Danish ‘Raven’ banner during their defeat at the hands of King Alfred in 878 (*þær wæs se guðfana genumen ðe hi ‘Hræfn’ hæton*, ‘there the war-standard which they called ‘Raven’ was captured’).⁹⁸ The Vikings supposedly had a raven flag during the Battle of Clontarf (1014) and Cnut was recorded as having had his own raven banner.⁹⁹ Later sources state that the Danish banner in 878 brought victory while it flapped in the wind but boded evil when limp.¹⁰⁰ An interesting parallel is related by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*: King Áli of Norway had a horse called Hrafn which was considered valuable enough for King Aðils of Uppsala to plunder it along with his helm Hildisvín.¹⁰¹ Like the banners, and the predatory birds on early shields, this horse was probably not only valuable in its own right, but as a symbolic raven, brought into battle apotropaically. Moreover, these banners, much like personal names such as Hrefn (‘raven’), could have functioned as what Cicero calls, in his *De Divinatione*, *auguriis ... coactis* (‘compelled auspices’) – the manipulation of auspices to bring about a favourable outcome.¹⁰² Furthermore, in the discussion following Jesch’s paper, Dennis Green, drawing on Gottfried Schram and Günter Müller, discusses how the use of wolf, raven and eagle words in personal names (largely but not exclusively in compounds) are examples of *bahuvrihi* naming.¹⁰³ *Bahuvrihi* is Sanskrit for ‘much rice’, and it refers to someone who is rich because he possesses this, rather than because he embodies it. Green gives the example of Wolfram, ‘literally ‘wolf plus raven’, not someone who possesses a raven, but someone who summons the raven and the wolf by his deeds on the battlefield, where he slaughters his foes.’¹⁰⁴ These must be part of the same idea complex as the ‘beasts of battle’ topos. The material and onomastic

⁹⁸ *ASC volume 6. MS D*, ed. by Cubbin, s.a. 878. All references to the raven banners are collected by A. H. Krappe, ‘Arturus Cosmocrator’, *Speculum*, 20 (1945), 405-14, at 408-9, N. Lukman, ‘The Raven Banner and the Changing Raven: A Viking Miracle from Carolingian Court Poetry to Saga and Arthurian Romance’, *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 19 (1958), 133-51 and J. Jesch, *Ships and Men* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), pp. 252-4.

⁹⁹ Chaney, *Cult of Kingship*, p. 133

¹⁰⁰ According to an interpolation in Asser’s *De Rebus Gestis Aelfredi; Asser’s Life of King Alfred*, ed. by W. Stevenson (Oxford: OUP, 1904), p. 44

¹⁰¹ *Skáldskaparmál* Chapter 54.

¹⁰² See M. T. Cicero, *De Divinatione* I.XVI, in *Cicero XX: De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Divinatione*, ed. and trans. by W. A. Falconer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), pp. 254-5.

¹⁰³ The discussion section is found in Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, pp. 271-80; Green’s remarks are at pp. 271-2. See also G. Schramm, *Namenschatz und Dichtersprache* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957), pp. 80-1 and G. Müller, *Studien zu den theriophoren Personennamen der Germanen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1970), pp. 130 and 203ff.

¹⁰⁴ D.H. Green, in the discussion in Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, p. 271.

evidence suggests some apotropaic function underlies the advantageous presence of the wolf, eagle and raven when going to battle, but the literary evidence, in Old English and Old Norse, can pinpoint the origins of this apotropicism – and it is in the prophetic abilities of these animals we have seen earlier.

Before proceeding any further, it must first be stated that wolves have been omitted from the following discussion because they fall outside the scope of this thesis – and indeed, deserve a detailed literary examination in the same way Pluskowski has analysed them historically and archaeologically.¹⁰⁵ Instead, I will focus on the two birds that feature most often in the ‘beasts of battle’ topos: the raven and the eagle.

Literary representations of augury

The rest of this chapter will once again take up the theme of avian auralty, which we have seen was of primary importance in the Anglo-Saxon experience, and perception, of birds in the first chapter, and tie this in with the supernatural speech of birds not only in the ‘beasts of battle’ passages, but more generally in Old English literature. In this section I show that there are literary representations of the ability of birds to convey either information about the future or ‘news of present import through speech’.¹⁰⁶ In the section following this, I argue that this belief was not just a literary trope, but was grounded in a pre-Christian belief in the divinatory abilities of birds.

Chanting birds

This section and the one following will mostly be about ravens. Not only are these more plentiful than eagles in Old English literature, but when eagles occur with divinatory nuances they tend to do so alongside ravens. We have already seen how

¹⁰⁵ Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness*, passim.

¹⁰⁶ The quote is from North, *Pagan Words*, p. 112.

their rapid adaptability and preferential association with wolves provided the foundation for the ‘beasts of battle’ topos. Similarly, the raven’s demonstrations of intelligence could easily have fuelled ascriptions of supernatural knowledge to them. Amongst the raven’s clever customs is the act of caching: when it scavenges a carcass, a significant amount of time and effort is spent on hiding food, often with elaborate ploys to fool onlookers (usually, but not always, other ravens) intent on stealing its plunder.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the ascription of communicative abilities to ravens would easily have been fuelled by the way in which they call more ravens to carcasses: in this situation there is a very clear link between vocalisation and resulting action.¹⁰⁸

In the ‘beasts of battle’ topos, eagles and ravens are frequently endowed with the ability to speak. Out of the fourteen ‘canonical’ passages, Griffith identifies fourteen instances of the motif of the beasts being given voices, but it is worth examining these more closely, as only one, *Beowulf*, explicitly has the verb *secgan*, ‘to speak’.¹⁰⁹ Of these fourteen instances, six involve the verb *singan*,¹¹⁰ which, as Audrey Meaney has rightly pointed out, should be translated with a less value-laden term than Modern English ‘sing’; Meaney suggests ‘cry’ or ‘call’.¹¹¹ However, there are often qualifiers that suggest meaningful communication is meant by the verb here. When the eagle raises a song in *Elene* l.29, it is paralleling the wolf’s cry just before it, which, as we saw above, *ne mað wælrune* (‘did not conceal the secrets of slaughter’); such a parallelism implies the eagle’s cry also relates to these *wælrune*. This parallel is confirmed when later in *Elene*, it is the wolf which raises a song (*sang ahof*, l.112b). *Exodus* ll.164b-5a, in which the *wulfas sungon/ atol æfenleoð ætes on wenan* (‘wolves sang a terrible evening-song in anticipation of feasting’),

¹⁰⁷ T. Bugnyar and B. Heinrich, ‘Pilfering ravens, *Corvus corax*, adjust their behaviour to social context and identity of competitors’, *Animal Cognition*, 9 (2006), 369-376; T. Bugnyar and B. Heinrich, ‘Ravens, *Corvus corax*, Differentiate between Knowledgeable and Ignorant Competitors’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B*, 272 (2005), 1641-46; T. Bugnyar, C. Schwab, C. Schloegl, K. Kotrschal, and B. Heinrich, ‘Ravens Judge Competitors through Experience with Play Caching’, *Current Biology*, 17 (2007), 1804-8.

¹⁰⁸ B. Heinrich and J. Marzluff, ‘Do common ravens yell because they want to attract others?’, *Behavioural Ecology and Sociobiology*, 28 (1992), 13-21, esp. 13 and 20-21.

¹⁰⁹ Griffith, ‘Convention and originality’, 185, under (i).

¹¹⁰ *Elene* l.29 (*Urigfeðera earn sang ahof*), l.112b (*Wulf sang ahof*), *Exodus* ll.164b-5a (*Wulfas sungon/ atol æfenleoð*), *Finnsburh Fragment* l.5b (*fugel as singað*), *Genesis A* l.1983b (*Sang se wanna fugel*) and *Judith* l.211 (*salowigpada sang hildeleoð*).

¹¹¹ A. Meaney, ‘Exeter Book Riddle 57 (55) – a double solution?’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 25 (1996), 187-200, at 189.

like *Judith* ll.211, in which one of the birds (it is unclear whether *hyrnednebbu*, ‘horny-beaked’/‘pointy-beaked’, refers to the eagle or raven) *sang hildeleoð* (‘sang a battle-song’), mentions a *leoð*, which often refers to recited poetry, or narrative utterances.¹¹² Only in *Finnsburh Fragment* l.5b and *Genesis A* l.1983b are there no further descriptions of the singing, but in both cases the singing creature is presumably the raven (*Finnsburh Fragment* mentions only *fugelas*, whereas *Genesis A* describes *se wanna fugel*, ‘the dark bird’). As the *hrefn* is never otherwise described as singing in Old English, the idea of the raven singing a *leoð* might be supplied by an audience familiar with the topos.

No other verb is used as often as *singan*. *Hreopan* (‘to clamour’) is used twice of the ‘beasts of battle’ in *Exodus*: firstly the *herefugolas hreopon* (‘the war-birds clamour’, l.162a); secondly *hreopon mearcweardas* (‘the border-guards clamour’, l.168b). The latter is usually understood to refer back to the *wulfas* of l.164b,¹¹³ though elsewhere the verb is used of ravens (*Paris Psalter* 146.10) and of the demons (*Guthlac B*, ll.905-6).¹¹⁴ The wolf *gylleð* (‘yells’) in the *Finnsburh Fragment* (l.6a). In *Elene* we have *agol* (l.27b) and *gol* (l.52b: *Hrefn uppe gol*, ‘the raven raised a chant’), which are related verbs meaning ‘to chant’. The *DOE* gives ‘to sing’ as the primary meaning of *a-galan*,¹¹⁵ and ‘to sing, recite, speak formally; to cry out’ as a primary meaning of *galan*.¹¹⁶ However, comparative linguistic evidence, as well as other attestations in Old English, suggest that ‘chant’ should be the primary meaning.¹¹⁷ Let us start with the comparative evidence.

The cognates for OE (*a-*)*galan* are OHG *galan* and ON *gala*.¹¹⁸ Attestations of *gala* in the Eddic poetry are replete with magical nuances. In *Hávamál*, Óðinn claims to be able to fight fire because *kann ec galdr at gala* (‘I know which spells to chant’, 152.4), and when he catalogues the different runes he knows for a variety of

¹¹² *BT*, s.v. ‘leōþ’.

¹¹³ See for instance Lucas’ remarks, in *Exodus*, p. 103.

¹¹⁴ ...þa wrohtsmiðas wop ahofun,/ hreopun hreðlease, hleoþrum brugdon, ‘the slander-smiths raised a cry of grief, cry without victory, weaving their cries together’.

¹¹⁵ *DOE*, s.v. ‘ā-galan’.

¹¹⁶ *DOE*, s.v. ‘galan’.

¹¹⁷ The meaning ‘to chant’ was, to judge by comparative evidence, one of the primary meanings of Proto-Germanic. See G. Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), s.v. ‘*galan’.

¹¹⁸ Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. ‘*zalanán’.

circumstances, he punctuates it on one occasion with *svá ek gel* ('so I chant', e.g. 149.4). The stanzas with Óðinn's use of this verb come in what is probably the oldest part of *Hávamál*, and John McKinnell thinks that the half-stanza containing *svá ek gel* 'is used to mark a particularly ancient charm'.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, there is a particularly relevant use of *gala* in *Hávamál*: between stanzas 84 and 91, there is a list of all the things which *trúi engi maðr* ('no man should trust', 88.1), because *hætt er þeria hvárt* ('each of those things is dangerous', 88.4). One of these stanzas reads:

Brestanda boga, brennanda loga,	A bent-bow, a burning flame,
gínanda úlfi, galandi kráco,	a gaping wolf, a crow's chanting,
rýtanda svíni, rótlausom viði,	a grunting pig, a rootless tree,
vaxanda vági, vellanda katli.	a rising wave, a heating pot.

(stanza 85)

It is clear why most of these things should not be trusted: a heating pot and a burning flame are hot, a rootless tree will fall, a bent bow will fire, and a rising wave will break. The three animals pose some difficulty, in part because this stanza seems to directly contradict the wisdom in *Reginismál* 20 and 22, in part because it is unclear why a grunting pig is untrustworthy. This does not necessarily mean that these cautions are the product of Christian disdain for pagan lore, though it is, of course, a possibility. John McKinnell supposes that stanza 85 is one of several 'encyclopaedic' stanzas added to *Hávamál* added when such catalogues were in vogue in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe,¹²⁰ though Clive Tolley has pointed out that these "'footnote" stanzas may also be early', and that they could have incorporated elements from 'traditional, originally pagan, lore.'¹²¹ It may well be that this caution should be read in conjunction with *Reginismál* 20 and 22: the wolf and raven may be good omens, but ultimately, like Óðinn himself, they are untrustworthy, for they only serve their own agendas. Moreover, the inclusion of the pig here may be an allusion to a bellicose triplet that occurs with some frequency in

¹¹⁹ J. McKinnell, 'The Making of *Hávamál*', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), 75-115, at 112.

¹²⁰ McKinnell, 'The Making of *Hávamál*', 101.

¹²¹ C. Tolley, *Shamanism in Old Norse Myth and Magic*, *Folklore Fellows' Communications* 296-7, 2 vols (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2009), II, 108.

early Scandinavian material culture: of a predatory bird, a wolf, and a boar.¹²² Whether Christianised or a pagan survival, the participial form of *gala* (*galandi*) used to describe the crow's (*kraco*) call must, in light of the surrounding use of *gala* in *Hávamál* mean something like 'chant', and especially so given that talking corvids are common in Old Norse.¹²³

The OHG cognate *biguolen* carries similar nuances in the *Second Merseburg Charm*. This charm for healing an injured horse invokes a narrative in which Balder's horse is injured but is cured through the combined efforts of the gods:

Phol ende Uodan uuorun zi holza.
du uuart demo Balderes uolon sin uuoz birenkict.
thu biguolen Sinhtgunt, Sunna era suister;
thu biguolen Friia Uolla era suister;
thu biguolen Uodan, so he uuola conda:
sose benrenki,
sose bluotrenki,
sose lidirenki;
ben ze bena, bluot zi bluoda,
lid ze geliden, sose gelimida sin.¹²⁴

Phol and Wodan went to the forest. Then Balder's horse sprained its foot. Then Sinhtgunt, the sister of Sunna, charmed it, then Frija, Volla's sister, charmed it, then Wodan charmed it, as he could well do. Whether sprain of the bone, whether sprain of the blood, whether sprain of the limb; bone to bone, blood to blood, limb to limb, as if they were stuck together.

¹²² L. Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality. An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400-1000* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 69-71 and Figure 4.11a-d. Hedeager calls the bird here an eagle, but as predatory birds are notoriously difficult to distinguish in stylised art, I do not see why it could not be a raven in those designs.

¹²³ In addition to the infamous Huginn and Muninn (e.g. in *Grímnismál* 20), we have the raven in *Brot af Sigurðarqviða* 5 and 13, the *kráka* (crow) in *Rígsþula* 48-9, *Helgaqviða hundingsbana in fyrri* 5, *Guðrúnarqviða önnor* 8 and *Hrafnsmál/Haraldskvæði* 2.

¹²⁴ *An Old High German Reader*, ed. by C. Barber (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964) p. 65.

The use of *biguolen* here to refer to magical incantations parallels the use of ON *gala* in *Hávamál*, and is especially comparable to Óðinn's declarative *svá ek gel* for his spell-casting. The age of this charm is unclear; it is preserved in a ninth-century manuscript and written in a tenth-century hand, but is probably much older to judge by the depiction of the scene of the horse-healing on fifth- and sixth-century bracteates.¹²⁵

The analogous evidence suggests that West Germanic **zalanan* had a magical meaning rather than merely meaning 'to shout' or 'to cry'. Returning to the Old English evidence, we find that (*a-*)*galan* retains these nuances. The earliest evidence is the eighth-century Second Corpus Glossary, which has *incantata* glossed with *gegaelen* (I.367). It is attested with nuances of magical incantation in Old English poetry too, however, and often characterises the otherworldly cries and laments of demons and devils. In these instances the sense is often better rendered by translating (*a-*)*galan* with 'wailing', but I have deliberately chosen to translate them with 'chanting' in the following to stress the under-appreciated nuances. In *Juliana*, a demon that has previously been castigated by the saint turns up as she is being led to her execution and *hearmleoð agol* ('chants a woeful song', l.615b); a few lines later we are told that *gehyrde heo [Juliana] hearm galan helledeofol* ('she heard the hell-fiend chanting injuriously', l.629). In *Andreas* l.1342b, the devil, devastated by the inability of his demonic comrades to assail the eponymous saint, has his bewailing of their failure described almost identically, as *hearmleoð galan* ('chanting a woeful song').¹²⁶ A parallel construction is used at the iconic moment when Grendel realises his defeat: *gryreleoð galan Godes andsacan/ sigeleasne sang* ('God's enemy chanted a verse of terror, a victory-less song', ll.786-7a). *Galan* is not always used with negative connotations, however. In *Guthlac B*, after Guthlac has died and gone

¹²⁵ R. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by A. Hall (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1993), p. 278, though Simek identifies the manuscript as tenth-century. S. D. Fuller, 'Pagan Charms in Tenth-Century Saxony? The Function of the Merseburg Charms', *Monatshefte für deutsche Unterricht, deutsche Sprache und Literatur*, 72.1 (Spring 1980), 162-70, at 162 and 168, is more detailed in dating the manuscript. See also the images and comments in Simek, 'Germanic Religion and Conversion to Christianity', pp. 80-81, and J. Knight Bostock, *A Handbook on Old High German Literature*, 2nd edn, rev. by K. C. King and D. R. McLintock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 26-37.

¹²⁶ By way of comparison: *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. and trans. by S. A. J. Bradley (London: Dent, 1982), translates 'began to wail a lament', p. 144.

to heaven, his servant travels to tell Guthlac's sister Pega about the former's passing, and it is related as follows:

... He þa wyrd ne mað,
fæges forðsið. Fusleoð agol
wineþearfende, ond þæt word acwæð
...
(ll.1345b-7)

He did not conceal fate, the journey onwards of the fated man [i.e. Guthlac].
The one in need of a friend [i.e. the servant] chanted a dirge, and spoke these words...

The *DOE* records that *fusleoþ (a)galan* means 'to sing a dirge', and is attested three times in Old English poetry: here, in *Christ II* 1.623b, and *Andreas* 1.1549b.¹²⁷ A similar formula, *sorhleoð galan* ('to chant a song of sorrow') is found in *The Dream of the Rood*, (1.67) and *Beowulf* (1.2460). In the former, it is used of the expression of grief by Christ's followers after they set him in a tomb; in the latter it is used of an old man lamenting the death of his heir. I have not found any cognate formulae in the related literatures for these, but it seems probable that such formulae (*X-leoð galan*) were well known and wide-spread. Consequently, the wolf in *Elene*, which *fyrleoð agol* ('chants a battle-song', 1.27b) is a conscious allusion – and playful inversion – to formulae like *fusleoþ agol* and *sorhleoð galan*, where, instead of mourning death, the wolf is eagerly celebrating and anticipating it.

J. R. Hall, in trying to deplete the *walceasega* of *Exodus* 1.64b of any supernatural connotations, remarks that nobody had 'given evidence that elsewhere the raven had the role of deciding, like a valkyrie, the destiny of a warrior.'¹²⁸ We have already seen that there is some aspect of this in the beasts of battle topos: the raven, eagle, and wolf appear before battle, and that their appearance has ties with the fate of the warriors on the battlefield. However, we have also seen that underpinning the prophetic abilities of the 'beasts of battle' is the idea that birds speak, and that this

¹²⁷ *DOE*, s.v. 'fūs-lēoþ'.

¹²⁸ Hall, 'Exodus 166b', 118.

speech contains occult knowledge. In what follows I try to stress how pervasive this belief was in Anglo-Saxon England.

Talking birds

In the following investigation I show that the chanting, singing and talking birds in the ‘beasts of battle’ topos are symptomatic of a much larger literary tradition of representing news and prophecy bringing birds. By appealing to the Old Norse analogues and demonstrating the pervasiveness of this motif within that literature I hope to show that this idea can also be read more widely into Old English literature and demonstrate a common tradition. A discussion of talking birds could not begin without the talking birds *par excellence*: Óðinn’s ravens, Huginn and Muninn. In *Grímnismál* they are described thus:

Huginn oc Muninn fliúga hverian dag
iormungrund yfir;
óomc ec of Huginn, at hann aptr né komið,
þó síámec meirr um Munin.
(stanza 20)

Hugin and Munin fly out every day over the enormous earth; I fear that Hugin will not come back to me, yet I fear it even more about Munin.

Snorri Sturluson, drawing on *Grímnismál*, elaborates on why Óðinn wants his ravens to return so badly in *Gylfaginning*: the ravens sit upon Óðinn’s shoulders and tell him *oll tíðindi þau er þeir sjá eða heyra* (‘all the news which they see or hear’).¹²⁹ The information they provide in this sense is empirical and current, though it is obviously related with some bearing on future recourse. The *kráka* in *Rígsþula*, for example, really only provides Konr Ungr with the present knowledge that Danr and his son Danpr are in possession of greater wealth than he and are worthy adversaries

¹²⁹ *Gylfaginning*, Chap. 38.

skilled in battle and sailing.¹³⁰ Presumably a future implication, probably in the form of a blatant command to invade, was to follow this description, though we will never know for certain as the text ends abruptly after stanza 49. If this was indeed the case then the crow's suggestions are well founded: Konr Ungr was always destined for a great future: his name is a folk etymology of the word *konungr* ('king'), and from a young age he is taught both the occult and practical arts - as befits a ruler in both the political and divine sense.¹³¹

There is a very close parallel to the *kráka* of *Rígsþula* in Anglo-Saxon England, though it is in Anglo-Latin, and not in vernacular, literature. The text in question is the *Vita Gregori Magni* (henceforth *VGM*), written by an anonymous monk or nun in Whitby between 704 and 714 AD.¹³² At the time of this text's composition, almost a century had passed since Edwin's landmark conversion to Christianity in 627, and around half a century had passed since the Roman Church had consolidated its authority at the Synod of Whitby in 664. The Church clearly felt its foundations were strong enough to begin implementing a certain degree of orthodoxy, and move on from the suggestions of enculturation made by Gregory the Great in his letter to the abbot Mellitus in 601 (*HE* I.30), as can be seen by the rise of the Anglo-Saxon penitential from the seventh century.¹³³ However, the Church was still facing some resistance in its extinguishing of heathen practices. This is illustrated perfectly in early eighth-century Kent, where King Wihtræd's laws prohibit both working on Sundays and *deoflum gelde* ('offering to devils');¹³⁴ Christianity was strong enough to have governed secular law yet the proscription against *deoflum gelde* indicated that such practices were ongoing. It is in this climate that we must read the augury related anecdote of the *VGM*. The narrative tells us of the conversion of King Edwin of Northumbria, and how he and a large group of *genilitati* ('pagans') had been in the royal hall where they had been 'exhorted to put ... matters right' (*utrumque emendandum hortati*).¹³⁵ Upon leaving the hall they hear

¹³⁰ See also the genealogy of Danr and Danpr given by Dronke in *PE* II, pp. 236-7.

¹³¹ See *Rígsþula* stanzas 43-46. For the religious/divine role of the king in Germanic culture see W. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England*, passim.

¹³² *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. and trans. by B. Colgrave (Cambridge: CUP, 1968), p. 48

¹³³ A. Frantzen, 'The tradition of penitentials in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1982), 23-56, at 25 and 27-8.

¹³⁴ *Die Gesetze Der Angelsachsen*, ed. by F. Liebermann (Leipzig: Niemeyer, 1906), p. 13.

¹³⁵ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, Chap. 15, pp. 96-7.

... stridula cornix ad plagam voce peiorem cantavit. Tunc omnis multitudo regia quę adhuc erat in platea populi, *audiens avem*, stupore *ad eam conversa subsistit*, quasi illud canticum novum carmen Deo nostro non esset vero futurum in ecclesia, sed falso ad nihil utile. [emphasis mine]

(Chap.15)¹³⁶

... a crow set up a hoarse croaking from an unpropitious quarter of the sky. Thereupon the whole of the company, who were still in the public square, *heard the bird and turned towards it, halting* in amazement as if they believed that the “new song” in the church was not to be “praise onto our God” but something false and useless.¹³⁷

The directional aspect may, at first appearance, evoke the Classical means of divination.¹³⁸ However, rather than merely noting the location of the bird as it calls, Edwin and his company stop and listen to it: the grammatical relationship between the preterite active verb *cantavit* (‘sung’) and deponent participle [*eam*] *conversa* (‘turned’) clearly link the crow’s song and the retinue’s turning to pay attention to it and indicate that the two actions are more or less contemporary. The duration of the song is not made explicit by the grammar but it may be inferred that as the retinue halts (*subsistit*) and listens (*audiens*) the song of the crow is ongoing. In this light, Paulinus’ reaction, which is to command that the bird is quickly shot down, makes more sense as an operation in damage-limitation: it is to cut short the words of the crow. Paulinus’ motive for killing the crow is mentioned when he ridicules Edwin and his retainers for their folly:

Omnibusque illuc congregatis recenti rudoque adhuc populo Dei bene satis eo causam donante, confirmavit antiquum scelus nomen idolatrię, tam evidenti signo esse pro nihilo in omnibus discendum, dicens etiam sibi ipsi

¹³⁶ Ibid. Chap. 15, p. 96

¹³⁷ The translation here is Colgrave’s, in Ibid. Chap. 15, p. 97. I have used Colgrave’s translations throughout this section.

¹³⁸ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.39, I.85, and T. L. Livy, *The Early History of Rome: Books 1-5* ed. and trans. by A. De Selincourt (London: Penguin, 1960), VI.41.

avis illa insensata mortem cavere cum nescisset, imo renatis ad imaginem Dei baptizatis omnino hominibus...¹³⁹

Then when they were all gathered together there, he gave the people of God who were recent converts and still uninstructed, a very good reason for this event; he assured them that they ought to learn from so clear a sign that that ancient evil called idolatry was in all respects useless; “for”, he said, “if that senseless bird was unable to avoid death, still less could it foretell the future of men who have been reborn and baptized into the image of God.”¹⁴⁰

The implication is that if the crow’s song were to go on it would threaten the possibility of Edwin’s retinue believing in the ‘new song’ (*novum carmen*) of the Christian faith. It may be argued that the source for the implied idea that the crow’s song was an ‘old song’ may come, ultimately, from Isidore’s *Etymologiae* (XII.7.44: *Cornix, annosa avis, apud Latinos Graeco nomine appellatur, ‘the crow, an old bird, is called this name by the Romans and the Greeks’*)¹⁴¹ but the text itself, explicitly identifying the Christian faith with a *novum carmen*, implies that the old song of the crow should rather be identified with that of the old heathen religion. It is, after all, their trust in this old religion which Paulinus so vehemently cautions against in his exhortation at the end of chapter 15 of the *VGM*.¹⁴² There is likely some subversion going on here too. Immediately after his logical demonstration above the *VGM* carries on:

...qui dominantus piscibus maris et volatilibus celi atque universis animantibus terre, nihil profuturum prenuntiet, quas illi ex sua subtili natura ad deceptionem stultorum se scire, Deo iuste premittente, iactitant.¹⁴³

[“those who have been baptized into the image of God”], who have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing on earth; yet these foretellers boast that they understand the ways of

¹³⁹ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 98.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁴¹ *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi: Etymologiae sive Originum*, ed. by Lindsay.

¹⁴² *Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 98.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

birds by their own native cunning and so deceive the foolish, as God's permissive will allows¹⁴⁴

The *subtili natura* that Colgrave translates 'native cunning' could be better rendered by 'innate cunning'; in any case it is clear that it alludes to people who claim to be able to understand birds. The *VGM* further articulates that any need for these people and their talents is made redundant by conversion to Christianity by evoking no less an authority than Genesis 1:28. The fact that Paulinus' rhetoric is related in direct speech implies that his warning regarding the crow could still resound with the text's current audience. The direct speech acts in the *VGM* tend to be passages of particular interest, such as Gregory punning on the names of the Anglii,¹⁴⁵ the directions given to the priest Trimma to bear King Edwin's bones to Whitby,¹⁴⁶ and the various praises and Christian maxims.¹⁴⁷ The anonymous author's knowledge of their intended audience may be inferred from their thoroughly local identity;¹⁴⁸ he refers to Edwin as *regis nostri* ('our king')¹⁴⁹ and identifies him as *in gente nostra, que dicitur Humbrensi* ('of this race of ours which is called the Humbrians'),¹⁵⁰ and later the *VGM* calls Whitby *nostrum ... coenobium* ('our monastery'), and even gives directions on how to get there.¹⁵¹ Intimate flourishes of this kind indicate that the *VGM* was intended for an audience familiar with the geography and history of the local area, and as such, raises the possibility that its audience was also familiar with local folk-beliefs too.

The similarity between *Rígsþula* and the *VGM* lies not just in the species of bird (*kráka* and *cornix* both generally mean 'crow', though we must bear in mind issues of classification). Both Konr Ungr and Edwin are royalty, and it is possible, as Harris has opined, that the *cornix* in *VGM* is also sat on a tree. Paulinus asks a boy (*puero*) to shoot the bird down (we surely should not expect that Anglo-Saxon youths were

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., Chap. 9, pp. 90-1.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Chap. 18, pp. 102-3.

¹⁴⁷ E.g. Ibid., Chap. 18, pp. 110-11.

¹⁴⁸ The following is a summary of the evidence provided by B. Colgrave, 'The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, Written by a Whitby Monk', in *Celt and Saxon Studies in the Early British Border* ed. by N. K. Chadwick *et al* (Cambridge: CUP, 1963), pp. 119-37, at p. 122 and *Earliest Life of Gregory*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Chap. 16, pp. 98-9.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., Chap.12, pp. 94-5.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., Chap. 19, pp. 104-5.

able to hunt birds in flight)¹⁵² and when the *cornix* calls out, Edwin and his men turn towards, and listen to, it (which would not be possible if it were on the wing and moving past them).¹⁵³ If we can use *Rígsþula* to read into the *VGM*, then Edwin and his company were listening to the bird because it offered them news of present import with future implications. Specifically, the bird seems to have been advising them not to convert to Christianity (*quasi illud canticum novum carmen Deo nostro non esset vero futurum in ecclesia, sed falso ad nihil utile*), and its message, as much as association with paganism, resulted in its vitiating.

The comparative evidence suggests that the speech of birds – even corvids – was not originally inherently good or bad or even macabre, though there must have been aspects of the latter endemic to the corvids’ presence of the battlefield. In the Old Norse sources, for example, the raven’s prophecy generally (though not always) bodes well for its hearer, and in some of the ‘beasts of battle’ occurrences the raven’s call and company heralds their victory.

Indeed, the much-debated *hrefn blaca* (‘bright raven’) in *Beowulf* (l.1801a) seems to play with the possible outcomes of a prophesying raven.¹⁵⁴ After Beowulf has defeated both Grendel and his mother, there is feasting and celebration in Heorot, and the poem’s hero, *inne swæf/ op þæt hrefn blaca heofones wynne/ bliðheort bodode* (‘slept inside [the hall] until the bright raven happily bode the joy of heaven [=the sun]’, ll.1800b-1802a). Beowulf and his men hurry out of the hall, eager to get home – but nothing has happened. There is no slaughter, no army waiting to lay waste to Heorot, no third monster. The expectation that accompanies the raven, and the stark contrast this has with the complete absence of any fulfilment of that expectation, has troubled commentators. Andy Orchard and Michael Lapidge view the *hrefn blaca* as an elaborate joke that plays on expectations: that after two

¹⁵² A relevant parallel here is that it is considered an especially skilful act when a young Cú Chulainn goes out hunting and brings down birds on the wing, in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. See ll.763-7 of the first recension in *Táin Bó Cúailnge: the first recension*, ed. and trans. by C. O’Rahilly (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), p. 24 Irish, pp. 146-7 English, and ll.1157-66 of the second recension, in *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*, ed. and trans. by C. O’Rahilly (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), pp. 31-32 Irish, pp. 170-71 English..

¹⁵³ Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, pp. 21-2.

¹⁵⁴ What follows is a condensed summary of E. Lacey, ‘*Beowulf*’s Blithe-hearted Raven’, in *Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia*, ed. by M. Bintley and T. Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell, forthcoming).

sequential nights of carnage by the Grendels, the audience should be primed to expect the worst when the raven is mentioned.¹⁵⁵ North and Sylvia Horowitz view it as an omen of evil; the former sees it predicting Heorot's destruction by Ingeld, while the latter compares it to the raven that leaves Noah's ark and interprets it as an omen of future corruption.¹⁵⁶ Kathryn Hume, on the other hand, suggests that the raven betokens the cleansing of Heorot and Beowulf's fulfilment of his earlier vow that warriors would be able to sleep in Heorot again (ll.1671-6).¹⁵⁷

There is also the problem of the adjective *blaca*, which is either an ablaut form of *blican* ('to shine') or from *blæc* ('black'). While the latter may seem more logical, *blæc* ('black') is never used in *Beowulf*, whereas *blac* ('bright') is: once in a simplex and the other time as the second element of a compound.¹⁵⁸ The adjective 'bright' is appropriate, as ravens are iridescent and exhibit a metallic sheen in direct light. However, given the puzzling nature of the scene – in which the reason(s) for the raven's happiness is/are never stated – an ambiguous adjective is conspicuous, and especially so when we acknowledge the loaded symbolism of either 'black' (evil) or 'bright' (good). In light of the analogous evidence, wherein the ravens can prophesy both good and ill, it seems reasonable to suppose that this scene is supposed to be ambiguous and puzzling, and that we are supposed to be unsure as to whether this raven is a good or bad omen. However, the subsequent raven references in *Beowulf* are all associated with death, and so undermine the ambiguity of the *hrefn blaca*.¹⁵⁹ This undermining culminates in the realisation that Hygelac collocates with ravens and sunrise: Beowulf leaves the *hrefn blaca* behind to see Hygelac (ll.1830-5), the

¹⁵⁵ M. Lapidge, 'Beowulf and Perception', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 111 (2001), 61-97, at 64-7; A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 77-8.

¹⁵⁶ R. North, *The Origins of Beowulf* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 108; S. H. Horowitz, 'The Ravens in *Beowulf*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 80 (1981), 502-511.

¹⁵⁷ K. Hume, 'The Function of the 'Hrefn Blaca': 'Beowulf' 1801', *Modern Philology*, 67.1 (Aug. 1969), 60-63. Marijane Osborn and Martin Puhvel also do not see the raven as a bad omen, though each reads the passage towards other ends. M. Osborn, 'Domesticating the Day-raven (with some attention to Alison's *ston*)', in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honour of Jess B. Bessinger Jr.*, ed. by H. Damico and J. Leyerle (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1993), pp. 13-30, uses it to evidence the domestication of ravens, whereas M. Puhvel, 'The blithe-hearted morning raven in 'Beowulf'', *English Language Notes*, 10.4 (June 1973), 243-7, uses it as evidence for a solar cult.

¹⁵⁸ The first element of the compound is missing, but must begin with 'h'; it is usually emended to *hildeblac* (l.2488a). The simplex is on l.1517a.

¹⁵⁹ Other raven references: attending to gallows (l.2448a), the champion Dæghrefn (l.2501b), at battle (l.2941a). There are also raven place-names associated with battle: *hrefna wudu* (l.2925b) and *hrefnes holt* (l.2935a).

next time ravens are mentioned they are attending the corpse of Hygelac's brother Herebeald (ll.2446b-9), Hygelac's slayer is revealed to be named Dæghrefn ('Day-raven', l.2501b), and finally Hygelac leads an army to slaughter Ongenþeow's army at Hrefnes Holt ('wood of the raven', l.2935, which may or may not be the same place as Hrefna Wudu, l.2925) at dawn (ll.2941b-5). It is only by looking backwards that we can notice the connection of the *hrefn blaca* with Hygelac's death, and therefore, that it was prophesying his death. At the moment it is introduced it is ambiguous, and I suggest that this ambiguity is deliberately toying with the talking-raven tradition, in which such birds could bode both ill and well.

The clearest example of a talking bird in Old English poetry bringing good news is, somewhat paradoxically, not really a bird at all. North argues for images of augury underlying the *anfloga* ('lone-flier') in *The Seafarer*.¹⁶⁰ In what follows, I draw on and embellish his argument, and link it more generally with the talking birds we have seen so far in Old English, Old Norse, and the *VGM*. After this, I show that there is evidence that talking birds were not merely a figment of literary imagination, but that these literary representations have their foundations in a pre-Christian belief of bird-divination.

The talking birds of *The Seafarer*

In the first chapter we saw how important sound was in *The Seafarer* with regards to bird identification. We now return to this poem to appraise the importance of sound again – but this time with regards to the trope of information-bringing birds. Out of the eight bird-candidates in the poem, six are endowed with voices, and the remaining two may be imbued with connotations of understandable voices. They occur in two clusters: all but the *geac* and *anfloga* are found between ll.19b-25a; the *geac* and *anfloga* occur sequentially on ll.53-64a. The first grouping, depicted on the harsh winter seas, is quite naturalistic; the second grouping, tying in with hastening progress of time, is slightly less so. Before the former are introduced, the narrator

¹⁶⁰ North, *Pagan Words*, pp. 99-121.

relates how he repeatedly seeks journeys across the waves, endures the piercing cold, hunger and the hurling waves – all for an unstated goal, though the references to repeated journeys, longing for the sea and the searching for other lands bear out the interpretation that the narrator is on a *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*.¹⁶¹ The first grouping is then related thus:

... Hwilum ylfete song
 dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor
 ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,
 mæw singende fore meadodrince.
 Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð
 isigfeþera; ful oft earn bigeal
 urigfeþra; nænig hleomæga
 feasceaftig ferð frefran meahte.
 (ll.19b-26)

At times the *ylfete*'s song served me for my entertainment, the *ganet*'s noise and the *huilpe*'s song for the laughter of men, the singing *mæw* for the drinking of mead. Stormy waves beat the stone-cliffs there, where the tern, icy-feathered, cried out in reply [to the *stormas*]; the dewy-feathered eagle yelled about often; nor can any kinsmen comfort the desolate spirit.¹⁶²

Each bird is given some human component to its vocalisations: the *ylfetu* is redolent of songs, the *ganet* and *huilpe* of men's laughter, the *mæw* of the joys of mead-

¹⁶¹ I do not subscribe to the theory that the narrator is a fisherman, put forward in S. Sobecki, 'The interpretation of *The Seafarer* – a re-examination of the pilgrimage theory', *Neophilologus*, 92 (2008), 127-39. Sobecki's major objections are that, by his reading, the narrator desires 'adventure rather than exile at sea' (at 130), and that he does not believe that there could be influence from the Irish habit of 'exile to the sea' on the Old English poem (132-5). His objections, particularly in the latter respect, do not really convince, and I am inclined to agree with C. Ireland, 'Some Analogues of the Old English *Seafarer* from Hiberno-Latin Sources', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 92 (1991), 1-14, P. Orton, 'To be a Pilgrim: the Old English *Seafarer* and its Irish Affinities', in *Lexis and Texts in Early English*, ed. by C. J. Kay and L. M. Sylvester, Costerus New Series 133 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 213-223, P. L. Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric*, esp. pp. 29-66, and T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The social background to Irish *peregrinatio*', *Celtica*, 11 (1976), 43-59, all of whom support D. Whitelock, 'The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*', in *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe*, ed. by C. Fox and B. Dickins, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies (Cambridge: CUP, 1950), pp. 259-72, and her original idea of the journey in *The Seafarer* being a *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*.

¹⁶² I have deliberately left the OE bird-names untranslated here to emphasize the problematic identifications of them.

drinking. Similarly, however, there is the idea of communication underlying each: the sounds made by the birds are interpreted as something socially meaningful. Even one of the birds which does not explicitly substitute for human companionship is given a sound which evokes human speech: *oncwæð*, used of the *stearn*, means ‘to reply’.¹⁶³ *Bigeal*, on the other hand, is a *hapax legomenon*, and the stem, *gyllan*, is usually used of beasts, such as the jay in Exeter Riddle 24 (1.3b *hwilum gielle swa hafoc*, ‘at times I yell like a hawk’) and the wolf in the *Finnsburh Fragment* (1.7a *gylleð græghama*, ‘the grey-coated one yells’).¹⁶⁴ The form *bigeal* is notable for uniting sound and motion (the preposition *bi-* indicates a spatial relationship to the cliffs and storms it ‘yells’ around), but does stand in contrast to the other bird sounds. Its non-conformity to the pattern of bird-sounds preceding it, which are both naturalistic and evocative of human speech, may be further support to claims that this passage is corrupt: 1.25 is metrically deficient, with no alliteration, and as Goldsmith notes, we ought to be suspicious of the near-repetition of 1.24a’s *isigfeþera*.¹⁶⁵

Hugh Magennis cites this passage as an example of ‘ironic and transformed images of hall life’ being ‘exploited’ in order to ‘contribute to the themes of exile and alienation’ in the Exeter Book.¹⁶⁶ For Magennis, the activities the birds substitute for ‘present a powerful contrast to the isolation which the seafarer has endured.’¹⁶⁷ Neville follows suit, remarking that ‘[a]ny suspicion that the Seafarer finds the beauty of the natural landscape an inspiring replacement for human company is eliminated by the last line, which specifies that he is ‘miserable’ and missing ‘protecting kin’.¹⁶⁸ I completely agree with the idea that by substituting for human companionship, the birds exaggerate and emphasize the narrator’s loneliness – this is an important aspect of the poem. However, the loneliness and isolation in *The Seafarer* is a corollary of the narrator’s repeated forays over the seas in search of

¹⁶³ *BT*, s.v. ‘on-cweðan’.

¹⁶⁴ *DOE*, s.v. ‘gyllan’.

¹⁶⁵ Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 129, remarks that this line is ‘almost certainly corrupt’. For a summary of previous editors’ responses to this line see *Ibid.*, p. 129 and *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, ed. by K. Muir, 2 vols, rev. 2nd edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), II, 526. See also Goldsmith, ‘*The Seafarer* and the birds’, 235.

¹⁶⁶ H. Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, CSASE 18 (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 83. See also A. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, pp. 128-9.

¹⁶⁷ Magennis, *Images of Community*, p. 97.

¹⁶⁸ Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, p. 36.

another land (*elþeodigra eard gesece* 1.39), and it is this larger context of the narrator’s quest of seeking – and particularly in light of the *geac* and *anfloga*’s news-bringing later on – that we must view these talking birds earlier in the poem. We will therefore return to consider these birds more fully after examining the latter two.

After the first group of birds, the Seafarer relates the coming of night and snow (ll.31-3), the need to repeatedly revisit the sea on his search for an *elþeodigra eard* (ll.34-47) and the hastening of the world, from winter to spring, which further spurs the Seafarer to set to sea (ll.48-52). Now in spring, another bird appears – and one which also spurs the Seafarer on:

Swylce geac monað geomran reorde;
 singeð sumeres weard, sorge beodeð
 bitter’ in breosthord. Ðæt se beorn ne wat,
 sefteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað
 þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað.
 (ll.53-57)

Likewise, the sad-voiced cuckoo compels [me to go to sea], summer’s guardian sings, boding sorrows, bitter in breast-hoard. That the man does not know, the person blessed with comfort, what some endure when they most widely pave their way in the paths of exiles.

The cuckoo is the third of three things which urge and impel the Seafarer, all using the same verb. The first is on ll.36-7a (*monað modes lust mæla gehwylce/ ferð to feras*, ‘the desires of thought compel the mind to venture, each season’); the second, on ll.50-1, references how the coming of spring and the hastening of the world *ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne / sefan to siþe* (‘all these compel the eager mind, the senses, to journey’).¹⁶⁹ In all three instances it is a mental journey being urged, however, it is only the cuckoo which does so vocally. In this way, it recalls but also develops the idea of communication seen in the first bird passage: there the birds

¹⁶⁹ I translate *sefa* with ‘senses’ as this appears to be its basic meanings, but more importantly to make clear that we are still dealing with the mental organs, rather than spiritual, in this passage. See North, *Pagan Words*, pp. 85-8, Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry*, p. 46, and Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions*, pp. 33-5.

only stood in for communicative acts rather than performing them. Moreover, the terms used to describe the cuckoo's call, *reorde* ('voice') and *beodeð* ('bodes'), both pertain directly to human speech – indeed, in *The Dream of the Rood*, *reordberende* ('speech-bearers', l.3a) is used as a kenning for 'people', suggesting that this particular attribute is diagnostic of being human. The cuckoo's compelling through human speech also prepares us for the poem's climax, which follows immediately, and in which the *anfloga* acts similarly:

For þon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
 min modsefa mid mereflod,
 ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
 eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
 gifre ond grædig; gielleð anfloga,
 hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
 ofer holma gelagu, for þon me hatran sind
 Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif
 læne on londe.

(ll.58-66a)

Therefore my mind now moves out of my rib-cage, my intellect over the seawater, over the home of the whale, it moves widely over the expanse of the earth, comes back to me, eager and greedy; the *anfloga* ('lone-flier') yells, impels the restless breast over the whale's path, ofer the lakes of the sea, because the Lord's joys are hotter to me than this dead life, transient on the land.

The *anfloga* has been the subject of much debate. Frans Diekstra, Vivian Salmon, P. L. Henry, Neil Hultin, Stephen Glosecki and Alexandra Sanmark have all identified the *anfloga* with the soul,¹⁷⁰ though, as North points out, 'the Christian soul cannot

¹⁷⁰ F. Diekstra, 'The Seafarer 58-66a: The Flight of the Exiled Soul to its Fatherland', *Neophilologus*, 55 (1971), 433-46; V. Salmon, 'The Wanderer' and 'The Seafarer' and the Old English Conception of the Soul', 1-10; Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric*, pp. 133-60; N. Hultin, 'The External Soul in 'The Seafarer' and 'The Wanderer'', *Folklore*, 88 (1977), 39-45; S. O. Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old English Poetry* (New York: Garland, 1989), pp. 78-83; A. Sanmark, 'Living On: Ancestors and the Soul', in *Signals of Belief in Early Anglo-Saxon England: Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited*, ed. by M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple (Oxford: Oxbow, 2010), pp. 158-80, at pp. 162-3.

leave the body without the body's death.'¹⁷¹ North, Peter Clemoes, Malcolm Godden, and Antonina Harbus, on the other hand, identify the *anfloga* with the mind.¹⁷² Some scholars are sure some metaphysical entity is meant but do not explicitly state whether they understand this to be the mind or the soul.¹⁷³ Even more fundamentally, there has been debate over whether the *anfloga* is anything more than a bird. Ida Gordon,¹⁷⁴ following Ernst Sieper's translation of *The Seafarer* into German,¹⁷⁵ suggested that it should be identified as the *geac*, which earlier impels the narrator on his journey. The majority have frowned upon this view, and some especially strongly: Clemoes opined that it was 'wholly unsatisfying imaginatively',¹⁷⁶ and John C. Pope thinks that the 'unsound and hopelessly confusing identification' of the *anfloga* and cuckoo 'should be consigned to oblivion.'¹⁷⁷ Orton, however, defends the cuckoo identification.¹⁷⁸ His opening gambit is an under-acknowledged argument Gordon made for the cuckoo identification:

Some have understood [the *anfloga*] to be the spirit (*hyge*) sweeping over the sea like a bird; but the emphasis on the cries, which could have little or no metaphorical significance, would make such an image almost absurd.¹⁷⁹

Orton rightly draws attention to how little this has featured in arguments for identifying the *anfloga* with either the mind or soul.¹⁸⁰ Gordon's objection is predicated on the assumption that the cries of the *hyge* in bird-form 'could have little or no metaphorical significance.' Yet if, as North has argued, the *anfloga* draws on the imagery of news-bringing birds, then the cries do carry metaphorical significance.¹⁸¹ Throughout the poem, the Seafarer mentions that it is his *mod* which impels him to set to sea (e.g. ll.36 and 50); in the *anfloga* we have an externalisation

¹⁷¹ North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings*, p. 103.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 100-110; P. Clemoes, '*Mens absentia cogitans*', pp. 62-77; Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', pp. 271-98; Harbus, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 145.

¹⁷³ J. C. Pope, 'Second Thoughts on the interpretation of *The Seafarer*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1974), 75-86, at 83-4.; Tolley, *Shamanism*, I, 186-7.

¹⁷⁴ *The Seafarer*, pp. 41-2, n.62b.

¹⁷⁵ *Die altenglische Elegie*, p. 277.

¹⁷⁶ Clemoes, '*Mens absentia cogitans*', p. 64, n.3.

¹⁷⁷ Pope, 'Second Thoughts on the interpretation of *The Seafarer*', 84, n.3.

¹⁷⁸ Orton, '*The Seafarer* 58-64a', 454-6.

¹⁷⁹ *The Seafarer*, p. 41, n.62b.

¹⁸⁰ Orton, '*The Seafarer* 58-64a', 450-51.

¹⁸¹ North, *Pagan Words*, pp. 99-121.

of the mind and its compelling the Seafarer to journey. We also have some explanation for its incessant inciting in the *anfloga* passage: the *hyge* – the *anfloga* – has ranged widely over the seas and has seen the *elpeodigra eard* that the Seafarer seeks. It therefore returns to him, chiding him on to carry on seeking this *elpeodigra eard*. This interpretation not only accommodates the clear parallels this passage has with the mobile mind, as argued by Clemoes,¹⁸² but links the *anfloga* with the earlier birds in the poem and with the Seafarer's *peregrinatio* too.

The use of the image of talking birds is especially artful in *The Seafarer*, but it is not alone among the elegies for doing so. *The Wanderer*, a poem which has some affinities with *The Seafarer*, uses this image too, though to quite a different effect. Just as at the beginning of *The Seafarer*, birds are used to stress the Wanderer's loneliness. After lamenting the loss of his lord, hall and companionship (ll.19-44),¹⁸³ the narrator wakes alone on the sea and sees the seabirds in front of him:

Donne onwæcneð eft wineleas guma –
 gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas,
 baþian brimfuglas, brædan feþra...

(ll.45-47)¹⁸⁴

Then he wakes again, the friendless man – and sees before him the dark waves, and bathing sea-birds, spreading their wings...

As Harbus notes, the birds here emphasize the Wanderer's isolation,¹⁸⁵ a function they fulfill again a few lines later, when the narrator's thoughts glance over the memories of his kinsmen:

... Sorg bið geniwad,
 þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfed;

¹⁸² Clemoes, 'Mens absentia cogitans', 10. See also Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, pp. 220 and 223-4.

¹⁸³ For the interpretation that the Wanderer does not just remember these things, but dreams them, see A. Harbus, 'Deceptive Dreams in "The Wanderer"', *Studies in Philology*, 93 (1996), 164-79.

¹⁸⁴ All citations to *The Wanderer* are from *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, I, 215-19.

¹⁸⁵ Harbus, 'Deceptive Dreams', 172.

greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað
 secga geseldan; swimmað oft on weg –
 fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð
 cuðra cwidegiedda.

(ll.50b-55a)¹⁸⁶

Sorrow is renewed, when the mind soars through the memory of kinsmen; he greets them with words of joy, eagerly scans through them, the companions of men; they often swim away – the troop of the floating ones does not bring there any understood meaningful speech.

There are two main issues here: one is the identity of the *secga geseldan*, the other is the meaning of *cuðra cwidegiedda*. I follow Bruce Mitchell's elegant reading here which sees the *secga geseldan* as both anaphoric and cataphoric: on the one hand it refers back to the kinsmen that the Wanderer previously thinks of, on the other hand, it refers forward to his current companions, the seabirds (the *fleotendra ferð*).¹⁸⁷ North must be right in seeing the *cuðra cwidegiedda* as an allusion to augury,¹⁸⁸ though rather than endorse his elaborate reading which appeals to the birds of Diomedea and Boethian philosophy, it seems that there is a much simpler approach: that augury has failed. Indeed, it is difficult not to read this passage in *The Wanderer* in comparison with *The Seafarer*. While the latter has repetitions of liberating journeys across the sea, the latter repeats images of binding: the binding waves (*wapema gebind*, ll.24b, and 56a) are mentioned before and after the appearance of the birds, and sorrow and sleep bind the narrator on l.40b. The birds which serve as companions to the Seafarer provide him with company, entertainment and incitements to journey; the birds around the Wanderer taunt him with their freedom and constantly swim away. One might even wonder whether the bird that carries men

¹⁸⁶ For the difficulty of this passage, and an overview of the different ways it has been read, see S. Irvine, 'Speaking One's Mind in *The Wanderer*', in *Inside Old English: Essays in Honour of Bruce Mitchell*, ed. by J. Walmsley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 117-33, at pp. 117-22. The reading and interpretation here are my own, though they have been informed by R. North, 'Boethius and the Mercenary in *The Wanderer*', in *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by T. Hofstra, L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald, *Germania Latina* 2 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), pp. 71-98, and the textual notes in Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, pp. 106-26.

¹⁸⁷ B. Mitchell, 'The dangers of disguise: Old English texts in modern punctuation', *Review of English Studies*, 31 (1985), 385-413, at 396.

¹⁸⁸ North, 'Boethius and the Mercenary', 89-90.

away over the seas later in the poem (*sumne fugel opbær/ ofer heanne holm*, ll.81b-82a) is not an allusion to the ‘beasts of battle’ topos, but a metaphorical reflection on the folly of listening to birds while at sea.

I have shown above that the trope of talking birds, able to bring information about the present and future, underlies the ‘beasts of battle’ topos and recurs separately also in Old English literature.¹⁸⁹ In the next section – which is brief, due to constraints of space, I make the case for the belief in talking birds not just being a literary trope, but a pagan survival that moves into the realm of popular culture and folk-belief.

Historical evidence for augury

The idea of talking birds recurs with some frequency in both the Old English and Old Norse, and it has been argued that these derive from a common tradition. However, they are not merely literary tropes: they occur in texts which purport to convey historical fact too, such as the *VGM*. In this section I show that there are other such texts which suggest that the idea of talking birds was – at least for some – a reality. I begin this section with a survey for the evidence of augury in the textual sources, but have singled out two under-discussed types of texts, the glossaries and the penitentials, for detailed discussions. They are both valuable resources for historical inquiry, but warrant more careful handling than is sometimes accorded to them.

The earliest evidence for the practice of augury attests to it being a common Germanic practice, and is from external observers of the Germanic peoples centuries before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in England. Tacitus’s *Germania*, when

¹⁸⁹ It also occurs separately from battle-tidings in Old Norse, if we are prepared to accept the evidence of the *igður* (‘nuthatches’) that speak to Sigurðr in *Fáfnismál* 31-32 and 39, and the geese which *gullo við* (‘cry out in reply’) to Guðrún’s mourning in *Guðrúnaaviða I* 16 as reflective of a wider tradition. In support of this it is worth noting that both Konr Ungr, in *Rígsþula* and the valkyrie in *Hrafnsmál* are said to understand the speech of birds generally (*Rígsþula* 45.1: *Klök nam fugla*, where the verbal form *klökodo* is used of the *igður* in the prose between *Fáfnismál* 31 and 32; *Hrafnsmál/Haraldskvæði* 2.4 has *fuglsrødd kunn*). On this note it is worth pointing out that the bird that speaks to Helgi Hjörvarðsson is never identified (*Helgaqviða Hjörvarðssonar* 1-4).

describing the kinds of divinatory practices found among the *Germani*, notes that they ‘examine the flights and calls of birds’ (*avium voces volatusque interrogare*, 10.3).¹⁹⁰ In another text of the first-century A.D., Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities* XVIII.192, a man described as *Γερμανός* (*Germanos*) makes a prophecy based on the appearance of an owl,¹⁹¹ though as Rives points out the reliability of this is questionable given the significance of the owl to the Greco-Romans.¹⁹² Despite coming through a filter of Roman and Greek bias, respectively, they probably contain a kernel of truth about the Germanic peoples believing in omens from birds. Procopius’ *De Bello Gallico*, however, records an instance which, by all appearances, is very close to some of the talking birds we have seen in Old English and Old Norse. Here, Procopius records events around 551 A.D., about a king called Hermegisclus (for **Hermigisl?*):¹⁹³

[who] saw a bird sitting in a tree and cawing (*κρώζοντα*) many things. Whether he understood the cry of the bird at once or already knew something else and made up a tale of understanding the bird prophesying, he immediately told the men there that he would die in forty days’ time. He said it was a prophecy of a bird that revealed it to him.¹⁹⁴

Although the bird is never named in Procopius’ account, the use of the verb *κρώζοντα* (*krozonta*), from *κρώζώ* (*krozo*), ‘to croak’, ‘to caw’, ‘to cry like a crow’, suggests that the species referred to here is a corvid of some kind.¹⁹⁵ The similarity of this to the *cornix* in the *VGM* and the *kráka* in *Rígsþula* is noteworthy, and the subject matter’s relationship to the ‘beasts of battle’ topos could suggest that the link

¹⁹⁰ *Cornelii Taciti opera minorica*, ed. by M. Winterbottom and R. M. Ogilvie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

¹⁹¹ *Josephus IX: Jewish Antiquities, Books XVII-XIX*, ed. by G. P. Goold, and trans. by L. H. Feldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 120-121.

¹⁹² *Tacitus: Germania*, ed. and trans. by J. B. Rives (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 167.

¹⁹³ *History of the Wars VIII.xx*, in *Procopius in Seven Volumes*, vol 5: *History of the Wars, Books VII (continued) and VIII*, ed. and trans. by H. B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 255 translation, p. 254 Greek. E. A. Thompson rightly remarks that the ‘entire chapter [with the Hermegisclus episode] is a digression’, and that ‘[Procopius] turned aside from abruptly from his great task of writing the history of Justinian’s wars in order to include some ‘hot’ news about the far north-west which had just reached his ears.’ He also comments that the story seems to have originated with the Continental Warni, and probably as a legend, in ‘Procopius on Brittonia and Britannia’, *The Classical Quarterly*, 30 (1980), 498-507, at 504 and n.31.

¹⁹⁴ Trans. in North in *Pagan Words*, p. 115. Although the standard translation of Procopius’ *History of the Wars* is H. B. Dewing’s, North’s translation is less dated.

¹⁹⁵ sv. *κρώζώ* in H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889).

between birds and prophecy antedates the link, specifically, between the prophecy given by *Corvidae* and battle. All three Classical sources, despite their disparate dates and locations (Josephus and Procopius are Greek, Tacitus is first-century Latin) also echo the key concept of auralty which we have seen repeated throughout the later literatures. This seems to be a strong case for these three external observers describing the same practice that goes on to form these later literary representations.

The earliest source for augury in Anglo-Saxon England is the *VGM*, though the handling of Edwin's conversion in this work, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (henceforth *Historia*) and Alcuin's *Versus De Patribus Regibus et Sanctis Euboricensis Ecclesiae* (*Poem on the Bishops, Kings, and Saints of the Church of York*) is interesting enough – and warrants sufficient attention – that it is examined in detail in the next chapter. We shall see, however, that North's arguments about Bede's infamous sparrow simile (*Historia* II.13) being a 'spiritual salvage operation' for Edwin's reputation are fundamentally correct, and that the presentation of Edwin's conversion in the *VGM* and Alcuin's poem points to an historical tradition in Northumbria that has, at its core, an instance of bird-divination.¹⁹⁶ We have some evidence for augury at the other end of the Anglo-Saxon period, however. Ælfric, writing during the second half of the tenth century, prohibits the practice of divination by birds in his homily *De Auguriis*:

Eallswa gelice se ðe gelyfð wíglungum oððe be *fugelum* oððe be fno-
rum oððe be horsum oððe be hundum, ne bið he na Cristen, ac bið forcuð
wiðersaca.¹⁹⁷

(emphasis mine)

Likewise he who believes in divination whether by *birds* or by sneezes or by horses or by hounds, he is no Christian, but a perverse apostate.

This caution is repeated in a lesser known homily, *On the Dedication of a Church*, as part of a much longer list:

¹⁹⁶ North, *Heathen Gods*, p. 176. See also North, *Pagan Words*, p. 119. See also J. Barrow, 'How Coifi Pierced Christ's Side: A Re-Examination of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* II, Chapter 13', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62 (2011), 693-706, esp. 700 and 706.

¹⁹⁷ Ælfric's *Lives*, I, XVII, p. 370.

Ða men þænne þe unþeawas 7 leahtras lufiað þæt is ofermettu. 7 idel wuldur
7 andan 7 yrre 7 unrottesse 7 gytsunge 7 gefernysse 7 oferdrinceas 7 unriht
hæmedu 7 mannslyhtas 7 mæne aðas 7 þyƿpa 7 leasunge 7 morþur 7
wiccedom 7 þa þe on ænegum þingum wigliað oððe be nytenum oððe be
fugelum oððe þa þe hyra ælmessan behatað to mislicum tryowum oððe to
wyllum oððe ahwæder buton to godes circium...¹⁹⁸

(emphasis mine)

Those people then who disbelieve and love those crimes which are over-
feasting and empty glory and malice and anger and misery and covetousness
and gluttony and over-drinking and unjust harm and killing men and wicked
oaths and thieving and lying and murder and witchcraft and those who divine
by any thing whether by animals or by *birds* or those who dedicate their alms
to uncouth trees or wells or anywhere except to God's churches...

In both these cases Ælfric cautions specifically against divination (*wiglung*, *wigliað*)
by birds, and his reference to horses in the first and trees in the second reflects
practices Tacitus observed among the early Germans.¹⁹⁹ That it is a homily intended
for an unlearned audience only strengthens it as evidence for Anglo-Saxon augury: it
makes little sense to discourage an extinct or unknown practice, and Ælfric's
prohibitions here match up well with prohibitions in the penitentials (below). It is
striking that nearly a millennium after Tacitus and nearly three centuries after Bede
and the anonymous *VGM*, we still find references to bird divination in the literature.
The long-standing appeal of augury is probably due to one of the fundamental needs
of religion: to provide guidance and support in accepting, or handling unknowns. In
this respect, divination becomes central to religion, and some of our Anglo-Saxon
evidence bears out this interpretation. For example, there is a moment in Bede's *Life
of Cuthbert* where we seem to hear the voice of the common eighth-century Anglo-
Saxon.²⁰⁰ Here, some of the monks from an unidentified monastery at the mouth of
the Tyne had been out gathering wood from the other side of the river when a gale

¹⁹⁸ *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Altenglischen Literatur und Kirchengeschichte*, ed. by R. Brotanek
(Leipzig: Niemeyer, 1913), p. 20.

¹⁹⁹ *Germania* chapters 9-10.

²⁰⁰ Personal communication with Alan Thacker.

starts blowing them out to sea. Cuthbert castigates the locals who jeer at the monks' plight, but is rebuked in turn by the locals, who say:

Nullus inquit hominum pro eis roget, nullius eorum misereatur Deus, qui et *ueteres culturas hominibus tulere, et nouas qualiter obseruare debeant nouit.*

(Chapter III, emphasis mine)²⁰¹

“Let nobody pray for them [i.e. the monks], and may God have no mercy on any one of them, *for they have robbed men of their old ways of worship, and now nobody knows what should be done.*”

This incident is not related in Bede's main source, the *Anonymous Life of Cuthbert*, and so this is probably one of the episodes that Bede had collected either from Herefrith or from some other first-hand source.²⁰² The sentiment expressed by the locals seems to derive from some very real, reported, response. It certainly does not resonate with the ideas Bede expresses elsewhere, in which pagans eagerly embrace Christianity because it offers solutions not attended to by the old religion (e.g. Edwin's infamous council in *HE* II.13). The *VGM* implicitly links the role of Christianity with such guidance through signs when it has Paulinus explicitly chide the Northumbrians for indulging in the pagan habit of doing so. When Paulinus has brought all of the catechumens, who were distracted by the *cornix*, into one place, he uses their understanding of the bird as a divine sign as an opportunity to reaffirm their faith:

Omnibusque illuc congregatis recenti rudoque adhuc populo Dei bene satis eo donante, confirmavit antiquum scelus *nomen idolatrię*, tam euidenti signo esse pro nihilo in omnibus descendum²⁰³

‘Then when they were all gathered together there, he gave the people of God who were recent converts and still uninstructed, a very good reason for this

²⁰¹ *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, p. 164. The translation here is my own.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 142-6.

²⁰³ *Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, Chap. 15 p. 98.

event; he assured them that they ought to learn from so clear a sign that that ancient evil *called idolatry* was in all respects useless²⁰⁴

Idolatry – the act of worship – is, as in *Beowulf*, indistinguishable from the process of seeking divine guidance. The term *idolatrię* may seem to be out of place here, but the *Council of Toledo* in 693 also links augurs and idolaters, presumably for this very reason, and the relationship between idolatry and divination was frequently stressed in Latin pastoral literature.²⁰⁵ It is an irony lost on Paulinus that his presentation of the death of the *cornix* here runs along these lines too: it has become a divine sign that guides them to convert to Christianity.

It is surprising then, that birds, in the context of augury, are mentioned nowhere in the Anglo-Saxon law codes. Divination was prohibited, but specific forms are not often singled out; instead, the general terms *wigleras* ('diviners') and *wiglung* ('divination') are used.²⁰⁶ There is the possibility that we have evidence of a different kind, however, following the sort of vitiation we have seen in *Beowulf* with the *hrefn blaca* and in the *VGM*. In his homily *Dei Auguriis*, where he had already admonished practitioners of augury as apostate, Ælfric describes the behavior of the devil thus:

Nu secge we to soðan þæt se ungesewenlica deofol þe flyhð geond þas woruld, and fela ðincg gesihð, geswutelað þæra wiccan hwæt heo secge mannum, þæt þa beon fordone þe ðæne drycræft secað.²⁰⁷

Now we say the truth, that the invisible devil who flies through the world, and sees many things, and reveals to those witches what they [subsequently] tell to men, so that they become corrupt for seeking out that sorcery.

²⁰⁴ Trans. Ibid. Chap. 15, p. 99, emphasis mine.

²⁰⁵ B., Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005) pp. 232-3.

²⁰⁶ For a list of these see L. S. Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900-1100: Study and Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 115 n.88, and 117-9.

²⁰⁷ *Ælfric's Lives*, I, XVII, p. 372.

No source is known for this description. The *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* gives no source for this passage, though sources have been identified for the preceding and subsequent passages.²⁰⁸ It is tempting to see an explanation of the devilish involvement in augury here, where the devils act like birds – going out into the world and reporting what they hear to a diviner. The passage closely parallels the description given of Óðinn and his ravens in Snorri’s *Edda* and in *Grímnismál* 20. It is slightly tenuous, but based on Ælfric’s use of the Scandinavian form of Óðinn’s name in *De falsis diis* (Óðon) as opposed to the Old English form (Woden), it is possible that Ælfric was aware of this association of Óðinn’s and consciously sought to undermine it.²⁰⁹ This idea of devils being like invisible birds is echoed in somewhat more blatantly in *Dominica in Sexagesima*:

Deoflu sind fugelas gecigede, for ðan ðe hi fleoð geond þas lyft ungesewenlice, swa swa fugelas doð gesewenlice.²¹⁰

Devils are called birds, because they fly through the air invisibly just as birds do visibly

The devil’s ability to fly is reiterated a few lines later when he is called *se fleogenda sceocca* (‘the flying fiend’).²¹¹ Peter Dendle, when discussing these texts, presents a parallel from the *Enchiridion* of Byrthferth (that *eall þis lyft is full hellicra deofla*, ‘all this air is filled with hellish devils’)²¹² though he argues that these descriptions are symptomatic of a widespread belief of the devil’s being consigned to roam the air, which for a long time was orthodox.²¹³ He and several other commentators acknowledge that in Old English literature there is an overwhelming ambiguity as to whether the devils are locked in hell or free to roam and affect people;²¹⁴ a symptom

²⁰⁸ <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/> [Accessed 6/05/2010].

²⁰⁹ *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. by J. Pope, EETS 259, 260. 2 vols (London: OUP, 1967-8), pp. 672-712, ll.139-140. Henceforth *Supp.*

²¹⁰ M. Godden, ed., *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text*, EETS s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press 1979), VI.54, ll.70-71. Henceforth *CH II*.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 55. l.77.

²¹² *Byrthferth’s Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by P. Baker and M. Lapidge, EETS s.s. 15 (Oxford, 1995) pp. 247-8, ll.84-5.

²¹³ P. Dendle, *Satan Unbound* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 70ff.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 35-39. M. Fox, ‘Ælfric on the creation and fall of the angels’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 31 (2002), 175-200, S. Semple, ‘Illustrations of damnation in late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 231-45.

of several co-existing theological ideas about the nature of demons and their native element. As such, Ælfric would have been free to manipulate this current idea of the devils of the air into demonizing a heathen god and a problematic practice.

So far we have surveyed the narrative textual sources for evidence of augury, but these can be supported by evidence from more difficult realms: the glosses and the penitentials. These are rewarding sources but they both have methodological issues which must be addressed before any examination can be made of them. In the next sections, then, I outline my approaches to these sources before seeing what information we can and cannot glean from them.

Glossary Evidence

Glossary evidence is notoriously difficult to interpret, and Hall draws attention to particular instances where they have been ‘poorly handled’ because they have not taken into account the nature and background of glosses: the context of the original lemma is important as it will inform its understanding.²¹⁵ In his chapter arguing for augury in *The Seafarer* North collects some Old English and Old High German terms regarding the practice of augury,²¹⁶ but he does not try to locate the origins of the lemma they gloss, and therefore, whether it is significant or not that bird-divination vocabulary was used to gloss them. He lists the London-Antwerp glossary *fugelhwata* (‘bird-diviner’), which glosses *caragius* (‘wizard’),²¹⁷ *fugelweohlære*²¹⁸ (‘bird-soothsayer’), which glosses *augur uel auspex* (‘augur or auspice-taker’),²¹⁹ and *wigule fugeles* (‘divinatory birds’), which glosses *oscines aues* (‘singing/portentous birds’).²²⁰ Additionally, North finds an unsourced entry in William Somner’s *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum*, who probably had access to Old English texts now either lost or destroyed, which records *fugelhælsere* (lit. ‘bird-besecher’) with the definition of *augur*, ‘a sooth-sayer, a conjecturer, a

²¹⁵ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, lists some examples of this on p. 77, notes 6 and 7.

²¹⁶ The following section paraphrases and uses the terms collected by North *Pagan Words*, p. 114.

²¹⁷ Fourth Antwerp glossary, l.263.

²¹⁸ *BT*, identify this as a variant spelling of *fugel-wiglere*, sv. *fugel-weohlere*.

²¹⁹ Second Antwerp l.137.

²²⁰ Third Antwerp l.10.

diviner, he that telleth the events of matters by the flying, voices, or sitting of birds'.²²¹

While the context for Somner's *fugelhælsere* is lost, we can return to the others and consider them in more detail. The first, *caragius fugelhwata*, is difficult because of the uncertainties surrounding the meaning of *caragius*,²²² and matters are not helped by the fact that the majority of lemmata in the London-Antwerp glossaries have not been traced to identifiable sources yet.²²³ David Porter observes that the 'the source supplying the bulk of article 5 was a glossary closely related to the Corpus glossary',²²⁴ and if *caragius*, which is from article 4 and not article 5, derives from this same source then there are extra complications to contend with. Corpus glosses *caragios*, originally written *caragius* but then corrected, with *lyblaecan* ('potion making physician'),²²⁵ and the only other attestation of this lemma, in the First Cotton Cleopatra glossary, has *caragios* glossed with *lyblæcan*.²²⁶ The only Insular source cited as containing *caragius* by the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* is Egbert's Penitential,²²⁷ which lists the *Ceraios* among *divinos praecantatores* ('enchanting diviners') and *filecteria* ('phylacteries').²²⁸ I know no instances where a penitential forms the source of a glossary and would not suggest that the Penitential of Egbert lies behind these entries, but I do suggest that if the usage of Egbert is analogous to that of the glossaries' source for *caragius*, as is probable, then we can see how the same word came to be glossed both *fugel-hwata* and *lyblæcan*.²²⁹ *filecteria* could evoke the latter, and the aural aspect of bird-divination could have suggested *fugel-hwata* for *divinos praecantatores* (it is important to mention that Egbert's Penitential says *Ceraios et divinos praecantatores*, suggesting some interchangeability between the two terms). The

²²¹ W. Somner, *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum*, in R.C. Alston, ed., *English Linguistics 1500-1800* (Menston: Scholar Press, 1970) sv. *fugelhælsere*

²²² Filotas, *Pagan Survivals*, pp. 233-4.

²²³ D. W. Porter, 'On the Antwerp-London Glossaries', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 98 (1999), 170-92, at 176.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

²²⁵ Second Corpus C.223, see also Hessels' notes on, p. 29 n.8.

²²⁶ First Cleopatra l.867.

²²⁷ R. E. Latham, *A Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources. Fascicule II: C* (Oxford: OUP, 1981), s.v. 'caragios'.

²²⁸ *Die Bussbücher und die Bussdisciplin der Kirche*, ed. by H. J. Schmitz, 2 vols (Mainz: Franz Kirchheim), I, 581.

²²⁹ B. Filotas, *Pagan Survivals*, p. 233, surveying the Latin pastoral literature of the early medieval period, remarks that in no occurrence of the term 'is there any clue about his [i.e. the *caragius*'] distinctive characteristics', but that the term always occurs with other diviners.

gloss *caragius fugelhwata*, then, shrouded as it is in obscurity, could be very good evidence for glossators loosely interpreting the Latin to match a more familiar concept.

The entry *augur* [uel] *aspex fugelweohlære* is quite opposite to the previous gloss, in that it must derive from Isidore's *Etymologiae* VIII.9.18, which defines augurs as those people who pay attention to the flights and calls of birds for omens, and says *idem et auspices* ('and auspices are the same'). It is therefore impossible to tell whether *fugelweohlære* is reflective of a practice known to the glossators or the product of being informed by its context. At first glance the case seems to be much the same for *Oscines aves wigule fugeles*, which must come from *Etymologiae* XII.7.76: *Oscines aves vocant, quae ore cantuque auspiciam faciunt; ut corvus, cornix, picus* ('birds are called *oscines*, which make auspices by singing with their mouths, such as the raven, crow, and woodpecker'). However, related to this is a most curious entry in the Second Corpus glossary: *Obscines. corbi. auspicia. dantes.* ('*obscines* ravens giving auspices').²³⁰ There is evidently corruption of the original lemma, presumably from *oscines* to *obscines*. However, whatever originally lay behind this entry, the current interpretamentum is telling. Either the gloss drew completely from the *Etymologiae* and the *corvus* was selected specifically, or, informed by *obscenitas* ('obscenity'), the glossator added the *corvus* specifically.²³¹ Whichever is the case, it seems to be informed by the depiction we have seen in both Old English and Old Norse of ravens giving prophecies.

Given the evidence above, which suggests that augury was a custom shared by the Anglo-Saxons with their Continental relatives, one would expect to find related terms in the other old Germanic languages too. Going through each of these individually would take us too far from the Anglo-Saxon evidence, though they deserve a brief mention. North assembles a perfunctory list of Old High German terms: *fogalararta* ('bird-speaker')²³² glossing *augurium*, *fogalarartôn* ('bird's voicing') glossing *augiari*, *fogilartod* ('bird's voicing') glossing *auspiciam*, *fogalscouwo* ('bird-meditator/observer') for *auspex*, *fogalwiso* ('bird-knower') for *augur*, *wîzac-vogal* ('bird-knowing', i.e. a bird of prophecy) and *fogalôn* (lit.

²³⁰ Corpus 2, O.83.

²³¹ It is worth noting that Corpus 2 elsewhere preserves *Oscines. auspicia* (O.270).

²³² All definitions in parentheses are my own; I have endeavoured to be as literal as possible.

‘birding’) for *auspicari*.²³³ The most common of these, *vogal-rarton* (and its variants) occur 6 times in manuscripts dating from the eighth to tenth centuries,²³⁴ with *wîzac-vogal* and *fogalôn* occurring one each in a tenth/eleventh century and an eighth century manuscript respectively.²³⁵ It is particularly noteworthy that in two of these instances corvids are mentioned specifically in a tenth century manuscript: *fogalrarta* for *corvinum, proprium nomen* (‘the name of a particular characteristic of the raven’) and *fogelrarte* for *cornice uel oscine parthas* (‘crow or bird of augury’; the meaning of *parthas* is uncertain – perhaps it is a corrupt form of *partas*, ‘produces’).²³⁶

The glossary evidence, even when examined contextually, seem to attest to a belief in talking birds – with a particular focus on ravens (though some tenth century Old High German glosses invoke the crow specifically). Both the species mentioned, and the focus on aurality, fit with the literary evidence, and the glossaries consistently refer to this practice despite representing manuscripts from the eighth to eleventh centuries. The limitation, however, is that we cannot tell if these words are the product of a learned, scholarly environment or whether they have any relationship to reality beyond the esoterically inclined few. The next sources to be examined, the penitentials, go some way to remedying this as they are concerned chiefly with the pastoral care of their parishioners, the majority of whom would not have been educated.

The penitential evidence

The penitentials, as they are a notoriously difficult group of texts, have elicited a full spectrum of responses regarding their validity in ascertaining medieval pagan

²³³ North, *Pagan Words* p. 114

²³⁴ Twice in the tenth century *Prudentii carmina* in Codex Emmeram E.18 in Munich, three times in the tenth/eleventh-century St Gallen MS 872 (folios 104-119) and once in a ninth-century manuscript of the works of Isidore. See E. G. Graff, *Althochdeutscher Sprachschatz oder Wörterbuch der Althochdeutschen Sprach*, 6 vols (Berlin: Erster Theil, 1834-1842), sv. *vogal-rarton*, II, 536.

²³⁵ *Wîzac-fogal* is found in the form *uuîzefógela* in St Gallen MS 872, see Graff, *Althochdeutscher Sprachschatz*, III, 435; *fogalôn* is found in the *Hrabani Mauri* glossary in Codex Hist. Prof. 629 in Vienna (Graff, *Althochdeutscher Sprachschatz*, III, 439).

²³⁶ Both in the aforementioned Munich, Codex Emmeram E.18.

practices. Some scholars have expressed the extreme and excessively pessimistic opinion that the penitentials have no basis in reality and reflect only the mindless recapitulation of their sources.²³⁷ Wilhelm Boudriot, Dieter Harmening and Ken Dowden, varying in their extremity, all argue that discernable copying of material from other texts suggests little more than the existence of a literary tradition.²³⁸ Yitzhak Hen, marginally less pessimistically, is of the opinion that a “mental reality rather than a practical one” is expressed within the documents.²³⁹ Even if not all are as optimistic as Cyrille Vogel’s evaluation of the texts being “incomplete... but faithful”, the majority of scholars at the moment seem to be inclined towards a degree of confidence in them expressing genuine practices, among them Aron Gurevich and Bernadette Filotas.²⁴⁰ Although most work on the penitentials has tended to focus on continental material, Allen Frantzen has come to a similar conclusion on a degree of validity in the Anglo-Saxon penitential texts.²⁴¹

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the precise relationships between the various penitentials; these will be mentioned only when they are pertinent. Rather, I will work with the supposition that if a proscription within the penitentials is reflected elsewhere that there is a case for its authenticity.²⁴² The most damning charge brought against the penitentials is their dependence upon other sources; the early English penitentials draw heavily upon the Irish and all the penitential texts circulating on the continent and in Anglo-Saxon England appear to draw on the work of Caesarius of Arles. Canons from Asia Minor in the fourth century are cited in

²³⁷ This overview of scholarly perception on the reliability of penitential sources is derived from Bernadette Filotas’ discussion of her sources in *Pagan Survivals*, pp. 42-51. This summary is a condensed version of hers on p. 46.

²³⁸ W. Boudriot, *Die altgermanische Religion in der amtlichen kirchlichen Literatur des Abendlandes vom 5. bis 11. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: L. Rörscheid, 1964); D. Harmening, *Superstitio: Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1979); K. Dowden, *European Paganism* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 149-66. Even then, Boudriot accepts certain texts without this reservation, including many of the questions in Burchard of Worms’ *Corrector*.

²³⁹ Y. Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 171, and Y. Hen, ‘Paganism and superstition in the time of Gregory of Tours: ‘une question mal posée’, in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by I. Wood and K. Mitchell (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 229-240.

²⁴⁰ C. Vogel, *Le pécheur et la pénitence dans l’église ancienne* (Paris: Cerf, 1969), p. 40. Others who are confident in the retention of real pagan ideas in the penitentials are A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 37 and Filotas, *Pagan Survivals*, pp. 46-8.

²⁴¹ A. Frantzen, ‘Penitentials Attributed to Bede’, *Speculum*, 58 (1983), 573-97, at 594-5.

²⁴² Filotas, *Pagan Survivals*, accepts this as a valid methodology: “it remains true that the testimony for individual practices can be accepted only if they can be authenticated independently”, p. 56. Rudy Künzel is essentially of the same opinion, ‘Paganisme, syncrétisme, et culture religieuse au haut moyen âge’, via *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Carolingian laws, though as Filotas has noted there is occasionally direct evidence that these applied to actual rituals and practices in these areas.²⁴³ She also notes that “by invoking the authority of a prestigious council of the remote past,” “the intention was evidently to add weight to a contemporary canon.”²⁴⁴ The main goal of penitentials was to establish orthodox Christian practice,²⁴⁵ but minor variations in them suggest that they were tailored to suit the needs of the priests and bishops using these handbooks. Frantzen notes that the Irish penitentials do not have the same administrative concerns as the Theodorian texts, for example.²⁴⁶

If there are enough problems as it is with using the Anglo-Saxon penitentials to gain insight to their pre-Christian beliefs, what justification is there for use of the continental penitentials? Yitzak Hen’s observation during his discussion of the Bobbio, Paris and Burgundian penitentials, addresses the usefulness on this beyond mere comparative data regarding other Germanic peoples:

The so-called ‘private penance’ and the *libri poenitentiales* which accompanied it were introduced on the continent by the Irish and Anglo-Saxon missionaries from the mid-seventh century onwards. The roots and early development of the penitentials as a literary genre were part and parcel of the religious circumstances of the British Isles, and therefore, it is more than probable that the earliest penitentials, even those which were copied or composed on the continent during the seventh and early eighth century represent thematic preoccupations which characterised the churches of Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England.²⁴⁷

He overstates the point perhaps, but we must also concede the possibility that Anglo-Saxon missionaries perceived the paganism they encountered in the light of practices known to them back home. Principle among the continental texts considered here is the *Decretum* of Burchard of Worms. As first noted by Jacob Grimm, Burchard seems to add his own knowledge of superstitious practices to his sources as

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁴⁵ A. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 11.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64-5.

²⁴⁷ Hen, *Culture and religion*, p. 188.

evidenced by his inclusion of vernacular terms (i.e. ‘Holda’, ‘werwolf’, ‘belisa’).²⁴⁸ It may be here that we have affirmation that the proscriptions in other penitentials are grounded in fact: when Burchard embellishes his sources, the practices embellished are nonetheless found in other penitentials.

The earliest English penitential is that attributed to Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury (d.680). It was probably issued in the early eighth century and was compiled by the anonymous *Discipulus Umbrensius*, who cites his source as a follower of Theodore named Eoda.²⁴⁹ It draws upon the Irish penitentials of Finnian and Cummean but seems to have been intended to supplement, rather than replace them.²⁵⁰ Unlike the Irish texts, Theodore’s penitential was not directed at an essentially monastic context and contains tariffs for sins applicable only to a wider audience.²⁵¹ Another early English penitential is that of Egbert, archbishop of York from 732-766. It has a very strong claim to a genuine connection to Egbert,²⁵² and draws heavily from Theodore’s penitentials.²⁵³ They appear to have had different aims however, for in the words of Allen Frantzen: “Theodore’s penitential seems to have been part of a ‘national’ reform of penitential standards; Egbert’s handbook seems to concentrate instead on the local clergy and their preparedness.”²⁵⁴ The group of texts attributed to ‘Bede’ or ‘pseudo-Bede’ have a baffling textual relationship.²⁵⁵ They necessitate mention here because the penitential known as ‘Albers’ Bede’ is a composite of the ‘Bedan’ texts and Egbert’s penitential, though it is possible to reconstruct what might be called a ‘pure Bedan text’ by stripping away those parts found in Egbert’s penitential.²⁵⁶ The texts variously attributed to ‘Bede’ and ‘pseudo-Bede’ are certainly not Bede’s own,²⁵⁷ however it is probable that they

²⁴⁸ J. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. J.S. Stallybrass, 4 vols (New York: Dover, 1966), IV, 1743.

²⁴⁹ For the dating see Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 27. The *Discipulus Umbrensius* is named in the preface to book I of the penitential, in A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, ed., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1871), p. 173; Eoda is named as the follower of Theodore in the preface too, at p. 176.

²⁵⁰ See Frantzen, ‘The Tradition of Penitentials’, 28-9, where he notes that many MS of Theodore’s penitentials also contain those of Cummean.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29 and n.33.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 31, n.43.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-4.

²⁵⁶ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, pp. 107-8.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

are English in origin, and so they remain useful.²⁵⁸ There are three later handbooks too: the Confessional (often called the *Scrifiboc*), the Penitential and ‘A Late Old English Handbook for the Use of a Confessor’ (often called, simply, the ‘Handbook’).²⁵⁹ These are not discussed here, as my concern, with these early penitentials, is to show early attestations of the practice of augury.

In Theodore’s penitential there is a prohibition against augury for which there is no counterpart in either the penitentials of Cummean nor Finnian – the sections of the penitential of Finnian (§18 and 20) closest to this prohibit ‘magic’ with no clear indication of it being divinatory, and even then target only women and clerics specifically.²⁶⁰ The Theodorean penitential prohibits those who consult *qui auguria, auspicia sive somnia vel divinationes quaslibet secundum mores gentilium observant* (‘those who practice augury, auspices, dreams, or any of those divinations also observed by pagans’),²⁶¹ and Filotas has shown that the literal meanings of many of these words are problematic, and that *auspicia* in one place is not guaranteed to mean the same in another.²⁶² For our present purposes, however, it is worth noting that the popular *Etymologiae* construed the etymology of *auspicia* as *avium aspicia* (‘examining birds’), and *auguria* as *avium garria* (‘the chatter of birds’, VIII.9.19). This text was certainly known to Anglo-Saxon clergymen, and so while we cannot be sure that either of these terms means ‘bird-divination’, the inclusion of both *auguria* and *auspicia* in this proscription suggests a semantic difference between the two, and that in such contexts where they co-occur, one could well refer specifically to bird-divination.

In Egbert’s penitential, under the heading *De Cupiditate Ceterisque Flagitiis* (‘lust and other shameful acts’), there is a five year penance imposed for *augurias vel divinationes*,²⁶³ and the proscription against *auguria* is repeated again under the heading *De Auguriis vel Divinationibus* with the punishment of either

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

²⁶⁰ *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 90.

²⁶¹ *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol 3, p. 190.

²⁶² Filotas, *Pagan Survivals*, pp. 219-33. Although *auspicia/auspex* is not among those she investigates in any detail, the principle still applies.

²⁶³ *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol 3, p. 420

excommunication or doing between one and a half to three years penance.²⁶⁴ The penitential ascribed to Bede repeats the Egbert material almost *verbatim*. It is interesting that there is a definite concern surrounding these practices among the clergy in the penitentials attributed to Bede, Egbert and Theodore. It is tempting to speculate that perhaps, as spiritual leaders, they were under pressure from their parishioners to cater to these less conventional modes of guidance too.

There is one English penitential text I have found which clearly references bird-divination. Even later than Burchard of Worms was writing on the continent, we have the Penitential of Bartholomew Iscanus, a native of Brittany who became bishop of Exeter from 1161 until his death in 1184.²⁶⁵ His penitential is in urgent need of a new edition, for while Adrian Morey's pioneering work *Bartholomew of Exeter, Bishop and Canonist: A Study in the Twelfth Century* is still useful today, the edition of Bartholomew's penitential contained therein has omitted the section on magic.²⁶⁶ McNeil and Gamer edit and translate those folios of London, British Library, Cotton Faustina A.VIII omitted by Morey but do not include the Latin in their edition.²⁶⁷ The only edited source for the Latin is in volume 1 of *Reliquiae Antiquae*, edited by Thomas Wright and James Halliwell, and even then this includes only the descriptions of activities and omits the penances.²⁶⁸ I thus quote from Wright and Halliwell and supplement my translation with the penances from McNeil and Gamer:

Qui corniculæ vel corvi cantu vel obviatione presbyteri vel alicujus animalis aliquod prosperum seu adversum evenire crediderit.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

²⁶⁵ *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, ed. and trans. by J. T. McNeil and H. M. Gamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 346.

²⁶⁶ A. Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter, Bishop and Canonist: A Study in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: University Press, 1937).

²⁶⁷ *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, ed. and trans. by McNeil and Gamer, pp. 346-350.

²⁶⁸ *Reliquiae Antiquae. Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts, Illustrating Chiefly Early English Literature and the English Language*, ed. by T. Wright and J. Halliwell, 2 vols (London: John Russell Smith, 1845), I, 286.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Those who believe the songs of a small crow or raven or meeting a priest or any other animal can cause favourable or unfavourable outcomes [shall do penance for seven days].²⁷⁰

As with the evidence surveyed above, the raven and crow emerge as key creatures, and again the focus is on the vocalizations. Unlike Burchard's proscription (below), direction and movement are unimportant. Furthermore, Bartholomew's proscription states clearly that the belief allows for both favourable and unfavourable omens to be imparted via the bird's calling.

The most extensive account of augury in Germanic penitentiary writing is that in Burchard of Worms' *Decretum*, begun shortly after the year 1000 A.D.²⁷¹ When discussing the consultation of wizards (*consuilsti magi*), he mentions *auguriis* among their practices, though without explicitly mentioning birds.²⁷² Of particular interest to this study, however, are the elaborate proscriptions against bird-divination found in two successive sections of Book 20 of his *Decretum*. It is worthwhile quoting these in full:

Credidisti quod quidam credere solent? Dum iter aliquod faciunt si cornicula ex sinistra eurom in dexteram illis cantaverit, inde se sperant habere prosperum iter. Et dum anxii fuerint hospiti, si tunc avis illa, quae muriceps vocantur, eo quod mures capiat, et inde pascatur nominata, viam per quam vadunt ante se transvolaverit, se illi augurio et omini magis committunt quam Deo. Si fecisti, aut ista credidisti, quinque dies in pane et aqua debes pœnitere.

Credidisti quod quidam credere solent? Dum necesse habent ante lucem aliorum exire, non audent, dicentes quod posterum sit, et ante galli cantum egredi non liceat, et periculorum sit eo quod immundi spiritus ante gallicinum plus ad nocendum potestatis habent, quam post, et gallus suo cantu plus valleat eos repellere et sedare, quam illa divina mens quæ est in homine sua

²⁷⁰ Own translation with consultation of *Medieval Handbooks*, p. 350.

²⁷¹ G. Austin, *Shaping Church Law Around the year 1000: The 'Decretum' of Burchard of Worms* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), p. 1. Following Austin, I too refer to the collective authorship of this work as 'Burchard' even though he certainly had help. See pp. 16-17.

²⁷² *PL* 140 p. 960.

fide et crucis signaculo? Si fecisti aut credidisti, decem dies in pane et aqua debes pœnitere.²⁷³

Have you believed what some people are accustomed to believing? If, when they make a journey, a crow cries from their left side towards their right, they hope to have a prosperous journey because of it. And when they worry about lodgings, if that bird which is called the mouse-catcher, because it catches mice and is named after what it feeds on, flies across in front of them, across the road on which they travel, they trust this augury and omen more than they trust God. If you have done, or do believe these things, do penance for five days on bread and water.

Have you believed what some people are accustomed to believing? When they need to go out somewhere before daylight, they dare not go, saying that it is the morrow and it is not permitted to go out before cock crow and that it is dangerous because unclean spirits have more power to harm before cock crow than after and that the cock by his crowing is more potent to banish and restrain them than that divine mind that is in a man by his faith and the sign of the cross. If you have done or do believe this, do penance for ten days on bread and water.²⁷⁴

These passages are written in an unclear Latin, particularly in relation to the precise actions surrounding the crow's calling in the first half of the description. Filotas remarks that she finds this 'odd... since the crow is normally considered to be an ill-omened bird.'²⁷⁵ However, we have seen the crow and its call in divinatory roles before, and the qualification that these omens are taken before journeying fits the description of *auguria* being taken by Claudius, a servant of King Guntram of the Franks, in Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* VII.29. The possibility that the crow could bring good as well as evil tidings also ties in with what we have seen of the *krákr* in *Rígsþula*, Edwin's men listening to the *cornix* in the *VGM*, and even Bartholomew Iscanus' penitential. However, there seems to be a combination of this with the Classical notion of the crow's call from the left (or a raven's from the right)

²⁷³ PL 140, pp. 970-1.

²⁷⁴ Translation based on *Medieval Handbooks*, p. 337.

²⁷⁵ Filotas, *Pagan Survivals*, p. 241.

being a good omen,²⁷⁶ and it is not inconceivable that the practice here is influenced by Roman paganism – yet even if this were the case, its correspondence to a practice of bird-divination elsewhere among Germanic peoples suggests that there may have been a native foundation for the Roman practice to influence, and the idea of the crow's calling being a good omen if its direction of travel were to the right seems unlikely from a strictly Classical standpoint.

It is not clear what the identity of the *muriceps* is: McNeil and Gamer identify it as an owl, though this interpretation is doubtlessly informed by the well-known Classical beliefs of owls being birds of omen.²⁷⁷ A. E. H. Swaen and Kitson argue for the OE cognate *mushafoc* denoting the buzzard,²⁷⁸ but the chances of this particular bird flying in front of a traveller is extremely unlikely given its penchant for soaring at great heights. I am inclined to interpret *muriceps* as a literal translation of what now exists as German *Mausehabeicht*, and *mushafoc* in the Old English, i.e. some kind of hawk.²⁷⁹ We have seen some suggestions of non-corvid divination in the literature, such as the *igður* in *Fáfnismál*, the unnamed bird at the beginning of *Helgaqviða Hjörvarðssonar*, and the bird-language knowledge of both Konr Ungr and the valkyrie in *Hrafnsmál*.

The cock-crowing proscription is peculiar. Underlying this, I think is something biblical: Christ tells Peter that the latter will deny him before the cock crows three times.²⁸⁰ If I am correct about this, then the existence of this proscription offers tantalising insight to how the process of religious syncretism could go awry. It is necessarily speculative, but it is possible that a non-Christian – or newly converted Christian – provided with this example would interpret the situation as not emphasizing Peter's human nature and the potential for even an apostle to do wrong, but as evidencing that there existed malign influences capable of turning the apostle against his master. Malign influences, it could be interpreted, which were only

²⁷⁶ Y. Bonnefoy, *Roman and European Mythologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 96.

²⁷⁷ *Medieval Handbook*, p. 337, n.44.

²⁷⁸ A. E. H. Swaen, 'Some Old English Bird Names', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 118 (1907), 387-9, at 389; Kitson, 'Old English bird-names (II)', 9.

²⁷⁹ Whitman, 'The Birds of Old English', 167, agrees that it is 'impossible to determine what species of hawk bore this name [*mushafoc*] in OE', let alone what bore it in eleventh-century Worms.

²⁸⁰ Matthew 26:34, 74-5, Luke 22:34, 60-62, John 13:38; in Mark 14:30 it is before the cock crows twice.

banished after three (or two) crows by the cock. Such an interpretation would only be possible, however, if there were a natural point of syncretism, such as a pre-existing belief in the power of a bird's voice. The incitement of the *anfloga* and the cuckoo in *The Seafarer*, and the counsel of the crow in *Rígsþula* or the *igður* in *Fafnismal* is not unlike the cock's crow forcing the dispersing of evil spirits; in each case there is a verbal instigation followed by an intended result.

It would appear that on both counts a concession must be made for an apparent conflation of beliefs – Classical on the one hand (with the directionality of the crow's call and *muricep*'s flight), and Christian on the other. In the other evidence surveyed the birds are usually stationary and communicate their portents orally. With a system of beliefs as decentralized and unregulated as paganism there is always the possibility for regional variance or small-scale innovation: this may be one such example.

Visigothic and Frankish penitentials of the eighth and ninth centuries further furnish our examples of prohibited bird-divination among Germanic peoples, a coincidence which cannot be without some meaning when compared with the absence of proscriptions against divining with birds in the Irish penitentials. The Burgundian penitential and the Bobbio penitential (sometimes known as the *Iudicium penitentiale* appended to the Bobbio Missal) resemble each other in their first thirty-eight articles,²⁸¹ and the Paris penitential resembles these in repeating the first thirty-three articles.²⁸² The former are both dated c.700-725 (it is unclear which came first),²⁸³ the latter c.750.²⁸⁴ Article 24 in all of these penitentials explicitly prohibits the consultation of auspices, 'whether he takes auguries by birds or any evil talent' (*si per aues aut quocum que malo ingenio auguriauerit*).²⁸⁵ It is interesting that the prohibition against taking auguries is separate here to the consultation of soothsayers

²⁸¹ Hen, *Culture and religion*, p. 183.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Medieval Handbooks*, pp. 273, 278.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

²⁸⁵ For simplicity's sake, all of the quotes and references are to the Burgundian penitential in *Bussbücher und kanonische Bussverfahren*, ed. by H. Schmitz (Gras: ADEVA, 1958), pp. 319-22; this article (XXIII) is on p. 321. For the Bobbio penitential see *The Bobbio Missal: A Gallic Mass-Book. Volume 2: Text*, ed. by E. A. Lowe (London: Harrison and sons, 1920), pp. 173-6; for the Paris Penitential see *Liber sacramentorum Romanae ordinis anni circuli – sacramentarium Gelasianum*, ed. by L. C. Mohlberg (Rome: Herder, 1960), pp. 254-9.

(which is the following article, XXV), implying that perhaps specialist knowledge was not required to consult omens by birds. The periods of penance for the crime indicate the close relationship between the English and Continental penitentials. Theodore's penitential prescribes five years penance for the laity guilty of divining or consulting diviners and immediate excommunication for members of the clergy, and Egbert's penitential prescribes three years penance for clergy, two and a half for the laity and the threat of excommunication if they do not repent at all. The penitential ascribed by Albers to Bede follows Egbert's. In the *Burgundian*, *Bobbio* and *Paris Psalters* we have these numbers cropping up again: five years of penance, and three on bread and water for consulting diviners (article XXV). Yet oddly we also have the three year prescription for committing the actual act of divination – whether by birds or otherwise. In a study of the current scope one can only guess at the reasons for this: I would tentatively suggest that the numbers we see in the penitentials of Theodore and Egbert(/Bede) derive from the conflation of what was once two separate clauses; one aimed at the act of divination; the other aimed at fraternising with them. The reduction of separate clauses into a single one fulfils the practical consideration of making a portable handbook for confession, and this would also explain the varying levels of detail in different penitentials and the popularity of generic terms such as *divinationes*.

In the earliest English penitentials there are proscriptions against diviners but nothing clearly stating that these diviners used birds. The nature of the penitentials may go some way to explaining this – as handbooks they would have detailed sins only as far as needed in order to keep the books a portable size. However, in the Theodorean penitential it seems probable that either *auguria* or *auspicia* refers specifically to this act, and later, related penitentials on the Continent and in England attest the practice in ways which are consistent with the literary evidence.

Conclusion

A re-examination of the 'beasts of battle' topos reveals hitherto under-appreciated supernatural aspects such as the appearance of these animals before battle, and the

ability to identify, if not decide, those who were fated to die. This supernatural aspect, however, is grounded in what we would incontrovertibly call ‘the natural’ – it seems that ravens, and probably wolves too, would have learned how to identify, and follow, groups of armed men to battle.

In addition to this ‘natural’ underpinning to the ‘beasts of battle’ topos, there is also a mythological underpinning: the belief in the prophetic abilities of the beasts involved. Due to constraints of space I have focused mostly on the corvids, but we have seen that in both Old English and Old Norse these birds turn up outside of ‘beasts of battle’ contexts, speaking tidings that do not necessarily have to do with the spoils of war - the imagery associated with news-bringing birds informed the depiction of the seabirds in *The Seafarer*, for example.

This chapter draws to a close with a perforce discursive array of evidence for there having been a historical belief in talking birds. I carry on examining the reality of this practice of augury in the next chapter, which focuses on the depiction of sparrows in Anglo-Saxon England, but which begins with a discussion of that most famous literary sparrow in medieval literature: the sparrow of Bede’s *Historia* II.13.

Part Two

Christian Bird-lore

Chapter Three

Sparrows in Anglo-Saxon England

In the previous chapter I argued for the historical belief in, and literary usage of, a practice of augury that was of pre-Christian origins. In outlining the historical evidence of augury, I mention that the handling of Edwin's conversion in three texts, the *VGM*, Bede's *Historia*, and Alcuin's *Versus De Patribus Regibus et Sanctis Eboricensis Ecclesiae* also attested to this belief, but warranted a detailed exploration. I begin this chapter by comparing Edwin's conversion in all three to show that the infamous sparrow simile in Bede's *Historia* is probably a fabrication, and that the sparrow simile is introduced to whitewash a tradition in which Edwin is associated with augury. It has been previously noticed that the sparrow simile evokes psalm 83, though very little has been said about the effect of this psalmic allusion in Bede's simile. I argue that the sparrow simile appeals to sparrow images in the Bible generally, and show that all biblical sparrows carry symbolic meanings of the soul and nuances of fore-knowledge. I argue that these nuances were deliberately evoked to add to the force of Bede's simile. Moreover, and in some respects to corroborate this argument, I show that whenever sparrows occur in Old English literature they always allude to the Bible, and subsequently, to souls and fore-knowledge.

Problematising Bede's account

One of the most striking images in Bede's *Historia* is that where the life of man is compared to the flight of a sparrow through the hall (II.13). Before its occurrence the scene is already laden with *gravitas*: the great Edwin of Northumbria, one of the seven kings Bede describes as wielding *imperium* (II.5), has agreed to convert to Christianity but first wishes to discuss it with his counsellors and chief men so that they might all convert with him. It is at this gathering that one Coifi, the chief of

Edwin's priests (*primus pontificum*) openly declares his disappointment with his worship of the pagan gods, and immediately one of king's chief men (*optimatum*) agrees with the following 'wise words' (*verbisque prudentibus*):

'Talis, inquam, mihi videntur, rex, vita hominum praesens in terris, ad comparationem eius quod nobis incertum est temporis, quale cum te residente ad coenam cum ducibus ac ministris tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio et calido effect caenaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemalium pluviarum vel nivium, adveniens unus passerum domum citissime pervolaverit; qui cum per unum ostium ingreditur, mox per aliud exierit. Ipso quidem tempore quo intus est, hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen parvissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens, tuis oculis elabatur. Ita haec vita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidve praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Unde si haec nova doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda videtur.' His similia et cetera maiores natu ac regis consilarii divinitus admoniti prosequuntur.¹

'This is how the present life of man on earth, King, appears to me in comparison with that time which is unknown to us. You are sitting feasting with your ealdormen and thegns in winter time; the fire is burning on the hearth in the middle of the hall and all inside is warm, while outside the wintry storms of rain and snow are raging; and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside, the storm and wintry tempest cannot touch it, but after the briefest moment of calm, it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again. So this life of man appears, but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all. If this new doctrine brings us more certain information, it seems right that we

¹ All references to the Latin are from *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

should accept it.’ Other elders and counsellors of the king continued in the same manner, being divinely prompted to do so.²

The usual interpretation of the sparrow-simile runs thus: man’s life is short, like the flitting of the sparrow through the hall, and life in the present is enjoyable compared to the stormy uncertainties of where one’s origins lie or where one will go after death. However, the ornate syntax, the beauty of the simile and the lexis redolent of Scripture, not to mention our better understanding of Bede’s ideologically-charged rhetoric, all suggest that there is more to this than an aesthetically pleasing comparison.³ Patrick Wormald described Bede as a ‘fundamentalist’, and Roger Ray has shown that we should not be surprised to see Bede follow Biblical precedence and ‘subordinat[e] even the truth to the end in view.’⁴ As Ray Page has noted, “It is known that Bede’s technique allowed him to add material, to invent or elaborate speeches and to develop incidents so as to illustrate points he wanted to make.”⁵

Bede’s use of direct speech in recounting the events of Edwin’s council gives us good reason to be suspicious too, for Roger Ray demonstrates how Bede invented the speeches made in his account of the Synod of Whitby (664).⁶ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill notes that the Latin of the Coifi speech ‘reads like [Bede’s] own’ and he calls the unnamed counsellor’s speech ‘a sophisticated confection.’⁷ Ray Page is rightly sceptical of the verisimilitude of the sparrow simile and draws attention to the curious omissions of any of the other speeches at the council (apart from Coifi’s,

² Translation from *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by J. McClure and R. Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 95-6. Unless noted translations are my own.

³ For the syntax of this passage see D. Shanzer, ‘Bede’s Style: A Neglected Historiographical Model for the Style of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*?’ in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. by C. D. Wright, F. M. Biggs and T. N. Hall (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007), pp. 329-352’, at pp. 334-335. For the scriptural allusions see below.

⁴ P. Wormald, ‘Bede, Beowulf and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy’, in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England: Papers in Honour of the 1300th Anniversary of the Birth of Bede, Given at Cornell University in 1973 and 1974*, ed. by R. T. Farrell, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 46 (Oxford: BAR, 1978), pp. 32-95, at p. 33; R. Ray, ‘The Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions in Pre-Carolingian Historiography’, in *The Inheritance of Historiography*, ed. by C. Holdsworth and T. P. Wiseman (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1986), pp. 67-84, at p. 77.

⁵ R. Page, ‘Anglo-Saxon paganism: the evidence of Bede’, in *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by T. Hofstra, L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald, *Germania Latina* 2 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), pp. 99-129, at p. 108.

⁶ R. Ray, ‘Bede and Cicero’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 16 (1987), 1-15, at 9; *idem.*, ‘The Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions’, pp. 79-81.

⁷ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 71 and 72.

which is itself suspicious) and the problems with unquestioningly accepting the unnamed counsellor's implication that Anglo-Saxon paganism had no belief in the after-life.⁸ Richard North casts further doubt on the authenticity of the specifics of the episode of Edwin's council, seeing not only the sparrow simile but also the figure of Coifi as artfully presented constructs serving 'a narrative that was morally if not factually true.'⁹

Page lamented that '[here] the inadequacy of our own knowledge becomes embarrassing, for we have few means of checking Bede.'¹⁰ Fortunately, in this instance, we do have sources we can correlate Bede's account with, for both Alcuin and an anonymous author also write about the landmark occasion of the first Northumbrian king to embrace Christianity. The latter work is the *VGM*, and it was most likely composed in the decade 704 x 714, some seventeen to twenty-seven years before Bede's composition of the *Historia* in c.731.¹¹ Alcuin's work, the *Versus de Patribus Regibus et Sanctis Eboricensis Ecclesiae* (*Poem on the Bishops, Kings and Saints of the Church of York*) was composed much later than Bede's *Historia*, though it is unclear exactly when. Its latest editor, Peter Godman, proposed either 786 or 790-3 based on Alcuin's return trips to England after joining Charlemagne's court, but its nineteenth century editor Wilhelm Wattenbach assigned the poem to 780-2 'on the grounds that there is nothing in it to indicate that its author was separate from the clergy of the church at York.'¹² The *VGM* has some of the same ideas as Bede's episode though the action takes place slightly after those in Bede's episode. Thus, in Bede's *Historia* Edwin has called a meeting with his council to discuss the embracing of the new faith so that they may all be baptised together at a church hastily put together at York (II.14). In the anonymous *Life* the analogous episode takes place just after Edwin and his men have left the hall where they had been urged to change their unchristian ways and are hastening to the church 'to receive instruction' (*ad caticuminum eorum*) when suddenly:

⁸ Page, 'The Evidence of Bede', pp. 104-105, 110-113. Page writes about Coifi on pp. 104-107, 110, 119-124 and 129. See also North, *Heathen Gods* pp. 176-9, and Wallace-Hadrill's remarks in his *Commentary*, p. 71.

⁹ *Heathen Gods*, pp. 179 and 330-340.

¹⁰ Page, 'The Evidence of Bede', p. 109.

¹¹ *The Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 48.

¹² Alcuin, *The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York*, ed. and trans. by P. Godman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). For both his dating and Wattenbach's see pp. xlii-xliii.

stridula cornix ad plagam voce peiorem cantavit. Tunc omnis multitudo regia que adhuc erat in platea populi, audiens avem, stupor ad eam conversa subsistit, quasi illud cantibum novum Carmen Deo nostro non esset vero futurum in ecclesia, sed falso ad nihil utile.

a crow set up a hoarse croaking from an unpropitious quarter of the sky. Thereupon the whole royal company, who were still in the public square, heard the bird and turned towards it, halting in amazement as if they believed the ‘new song’ in the church was not to be ‘praise unto our God’ but something false and useless.¹³

It is Paulinus’s resourcefulness that saves the day: he commands that the bird is shot down and uses the pre-Christian lore of the catechumens against them:

dicens etiam sibi ipsi avis illa insensata mortem cavere cum nescisset, immo renatis ad imaginem Dei baptizatis omnino hominibus... nihil profuturum prenuntiet

‘‘for,’ he said, ‘if that senseless bird was unable to avoid death, still less could it foretell the future to men who have been reborn and baptized into the image of God.’¹⁴

Rather tellingly, Paulinus’s admonition finishes with a reference to *quas illi ex sua subtili natura ad deceptionem stultorum se scire... iactitant*, which Colgrave expands on for the sake of clarity as ‘yet these foretellers boast that they understand the ways of birds by their own native cunning and so deceive the foolish.’¹⁵

¹³ Quotation and translation from *Earliest Life of Gregory*, Chapter 15, pp. 96-7.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 98 Latin; p. 99 translation.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The version of events recorded in the *VGM* is striking because it contains similar elements to Bede's account with the sparrow simile, as noticed by North;¹⁶ both events take place after Paulinus lays his hands on Edwin's head (and thereby confirming the vision he had seen while in exile) but before the baptism of the group, both contain references to a meeting in a hall and both hinge on a dramatic moment involving a bird. Indeed, at this moment they appear to conflict: Bede's imaginary sparrow vs. the *VGM*'s very real crow; the sparrow's figurative representation of death vs. the literal death of the crow; the sparrow's allegorical affirmation of the need for Christianity vs. the crow's literal attempt at undermining the faith of Edwin's men. At a closer look, however, it is clear that in spite of differing narratives both accounts deal with issues of (fore)knowledge.¹⁷ The unnamed counsellor in Bede's *Historia* suggests the acceptance of Christianity for its knowledge of what happens before and after the life of man, and in the *VGM* Paulinus confronts the belief that the crow possessed foresight and prophetic knowledge. These thematic similarities, as well as their situation at more or less the same moment in time, raise the possibility that both accounts are drawing from the same tradition – and that in one case it was substantially altered. A common Northumbrian tradition is the most likely source for the various episodes that both the *VGM* and Bede's *Historia* share, as neither seems to have been informed by, let alone aware of, the other work.¹⁸ There is an extremely brief but analogous scene in Alcuin's *Versus de Patribus* which contracts the chronological sequence in Bede's *Historia* (its major source) quite dramatically. Here, as soon as Paulinus places his hand upon Edwin's head, the king falls to the ground and pleads Paulinus to tell him how to worship the Christian god. Paulinus replies:

'Foeda procul fugiat primum cultura deorum,
nec pecorum sanguis falsis plus fumet in aris,
nec calidis omen fibris perquirat aruspex,
nec cantus volucrum servet vanissimus augur:

¹⁶ *Heathen Gods*, p. 179. My analysis here draws upon, and expands on, North's argument here.

¹⁷ See also *Ibid.*, where North sees the theme of knowledge here: 'Bede seems to save Edwin and other Deiran worshippers... from the punishment of knowing what they were doing.'

¹⁸ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, pp. 56-59. More recently S. D. Church, 'Paganism in Conversion-Age Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* Reconsidered', *History*, 93 (2008), 162-80, has made the same observation but without discussing the implications of the differences in these accounts, at 175-6.

omnia sternantur fundo simulacra deorum!’

(ll.158-162)

‘First banish afar the foul worship of idols,
on their profane altars, let the blood of animals smoke no more,
nor the soothsayer look for omens in the warm entrails,
nor the meaningless augur attend to the songs of birds:
let all images of the gods be smashed to the ground!’¹⁹

Peter Godman notes with curiosity that ‘in omitting Bede’s account of Edwin’s hesitation before his conversion and of the council that preceded it, Alcuin’s poem excludes perhaps the most poetic simile in Bede: the likeness of human life to a sparrow’s flight through a mead-hall.’²⁰ This omission is even more curious because Alcuin moves the destruction of –the local pagan altar by Edwin’s chief priest Coifi - to after Paulinus’s speech above (and even then only upon Edwin’s command, ll.168-70) and grants Coifi some of the sentiments (and uncertainty) expressed by the unnamed counsellor – while still omitting the sparrow simile:

‘Hactenus incerto mea stamina vita pependit,
obruit et dubiis animum caligo tenebris;
exhinc certa sequar cupiens agnoscere verum
aeternumque Deum, vel si sit vita future,
an tormenta malis, maneant an praemia iustis.’

(ll.173-7)

‘My life to this moment has hung by a thread of uncertainty,
my spirit has been darkened by the shadows of doubt;
henceforth I shall follow the truth, longing to know
the real and eternal God, whether there is a life to come,
punishments for the evil and rewards for the just.’²¹

It may be impossible to know for certain why Alcuin omits the sparrow simile (yet keeps the sentiment), particularly when he draws upon Bede’s *Historia* so

¹⁹ Alcuin, *Poem on the Kings, Saints and Bishops of York*, p. 16 Latin, p. 17 translation.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 17, n.149ff.

²¹ Ibid., p. 18 Latin, p. 19 translation.

extensively. Yet, especially when read in conjunction with the anonymous *Life*, there is something particularly suggestive about the line *nec cantus volucrum servet vanissimus augur*.²² It could be a reference to a tradition in which Edwin and his men were nearly swayed away from the Christian faith by the vocalisations of a bird.

The significance of the sparrow

What is evident from reading the anonymous *Life*, Alcuin's *Versus de Patribus* and Bede's *Historia* together is that the sparrow imagery in Bede's account does not seem to have any basis in a historical tradition (let alone be the actual words spoken by an anonymous member of Edwin's council!). It has been noted before that Bede's phrase *adueniens unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit* ('a sparrow travels swiftly through the hall in flight'), is reminiscent of Psalm 83.4:²³

Etiam passer invenit sibi domum, et turtur nidum sibi, ubi ponat pullus suos.
Altaria tua Domine virtutum: rex meus, et Deus meus.

Even the sparrow has found itself a home, and the turtle-dove itself a nest, where it can raise its young: In your altar, Lord of Hosts, my King and my God (emphasis mine).

There is no exact quotation or paraphrase, but I think Donald K. Fry is correct in suggesting that for an audience familiar with the psalms it would only take the

²² Godman identifies the set of lines condemning pagan practices (ll.159-162) as drawing upon Arator's poem *De Actibus Apostolorum* ii.183-4 in the notes on p. 16 of his edition, but the correspondence seems to me to be rather general. Even if we accept that Alcuin is using Arator here, however, this does not exclude the possibility of *nec cantus volucrum servet vanissimus augur* being particularly meaningful within the context of Northumbrian historical tradition.

²³ This borrowing has also been noticed by M. J. Toswell, 'Bede's Sparrow and the Psalter in Anglo-Saxon England', *American Notes and Queries*, 13.1 (2000), 7-12; North, *Heathen Gods*, p. 179, A. Meaney, 'Bede and Anglo-Saxon Paganism', *Parergon* n.s. 3 (1985), 1-29, at 22-3; D. K. Fry, 'The Art of Bede: Edwin's Council', in *Saints, Scholars and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones*, ed. by M. H. King and W. M. Stevens, 2 vols (Collegeville: Saint John's Abbey and University, 1979), I, pp. 191-207, at pp. 194-6, and Page, 'The Evidence of Bede', pp. 110-1. Note that Psalm 83 in the Vulgate is Psalm 84 in most modern editions of the Bible.

collocation of these words to elicit a comparison between the texts.²⁴ Nor is it ‘hard to imagine’, as T. Major claims, ‘how an allusion to Psalm 83 would add or strengthen the overall literary craft of the simile.’²⁵ From the unnamed counsellor’s perspective – and indeed from that of all the unchristianised council – there is no knowledge of where the sparrow goes once it is out of the hall. Psalm 83, itself centred around the joys of those who have found God,²⁶ describes the sparrow as having found its home in God’s altar. If we accept that Bede’s audience, churchmen for the large part, could draw a comparison between Psalm 83 and the sparrow simile, then there is a dramatic irony in the unnamed counsellor’s statement of ignorance as to ‘what follows after’ (*quid autem sequatur*) the sparrow’s flight: this bird finds itself a home with God. Likewise, by converting to Christianity, Edwin’s men would find a home with God in heaven at the end of their lives.

There are other biblical sparrows with which this passage could be linked. Psalm 10.2 reads *In Domino confido; quomodo dicitis animae meae: transmigra in montem sicut passer* (‘in God I trust; how then do you say to my soul: flee to the mountain like a sparrow’), and M. J. Toswell draws attention to the sparrows in Psalm 101.8 (*Vigilavi, et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto*, ‘I have watched, and have become like a sparrow alone on the roof’) and 123.7 (*Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium*, ‘Our soul has been rescued like a sparrow out of the snare of hunters’) as well as two references in the gospels of Matthew (10:29-31) and Luke (12:6-7).²⁷ Danuta Shanzer independently compares Bede’s sparrow to these gospel passages too, though she suggests that Bede’s ultimate source was Matthew 10:29 and 10:31 on the grounds of Bede’s construction *unus passer*, the *unus* of which she sees not as an indefinite article, but as ‘a vestige of the biblical *unus*, which was a real numeral.’²⁸ To this list we can also add 103.17 (*illic passeris nidificabunt herodii domus dux est eorum*, ‘there the sparrows nest, the house of the *herodius* is superior to theirs’). Tristan Major’s comments that these ‘pedantic nods

²⁴ Fry, ‘Art of Bede’, p. 201.

²⁵ T. Major, ‘1 Corinthians 15:52 as a Source for the Old English Version of Bede’s Simile of the Sparrow’, *Notes and Queries*, 54 (2007), 11-16 at 12.

²⁶ e.g. 83.2 *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum*, ‘how lovely your tabernacles are, Lord of hosts’; 83.5 *Beati qui habitant in domo tua*, ‘blessed are those who dwell in your house’; 83.6 *Beatus vir cujus est auxilium abs te*, ‘blessed the man whose help is from you’.

²⁷ Toswell, ‘Bede’s Sparrow and the Psalter’, pp. 9-10.

²⁸ Shanzer, ‘Bede’s Style’, pp. 335 and 348 n.44.

to biblical reference... should be considered merely coincidence' and that they '[do] not seem to heighten the literary power of the simile' cannot seriously be entertained given what we know of Bede's rhetoric.²⁹

As others have pointed out before, the sparrow is frequently linked to the soul in Scripture.³⁰ This is explicit in the case of psalms 10 and 123 but is still implicit in the human-sparrow equation in the other psalms because of theological notions of the soul as animator of the body and as self.³¹ The sparrow passages in the synoptic gospels are also related to the soul via the Augustinian notion of the soul as seat of reason,³² as can be seen in Bede's own commentaries on them. As the contents of these commentaries are not widely known I have included large excerpts of both here. Bede's commentary on Matthew 10:29-31 reads:³³

Nonne duo passeress asse veneunt, et unus ex illis non cadit super terram sine patre vestro. Hic est sensus: Si parva et vilia animalia absque Deo auctore non decidunt, et in omnibus est providentia; vos qui aeterni estis, timere non debetis, ut absque Dei providentia vivatis. Quaerat aliquis quomodo dicat Apostolus: Nonquid de bobus cura est Deo? cum utique bos pretiosior existat. Sed aliud est cura, aliud providentia.

Vestri autem capili capitis omnes numerati sunt. Denique hic numerus non in actu est comparationis, sed in facultate cognitionis.

*Nolite ergo timere: multis passeribus meliores estis vos. Meliores dicit, quia rationales, et ad imaginem Dei creati.*³⁴

²⁹ T. Major, 'the OE version of Bede's Simile of the Sparrow', p. 12.

³⁰ Toswell, 'Bede's Sparrow and Psalter', passim.

³¹ As in, for example, Genesis 2:7: Formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terrae, et inspiravit in faciem ejus spiraculum vitae, *et factus est homo in animam viventum* ('Then the Lord God made man out of the mud of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, *and man became a living soul*', emphases mine).

³² E.g. in Augustine's *De quantitate animae*, PL 32, Chap. 13, p. 1048: Si autem definiri tibi animum vis, et ideo quaeris quid sit animus; facile respondeo. Nam mihi videtur esse substantia quedam rationis particeps, regendo corpori accommodata ('But if you wish to define the soul, and therefore ask me "what is the soul?", I have a ready answer. It seems to be to be a particular substance endowed with reason, suited to rule the body'). Own translation based on *St Augustine: The Greatness of the Soul: The Teacher*, ed. and trans. by J. M. Colleran (New York: Newman Press, 1949) p. 40.

³³ I must thank Richard North here for his generous assistance with, and corrections to, my translations of Bede's commentaries here.

³⁴ PL 92, p. 55.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not a single one of those falls to the earth unknown to your Father. This is the sense: if even a small and worthless animal cannot fall without God's authority, and His providence is in all things, you who exist forever, must not fear that you may be living outside of God's providence. Some may ask, just as the Apostle said, *Surely God does care for the bulls* [I Cor 9:9]? For certainly the bull is of greater value. But care is one thing, providence another.

Moreover, all the hairs of your head are numbered. In short, this number does not reside in one's act of measuring, but in one's faculty of understanding.

Therefore, do not be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows. He says 'worth more' because you have reason, and are created in the image of God.

Unlike the Psalms, where mankind is equated with sparrows, here they are contrasted. The contrast is not a dichotomy, however, but an *a minori* comparison, as Shanzer has previously noted: although the sparrow is small and worthless (*parva et vilia*), it is within God's providence; and man, created in God's image (*ad imaginem Dei creati*), is far more highly valued within the sight of God.³⁵ It does not make sense to force an arbitrary divide between 'mankind' here and their souls, as Bede's commentary clearly refers to mankind in terms of their souls (e.g. *vos qui aeterni estis*, 'you who exist forever') and his references to reason and understanding reflect the previously mentioned Augustinian notion of a *substantia quedam rationis particeps* ('a particular substance endowed with reason').³⁶ Bede's commentary on Luke 12:6-8, though repeating much of the same material, elaborates a little more:

Nonne quinque passerres veneunt dipondio, et unus ex illis non est is oblivione coram Deo? Si minutissima, inquit, animalia, et quae quolibet per aera feruntur volatilia Deus oblivisci non potest, vos qui ad imaginem facti estis Creatoris, non debetis terri ab iis qui occidunt corpus, quia qui irrationabilia gubernat, rationabilia curare non desinit. Dipondius quo

³⁵ Shanzer, 'Bede's Style', p. 335.

³⁶ *De quantitate animae*, PL 32, Chap.13, p. 1048.

quinque passerres veneunt, id est venduntur, genus est ponderis levissimi, ex duobus assibus compositi. Quaerit fortasse aliquis, quomodo dicat Apostolus: *Nunquid de bobus cura est Deo* (I Cor. ix)? cum utique bos passere pretiosior existat. Sed aliud cura, aliud vero est scientia. Denique numerus capillorum de quo consequenter ait:

Sed et capilli capitis vestri omnes numerati sunt, non in actu computationis, sed in facultate cognitionis accipitur...

*Nolite ergo timere, multis passeribus pluris estis. Non pluris estis, legendum, quod ad comparationem numeri pertinet, sed pluris estis, hoc est majoris apud Deum meriti, dignitatis, et aestimationis, quam innumera passerum, vel corpora, vel genera computamini.*³⁷

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies, and not even one of them is forgotten in the presence of God? This says that if God cannot forget such miniscule tiny animals, even those which fly everywhere through the air, then you who are made in the image of the Creator, must not be afraid of those animals which kill the body, for He who governs unreasoning animals does not cease in caring for reasoning animals too. Where five sparrows go for, that is sold for, two pennies, their kind is of the lightest weight, of a weight composed of two coins. Someone perhaps may ask, just as the Apostle says, *Surely God cares for the bulls* since a bull is everywhere held of greater value. But care is one thing, and knowledge is another. And then, for the number of hairs, he consequently says:

But even the hairs on your head are all numbered: This is taken not in the act of calculating their number but in the faculty of one's understanding... *Therefore do not be afraid: you are more than many sparrows.* It must be read not as 'you are more' in regard to measuring number, but 'you are more', as in greater of merit and rank and value both in body and in kind before God than infinite sparrows.

There are few differences between Bede's commentaries on Matthew and Luke. While they both stress the superiority of man compared to any other animal (in the

³⁷ PL 92, pp. 488-9.

eyes of God) and link the number of hairs with understanding (*facultate cognitionis*), they differ subtly in the detail of what the sparrow-man comparison illustrates. In his commentary on Matthew the sparrow-man comparison he stresses God's care and providence, whereas in the commentary on Luke the same comparison is used to emphasize God's care and knowledge/reasoning.³⁸ We must be careful not to exaggerate this difference, however, for Bede's use of a parallel formula suggests that knowledge/reasoning and providence are closely related concepts: *sed aliud est cura, aliud providentia* of one mirrors the *sed aliud cura, aliud vero est scientia* of the other, implying a relationship between *vero est scientia* (knowledge) and *providentia* (Providence). Later we shall see how closely related these two concepts are, both in the Bible and more widely in the Old English, but for now it is worth noting their linkage here.

Furthermore, in both commentaries Bede differentiates the care God has for the valuable with the knowledge/providence he has for the less valuable; and man, being even more valuable than the bull, is held in higher esteem for and cared for more by God than the sparrow. This relates to another complex of ideas evident in the synoptic gospel passages cited above (and in the Psalms passages too, explored below): that of knowledge and birds. It is not just the juxtaposition of the hair-on-head as reasoning and sparrow motifs but implicit within the man-sparrow comparison itself; in his comments on Matthew 10:31 Bede interprets the 'better' of *multis passeribus meliores estis vos* as a direct result of mankind's possession of *rationales*.

From a survey of the biblical material associations emerge between providence, (fore)knowledge, the soul and sparrows which are pertinent to our understanding of the literary force of Bede's sparrow simile in *Historia* II.13. It seems arbitrary to nominate any one of these biblical sparrows as the direct source when they all share ideas which pertain to, and enrich, the sentiments put into the unnamed counsellor's mouth, though the use of vocabulary particular to Psalm 83.4 and Matthew 10:29-31

³⁸ Bede's differentiation between the unreasoning (*irrationabilia*) and reasoning (*rationabilia*) animals can also be read as differentiating between those which have souls and those which do not, again reflecting an Augustinian notion of the soul and reinforcing the *a minori* comparison between man and sparrow.

perhaps indicates that these were at the forefront of Bede's mind as he composed the episode. All the psalms (10.2, 83.4, 101.8, 123.7) explicitly link souls to sparrows, while the synoptic gospels (Matthew 10:29-31, Luke 12:6-8) explicitly link sparrows with providence and protection. The link between sparrows and souls is not subtle enough to be termed implicit in the synoptic gospels and the same could be said for the link between sparrows and providence/protection in at least some of the psalms (e.g. in Psalm 10.2 one's trust in God is contrasted with a sparrow fleeing into the mountains; in 123.7 God saves sparrow-souls from snares). Whilst each of these passages depicts the sparrow as an insignificant and miniscule cretin this is only to emphasize, through *a minori* comparisons, the importance of the soul, the magnitude of God's providence and the extent of God's protection. It is interesting, and revealing, that the sparrow-simile uses a similar *a minori* comparison when the life of man is compared to a sparrow's flight through the hall.

In order to see how these very ideas (the importance of the soul, the magnitude of God's providence and the extent of God's protection) are at the centre of Bede's sparrow simile we need only return to the dilemma which the unnamed counsellor uses this simile to illustrate:

Ita haec vita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidve praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Unde si haec nova doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda videtur.

So this life of man appears, but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all. If this new doctrine brings us more certain information, it seems right that we should accept it.³⁹

Latin *apparet* has a more concrete sense than its modern English reflex, and so the sense is perhaps better rendered 'so this life of man is manifest, but for a moment.'⁴⁰ Equally concrete is the advantage that unnamed counsellor singles out: the promise of 'more certain information' (*certius aliquid*) under the new doctrine. Following

³⁹ Translation from *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

⁴⁰ See C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1879), sv. 'appareo'.

Fry's reading of this passage, where certain words (and I would argue, images, such as that of the sparrow) prompt associations with biblical verse,⁴¹ but tampering it with the evidence above which suggests that the entire passage is, in Wallace-Hadrill's words, 'a sophisticated confection' crafted by Bede for a Christian audience.⁴² The phrase *nova doctrina* itself conjures the idea of Christian doctrine. And among the most central tenets of the Christian faith are the beliefs in the eternal soul and in the totality of God's providence; beliefs which find expression in the biblical sparrows and in the questions of what comes before and after the life of man.

Bede's sparrow simile is not alone in using sparrows with their biblical associations with both souls and (fore)knowledge. These ideas have currency in the later, but related, corpus of vernacular literature of Anglo-Saxon England, and are used so diversely as to preclude the possibility of these several texts drawing just on Bede's example. In the next section I collect all the sparrow references in the extant Old English narrative texts and demonstrate that they, like the sparrow in Bede's simile, can only be properly appreciated when read with their biblical associations in mind.

Sparrows and the soul in Anglo-Saxon England

Toswell, in her analysis on Bede's sparrow simile and its occurrence in the Psalter in Anglo-Saxon England, claims that 'the sparrow in connection with a hall is not ... an exclusively Germanic nexus.'⁴³ She is absolutely correct to link Bede's simile with the sparrows and buildings in the psalter but does not make the observation that outside of the glossaries all extant references to *spearwe* (and its variants) are either biblical in nature or biblical allusions. Indeed, the only non-Christian sparrow reference I am aware of within the early medieval Germanic traditions is in a single case preserved in *Ynglingatal*, *Ynglinga saga* and the *Historia Norvegiae*: that of the

⁴¹ Fry, 'Art of Bede', p. 201.

⁴² Wallace-Hadrill, *Commentary*, p. 72.

⁴³ Toswell, 'Bede's Sparrow and the Psalter', p. 8.

quasi-mythological King Dagr of Sweden. In Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga* we are told that *hann var maðr svá spakr, at hann skildi fugls rödd. Hann átti sporr ein, er honum sagði mǫrg tíðindi,*⁴⁴ ('he [Dagr] was such a wise man that he understood the speech of birds. He had a sparrow, which told him many tidings'), and that Dagr was killed by a peasant hurling a pitchfork through his head when he went to Gotland to avenge the death of this same bird. This account seems to be one of some antiquity because it is found in Snorri's source, stanza 8 of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's poem *Ynglingatal* (c.900):

Frák at Dagr	I heard that Dagr,
dauða orði	eager for report,
frægðar fúss, ⁴⁵	sent word of his death
of fara skyldi,	when the wise advancer
þás valteins	of the slaughter twig [=warrior]
til Vǫrva kom	came to Vǫrvi
spakfrǫmuðr	to avenge a sparrow.
spǫrs at hefna. ⁴⁶	

The kenning *valteins spakfrǫmuðr* ('of slaughter-twig' 'wise-advancer') means 'warrior' here: the slaughter-twig is the sword, and its 'wise-advancer' is the experienced warrior who knows how to use it. It is also quite an ironic formulation, as the *spakfrǫmuðr* of this sword is killed ignobly on a mission to avenge a tiny bird. Indeed, as Bergsveinn Birgisson has recently observed, *Ynglingatal* is parodic.⁴⁷ The sparrow here draws on the imagery of augury, but it does so facetiously: rather than a hawk or raven, as is seen so often in depictions of warriors,⁴⁸ Dagr instead has a tiny sparrow. There may even be sexual implications in this.⁴⁹ It bears none of the

⁴⁴ *Heimskringla*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslensk fornrit 26, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritfélag, 1941).

⁴⁵ For a defence of *frægðar* 'report' instead of the alternative *fremðar* 'success', see R. North, *Pagan Words*, p. 113.

⁴⁶ *Skj* B.1, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Bergsveinn Birgisson, *Inn í skaldens sinn. Kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldediktingen* (Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen, 2007), pp. 400-404, esp. p. 401.

⁴⁸ Kulakov and Markovets, 'Birds as Companions of Germanic Gods and Heroes', passim.

⁴⁹ Pheifer, in his edition of *Épinal-Erfurt*, notes that *Épinal-Erfurt* l.435 *fenus spearwe* may be a miswrite for 'penis' (p. 88). This same gloss turns up Second Corpus F.128, and in First Cleopatra l.2455.

hallmarks of a biblical reference, however. It is not employed in an *a minori* comparison, there is no conceivable suggestion of the sparrow signifying the soul and if there is any overlap with providence it is only in the sense that both prophecy and providence have the benefit of foresight.

Appended to the end of this chapter is a comprehensive survey of sparrow attestations in Old English (Fig. 3.1). It aims to be an exhaustive breakdown of the various sparrow attestations in the Old English corpus and the texts to which the sparrow passages allude, though it excludes glossaries and does not indicate spelling variants.⁵⁰ If we count each of these entries as a separate item and overlook multiple manuscript witnesses, we arrive at a total number of 24 texts including sparrow references.⁵¹ Of these, only the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* could conceivably be considered ‘secular’; otherwise every text is overtly Christian in nature. It is also clear that every sparrow reference outside of the psalms is an allusion to a biblical passage, and it will become evident that each of these allusions reinforces the sparrow-soul and sparrow-knowledge associations discussed above.

Ælfric is as good a place to begin as any, and both the texts in which he mentions sparrows the sparrow-soul and sparrow-knowledge associations are clear. In the *Forty Soldiers* the eponymous band are having their legs broken by their persecutors as they sing psalm 123 (*Ure sawl is ahred of grine swa swa spearwa*, ‘Our soul is set free from the snare just like a sparrow’) and *heora gastas ageafon* (‘gave up their souls’) immediately afterwards. To emphasize the link between the sparrow and their souls the image of the snare is used twice before in relation to the foils laid out for them by the devil and their persecutors (ll.80 and 233). The psalm is used in much the same way in the *Lives of Margaret*, for when she is captured by her persecutors she says *Ic eom nu ... swa swa spærwe on nette* (‘I am now... just like a sparrow in a

⁵⁰ The list was compiled using the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus Online* (Toronto: University of Toronto) < <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/> > [accessed 17 September 2012]. Most of the subsequently referenced texts are those from the *DOEC* bibliography, though exceptions to this are noted. I have also noted where the editions have not been available to me and so have been accessed through the *DOE* alone.

⁵¹ I am aware of the arbitrary nature of this division but it forms a convenient point of discussion. Even if we were to tally the number of texts differently (e.g. count the *Lives of Saint Margaret* as several texts) the subsequent points I make would remain just the same.

net'). It is with her martyrdom that her soul is released from her body - the net that had ensnared it.

In the *Life of Euphrosyne* the eponymous lady has disguised herself as a monk and hidden in a monastery to avoid marriage. Her father, who has arranged the marriage, has been searching for her and asked the monks to pray for her. When, after a week of their prayers, she is still not found (we are told this is because she has prayed to God that she is never discovered), the abbot quotes Mark 10:29 and 10:31 to the worried father:

‘Bearn, ne ateora þu for drihtnes þreale, forþam he swincð ælc bearn þe he lufað, and wite þu butan godes willan an spearwa on eorþan ne gefylð. Hu miccle ma mæg þire dehter gelimpan ænig þing butan godes dihte?’

‘Child, do not tire of God’s discipline, because he labours for each child he loves, and you should know that without God’s will not even a sparrow cannot fall to the ground. How much more can anything happen to your daughter without God’s ordinance?’⁵²

As with the gospel passage, the comparison between ill coming to a sparrow and ill betiding a human invites the identification of man with a sparrow though the primary sense here is evidently in regards to God’s knowledge and the protection that comes from being within it.

The same verse from Mark is cited in the material unique to the Worcester/D-text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in its entry for the year 1067, where the primary sense is again to do with God’s (fore)knowledge and protection, though once more with the implicit sparrow-soul connection. The event being described is that the request by - Malcolm III (Máel Coluim mac Donnchada) to marry Edgar Ætheling’s sister Margaret, mindless of her desire to remain chaste out of love for God. Edgar, being

⁵² *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, II, 348. Translation is my own based on Skeat’s and I have punctuated his text.

under Malcolm's protection, is unable to refuse his request. We are then told that despite the apparent wickedness of this endeavour, it actually turns out for the better, for all involved:

Hit wearð þa swa geworden swa God foresceawode on ær, 7 elles hit beon ne mihte, eallswa he sylf on his godspelle sæið þæt furðon an spearwa on gryn ne mæg befeallan forutan his foresceawunge. Se forewitola Scyppend wiste on ær hwæt he of hyre gedon habban wolde, for þan þe heo scolde on þan lande Godes lof ycean⁷ þone kyng gerihtan of þam dweliandan pæðe 7 gebegean hine to beteran wege 7 his leode samod, 7 alegcean þa unþeawas þe seo þeod ær beeode, eallswa heo syððan dyde.⁵³

sub anno 1067

It then happened as God had previously foreseen, and it could not have been any other way, just as He himself says in His gospel that even a sparrow cannot fall into a snare without His foreseeing. The foreknowing Creator knew before what He had desired to do through her, because she must increase the love of God in that land and correct the king from that straying path and turn to the better way, and his people too, and cast aside the evil customs which the nation previously practiced, just as she afterwards did.

The author, or scribe, has apparently conflated Mark 10:29, where a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without God's knowledge, with Psalm 123.7, where the soul is like a sparrow released from a snare. One might suggest the plausible scenario in which the scribe misread a translation of Mark 10:29 or an exemplar containing the word *grund* for *eorðan*, but there is no evidence that suggests that OE *grund* ('lowest part of a thing,' 'bottom,' 'base' and almost always used to translate Latin *fundamenta*) ever translated *terra* (which is almost always translated with *eorðan*), let alone that any vernacular source rendered, or used a rendering of, Mark 10:29 as **an spearwa on grund ne gefylð*.⁵⁴ The standard choice for *laqueo*, the snare of Psalm 123.7, is

⁵³ *ASC, Volume 6. MS D*, p. 82. I have emended the semi-diplomatic text slightly and replaced *geeacnian* with its interlinear gloss *ycean*.

⁵⁴ For the various meanings of *grund* and *eorðan* see *DOE* sv. 'grund' and 'eorþe' respectively. To give but a few of the hundreds of examples of *eorðan* translating *terra* see *Ælfric's Catholic*

gryn.⁵⁵ The possibility of an error is even less likely given the evidence of subsequent corrections,⁵⁶ and in the same entry the author/scribe quotes 1 Corinthians 7:14 in the Latin of the vulgate, suggesting that at some point there was access to at least part of the Bible.⁵⁷ Furthermore, despite the claim that this is *eallswa he sylf on his godspelle sæið* ('just as He says in His gospel'), *foresceawunge* ('foreknowledge') is not in the biblical account, which simply says 'without your father' (e.g. *buton eowrun Fæder* or *sine Patre vestro*). The idea of *foresceawunge* is of course implicit within the verse but it is not immediately apparent, and for this reason is a favourite topic of commentators on it, as we have seen with Bede's own commentary earlier. The presence of this word here, then, suggests that either the author was quoting from memory and was able to contemplate the gospel's meaning beyond the literal, or that the author's immediate source was a commentary or homily discussing the significance of this verse (though still possibly quoting from memory). In either case, it is unlikely that the conflation of the Psalm and Gospel ideas is unintentional.

The combination of the two allusions (to Psalm and Gospel) condenses a sophisticated justification for Margaret's unwilling marriage. There is, of course, the superficial comparison between an ensnared sparrow and Margaret's marriage. More importantly, it is God's *foresceawunge* in this matter that leads to the spiritual rectification of the people in Malcolm III's nation, and their release from the *unþeawas* ('bad customs') which were previously rife parallels that of the sparrow-soul being released from the *gryne* or *laqueo* of Psalm 123.7. By drawing the Psalm and the gospel passages together, the chronicler has emphasized the salvation narrative and its link with providence, drawing particular attention to the benefits that followed an initially ill-seeming event. God deliberately placed Margaret into

Homilies: The First Series, Text, ed. by P. Clemoes, EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) (henceforth *CH I*), p. 191 where *in terra pax hominibus* is translated *on eorðan sib mannum*; in *Der Cambridger Psalter*, Psalm 2.10 translates *iudicatis terram* with *demað eorðan*; and in *Hymnar und Hymnen im englischen Mittelalter*, ed. by H. Gneuss, Buchreihe der Anglia 12 (Tubingen: Niemayer, 1968), Hymn 36.5 has *eorðe* for *terra*.

⁵⁵ See the entries in the *DOE* sv 'grīne, giren, geren,' as well as the Psalm 123.7 in the appropriate psalters in Figure 1.

⁵⁶ For an example see those listed in Cubbin's notes to *ASC, Volume 6. MS D*, on p. 82 alone, where two interlinear glosses are in hands of uncertain date and two are in the original hand.

⁵⁷ As identified by the editors in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, ed. and trans. by D. Whitelock, et al. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), p. 147 n.2.

the snare of marriage with Malcolm, despite her protestations, in order that his people may benefit. Could this entry also be trying to suggest something similar with the Norman invasion a year before? The belief that invasions were a form of divine retribution was wide-spread and surely the faith of some would have been tested in reconciling this with a God who is meant to protect his faithful. A detailed foray into this is beyond the scope of the present chapter, however. What is clear is that in order for the chronicler to be able to combine the imagery of Psalm and gospel to enhance the significance of these events, the relationship of providence, sparrow, and soul must have been relatively easily identifiable to the target audience.

The way the late ninth century *Old English Version of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica* (henceforth *OEHE*) embellishes on Bede's sparrow simile suggests this too. In her recent study of the *OEHE* Sharon Rowley has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that its changes to Bede's *Historia* are the result of conscious manipulation, and that the Old English translator (or translators) not only had an excellent grasp of Bede's work but modifies and recasts themes and ideas in the *Historia* in accordance with their own ideologies.⁵⁸ Generally the *OEHE*'s alterations to Bede's *Historia*, however, are extremely subtle and involve the removal of material (and thus, the creation of new relationships and focuses in what remains) though occasionally there is an 'uncharacteristic' addition of material.⁵⁹ In the *OEHE*'s description of Edwin's council there is only the addition of a few words not found at all in the Latin but their contribution is extremely significant. The unnamed counsellor says

‘þyslice me is gesewen, þu cyning, þis andwearde lif manna on eorðan to wiðmetenese þære tide, þe us uncuð is, swylc swa þu æt swæsendum sitte mid þinum ealdormannum 7 þegnum on wintertide, 7 sie fyr onælæd 7 þin heall gewyrmed, 7 hit rine 7 sniwe 7 styrme ute; cume an spearwa 7 hrædlice þæt hus þurhfleo, cume þurh oþre duru in þurh oþre ut gewite. Hwæt he on þa tid, þe he inne bið, ne bið hrinen mid þy storme þæs wintres; ac þæt bið an

⁵⁸ S. M. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), passim., though here she focuses on particular examples, such as the differing notions of a unified English *gentes* in the two texts (pp. 57-70), or the effects of the repositioning of the *Libellus Responionum* and removing the other papal letters from the *OEHE* (pp. 98-133).

⁵⁹ For an example of this see Rowley, *The OEHE*, p. 84. Rowley notes on p. 4 that ‘the *OEHE* abridges its source by about a third.’

eagan bryhtm 7 þæt læsste fæc, ac he sona of wintra on þone winter eft cymeð. Swa þonne þis monna lif to medmiclum fæce ætyweð; hwæt þær forgange, oððe hwæt þær æfterfylige, we ne cunnon. Forðon gif þeos lar owiht cuðlicre 7 gerisenlicre brenge, þæs weorþe is þæt we þære fylgen'.⁶⁰

OEHE II.10

Thus it seems to me, you king, that this present life of man on earth, in comparison to that time which is unknown to us, is like when you sit at a meal with your ealdormen and thegns in winter-time, and the fire is burning and your hall is warmed and it rains and snows and is stormy outside; and a sparrow comes and flies quickly through the building, it comes in through one door and departs out through the other. Lo, in that time when it is on the inside it is not touched by the storm of the winter; but that is the twinkling of an eye and lasts a moment, and it immediately comes back from winter into winter. So this life of man appears for a brief moment; what came previously, or what follows after it, we cannot know. Therefore if this doctrine brings anything more certain and proper regarding this it is fitting that we follow it.

Tristan Major's concise analysis of the sparrow simile in the OE and Latin reveals that 'the Old English translator is extremely faithful to his Latin exemplar,' even in the syntax.⁶¹ The choice of *ætyweð* which means 'manifest', 'evident', and 'appears' as a translation for Bede's *apparet* is also testimony to the accuracy of the translation.⁶² Major rightly points out two deviations from the Bedan source in the description of the briefness of man's life as *eagan bryhtm* and in the addition of *gerisenlicre* ('more proper', 'more meritworthy') in the closing statement and links the first of these to 1 Corinthians 15:52: *In momento, in ictu oculi, in novissima tuba: canet enim tuba, et mortui resurgent incorrupti: et nos immutabir* ('In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise uncorrupted: and we shall be changed').⁶³ There is no extant Old English translation of this verse of the Bible but the idea is found elsewhere in the

⁶⁰*The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by T. Miller, EETS 95. 96, 110, 111, 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1890-1898), at I, 134-6.

⁶¹ Major, 'the OE version of Bede's Simile of the Sparrow', pp. 13-14.

⁶² DOE, sv. 'æt-eowan'.

⁶³ Major, 'the OE version of Bede's Simile of the Sparrow', pp. 13-15.

vernacular; Major notes that 6 of the 11 occurrences of *bryhtm* and its variant spellings are in connection with *eagan* and that these are found in homiletic texts discussing the end of this life and what follows it.⁶⁴ The second of these additions, *gerisenlicre*, is ostensibly used appositively with *cuðlicre* to translate Latin *certius* – though if this were its only function it would be peculiarly verbose. Major’s identification of a pun here between *gerisenlicre* (‘more proper’) and *gerisen-licre* (more risen/resurrected-like) addresses this peculiarity and reinforces the allusion to 1 Corinthians 15:52, giving the closing sentence the secondary meaning of ‘if this teaching brings anything more certain and *more in accordance to resurrection*.’⁶⁵ The innovations of the *OEHE* thus add an extra dimension to Bede’s sparrow simile by drawing attention to the resurrection (and thus the eternal life that follows the earthly one) – but upon what prompting? If we were to accept Major’s argument, then the translator(s) read Bede’s simile and found it too bleak and nihilistic, prompting the addition of the more positive idea of resurrection.

Yet there are a number of reasons for us to question such an interpretation, not least among them Major’s assumption that Bede’s original simile was devoid of any allegorical significance. One major bone of contention is that the simile is still ostensibly bleak and nihilistic: the *eagan bryhtm* is the brief duration for which the sparrow remains in the hall before facing the winter it came from again, and by extension, the duration of man on earth before facing the unknown before and after this life (regardless of the future resurrection). It seems more likely that the addition of the 1 Corinthians allusion is because the translator(s) identified the biblical reference(s) in the original sparrow simile. To my mind, at least, this is a far more satisfactory (and plausible) scenario than that the translator(s) should merely find the simile a little bleak. At the conceptual level there is an evident synergy between the belief in resurrection expressed in the Corinthians passage and that in the eternal soul frequently associated with sparrows elsewhere in the Bible (and, as I have shown above, not infrequently in the Old English literature). At the literal level, perhaps, the translator(s) struggled to maintain the biblical allusions of Bede’s Latin, while remaining as faithful as possible to his lexis and syntax. As with Bede’s phrase *nova*

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 15 for other texts, pp. 14-15. For *bryhtm* see also *DOE* sv. ‘Bearhtm, Byrhtm.’

⁶⁵ Major, ‘the OE version of Bede’s Simile of the Sparrow’, pp. 15-16, emphasis his.

doctrina, OE *lar* frequently – if not primarily – refers to Christian teaching in the extant Old English, and it surely cannot be a coincidence that the *gerisenlicre* pun is employed in conjunction with this word.⁶⁶

This is not to say that the sparrow-soul and sparrow-providence associations are any less discernible in the *OEHE* than they are in Bede's *Historia*, and indeed, the addition of *eagan bryhtm* only affirms the identification of these assertions. Crucially, it is appended when the unnamed counsellor discusses the duration in which the sparrow is within the hall and out of the wintry storms: *ac þæt bið an eagan bryhtm 7 þæt læsste fæc, ac he sona of wintra on þone winter eft cymeð* ('but that is the twinkling of an eye and lasts a moment, and it immediately comes back from winter into winter'). In the simile, this moment stands for the life of man, and the winter for what is unknown to the non-Christian; and by alluding to the resurrection at this point (rather than anywhere else), this expression emphasizes the continuity between the resurrection and this present life, a continuity that is only possible because of the eternal soul. This is in addition to the implications it retains from Bede's original: the movement of the sparrow through the hall as like that of the soul through the body (i.e. through the world in the body), the knowledge the new doctrine brings regarding this movement (and thus God's knowledge of what happens to the soul and his providence) and the nuances of the sparrows in the psalms and synoptic gospels.

Conclusion

From collecting all extant attestations of sparrows in Old English it is clear that no reference derives from the heroic tradition and that indeed all of them derive from the biblical tradition. This confirms that Bede's famous sparrow simile does not draw upon the actual words of an unnamed counsellor but is, instead, a masterful construction drawing upon biblical imagery. As in the Bible, the sparrows in Old English are often associated with providence, with what is to come in the future. It is tempting to link this with the evidence I have adduced for augury elsewhere and to

⁶⁶ See *BT* sv. 'lār'.

interpret it as the result of syncretism. In the next chapter I examine another eminent biblical bird: the dove. Although the presentation of doves in Old English is more complex than the presentation of sparrows, we will see elements of syncretism (like Bede's use of the sparrow in place of the *cornix*) and the widespread impact of biblical lore there too.

Appendix

Figure 3.1 Sparrows and biblical allusions in Old English

Text	Entry	Allusion	Passage
<i>Ælfric's Forty Soldiers</i> ⁶⁷	II.249-252	Psalm 123.7	Ʒa sungon hi Ʒisne sealm on Ʒære bræce: <i>Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo uenantium et cetera.</i> [Ʒæt is on englisc:] Ure sawl is ahred of grine swa swa spearwa...
<i>Ælfric's Life of Euphrosyne/Eufrasia</i> ⁶⁸	II.218-220	Matthew 10:29-31	... and wite Ʒu butan godes willan an spearwa on eorƷan ne gefylð. Hu miccle ma mæg Ʒire dehter gelimpan ænig Ʒing butan godes dihte?
<i>Life of St Margaret</i> ⁶⁹	Chapter 5 ⁷⁰	Psalms 101.8 and 123.7 ⁷¹	Ic eom nu ... swa swa spærwe on nette
Homily: <i>Nativity of the Virgin Mary</i> ⁷²	-	Psalms 103.17 and 83.4	Ʒa ahof heo hire eagan up to drihtne/ Ʒa geseah heo spearwan nest on anum lawertreowe
<i>The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People (OEHE)</i> ⁷³	II.10	1 Corinthians 15:52 ⁷⁴	cume an spearaw 7 hrædlice Ʒæt hus Ʒurhfleo ... ac Ʒæt bið an eagan bryhtm 7 Ʒæt læsste fæc...
<i>ASC D</i> ⁷⁵	<i>sub anno</i> 1067	Matthew 10:29, Psalm 123.7	...eallswa he sylf on his godspelle sæið Ʒæt furðon an spearwa on gryn ne mæg

⁶⁷ *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, I, 252-254.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 348.

⁶⁹ *The Old English Lives of St Margaret*, ed. and trans. by M. Clayton and H. Magennis, CSASE 9 (Cambridge: University Press, 1994).

⁷⁰ This passage is both in the composite text based on Cotton Tiberius A.iii on p. 114 and in their edition of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 on p. 154.

⁷¹ Clayton and Magennis compare this passage to Psalm 101.8 in their notes to the Latin *Passio S. Margaretæ* (p. 220, n.19), which seems likely as a literal source (*et facta sum sicut passer*, p. 196, cf. *et factus sum passer/ ic eom swa swa spearwe* Psalm 101.8). However, the reference to being a sparrow in a net doubtlessly draws on the imagery on 123.7; and this image is central to the comparison with Margaret's capture by Olibrius' soldiers.

⁷² *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. by B. Assmann, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 3, repr. with introduction by P. Clemoes (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1964), p. 116, via *DOEC*.

⁷³ *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, I, 136. Sharon Rowley and Gregory Waite are, at the time of writing, working on a highly anticipated new edition of this text which will remedy the deficiencies of Miller's, though for the time being this nineteenth century work is the best we have to hand.

⁷⁴ For this see T. Major, 'the OE version of Bede's Simile of the Sparrow', *passim.*,

⁷⁵ *ASC, Volume 6. MS D.*

			befeallan forutan his foresceawunge.
Paris Metrical Psalter	83.3	-	him eac spedlice spearuwa hus begyteð,/ and tidlice turtle nistlað,/ þær hio afedeð fugelas geonge.
	101.5	-	... and ic spearuwan swa some/ gelice gewearð, anlicum fugele.
	103.16	-	... on þam swylce nu mid hero spedum spearwan nystlað.
	123.6	-	Wærun ure sawla ... swa swa neodspearuwa/ of grames huntan gryne losige.
Paris Prose Psalter ⁷⁶	Preface Psalm 10	-	...þa his geferan hine lærdon þæt he hine þær hydde swa þer spearuwa;
	10.1	-	Hwy lære [ge] me þæt ic fleo geond muntas and geond westenu swa spearwa, for þam ic getrywe Drihtne?
Regius Psalter ⁷⁷	10.2,	-	
	83.4	-	
	101.8	-	
	103.17	-	Þær sperwan nystiað, ganotes hus latþeow is heora
	123.7	-	
Stowe Psalter	103.17	-	Ðær sperwan nystiað, wealhhafores hus lateow is heora
Cambridge Psalter	10.2	-	On drihtne ic getruwie hu cweðað ge to sawle minre fer on munt swa swa spearwa
	83.4	-	
	101.8	-	
	103.17	-	
	123.7	-	
Eadwine Psalter	10.2	-	
	83.4	-	
Bosworth Psalter ⁷⁸	101.8	-	
	123.7	-	

⁷⁶King Alfred's Old English Prose Translations of the First Fifty Psalms, ed. by P. P. O'Neill, Medieval Academy Books, No. 104 (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 2001), pp. 109-110. I have used this in preference to the *DOEC*'s source edition which is J. W. Bright and R. L. Ramsay, *Liber Psalmorum: The West Saxon Psalms, Being the Prose Portion, or the 'First Fifty,' of the So-called Paris Psalter* (Boston: Heath & Co., 1907).

⁷⁷ For the editions used for the psalters see above, p. 57, n.120.

⁷⁸ via *DOEC*.

Arundel Psalter	10.2	-	
	83.4	-	
	101.8	-	
	103.17	-	
	123.7	-	
Tiberius Psalter ⁷⁹	10.2,	-	
	83.4	-	
	101.8	-	
	103.17	-	
Vespasian Psalter	10.1	-	
	101.5	-	
	103.16	-	
	123.6	-	
Vitellius Psalter	10.2	-	
	83.4	-	
	101.8	-	
	103.17	-	
	123.7	-	
Stowe Psalter	83.4,	-	
	101.8	-	
	123.7	-	
Lambeth Psalter	10.2	-	
	83.4	-	
	101.8	-	
	103.17	-	
	123.7	-	
Junius Psalter ⁸⁰	10.2	-	
	101.8	-	
	103.17	-	
	123.7	-	
Salisbury Psalter	10.2	-	
	83.4	-	
	101.8	-	
	103.17	-	
	123.7	-	
West-Saxon Gospels ⁸¹	Matthew 10:29	-	Hu ne becypað hig twegen spearwan to peninge; & an of ðam ne befylð on eorðan butan eowrun Fæder
	Matt 10:31	-	Ne ondræde ge, ge synt selran þonne manega spearuan
	Luke 12:6-7	-	Ne becypað hig fif spearwan to helflinge, & an nis of þam ofergyten beforan Gode, ac

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Der altenglische Junius-Psalter*, ed. by E. Brenner, Anglistische Forschungen 23 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1908).

⁸¹ In *The Four Gospels in Anglo-Saxon, Northumbrian, and Old Mercian Versions*, ed. by Skeat.

			ealle eowres heafdes loccas synt getealde, Ne adræde ge eow ge synt beteran manegum spearwum.
Rushworth Gospels ⁸²	Matthew 10:29-31	-	

⁸² Ibid.

Chapter Four:

Doves in Old English literature

Much like the sparrows examined in the previous chapter, the dove seems to have had no real significance in Anglo-Saxon (or indeed, any wider Germanic) culture until the advent of Christianity. Almost all the associations which doves may have in Old English literature can be traced back to Christian influence. Surprisingly, very little has been written about doves in Old English literature, something which may be due to the seemingly obvious connotations of the dove. However, if we look beneath the surface, we will find an intriguing web of popular associations ranging from cultic evidence to popular etymology.

I have two main arguments throughout this chapter. The first, as noted, is that Anglo-Saxon dove-lore is a Christian import. The second argument concerns the way in which this lore was presented to a people for whom the dove had no particular significance. The first aspect to consider here is that other birds were adduced to give force to the dove's symbolism; on one hand the dove's goodness and purity is stressed through a contrast with the raven (a bird which did have a pre-Christian significance); to emphasize the contrast, on the other hand, a swan, a similarly coloured but generally less innocuous bird, was substituted for the dove with all its associations intact. The reasoning for this substitution is not entirely clear, but I suggest that it was made in order to overcome a common misapprehension that the dove did not cut a very impressive figure. I close the chapter by considering, within the larger literary context, a motif of the bird as a soul, a concept that owes a lot to the symbolic associations of the dove.

Old English words for ‘dove’: *culfre* and *turtle*

The extent of the impact of Christianity can be seen in the attested Old English terms for dove. In the extant texts we find only *cul(u)fre* and *turtle* (and the variant *turtla*); *culfre* has no known cognates in the other Germanic languages, and the Germanic cognates of *turtle* all point to individual borrowings of Latin *turtur*.¹ The use of the form *turtur* in some Old English texts makes this borrowing especially clear.² The term indigenous to the OE language, **dufe*, occurs nowhere in the Old English corpus but is attested in Middle English and in the cognate Germanic languages.³ Moreover, cognates of **dufe* are used to translate Latin *columba* in Christian contexts in other parts of the Germanic world, such as in the Old Saxon *Heliand* (*duḅun*, 1.983a) and the Old High German *Tatian* (e.g. *tubun*, XIV.4), and it is curious that Old English uses *cul(u)fre* in preference to **dufe*.⁴

The case not only for *turtur*'s derivation from Latin, but also its derivation from the Bible, is clear from what little usage there is of it in Old English. It is almost always found chiefly in three contexts: as a gloss to, or translation of, Psalm 83.4;⁵ glossing the Latin lemma *turtur*;⁶ and in translations and expositions of the sacrifice of turtle-doves in the Bible (i.e. Genesis 15.9, Leviticus 1:14, 5:7, 5:11, and Luke 2:24).⁷ Elsewhere, the only firmly identifiable reference is in the Durham Ritual, which refers to the beauty of a turtle-dove's neck; this reference is probably firmly rooted

¹ For the cognates and etymology of *turtle/turtla* see E. Seebold, *Kluge. Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 23rd edn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), s.v. ‘Turteltaube’.

² The form *turtur* is found in *The Blickling Homilies*: Homily II, p. 23 (*turturan*), Vercelli XVII, ll.11, 66 and 78 (*turturas*). It is also found in the Vespasian Psalter 83.2 (*turtur*), the glosses to both Linfifarne and Rushworth Luke 2:24 (*turturas*), a gloss in the Durham Ritual (*tvrtvres*) (*Rituale ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, ed. by U. Lindelöf, Surtees Society 140 (Durham: Publications of the Surtees Society, 1927), p. 4).

³ Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. ‘*dubon’.

⁴ In the *Heliand*, *duḅun* is used to describe the descent of the Holy Spirit, in dove-form, at Christ's baptism (*Heliand*, ed. by O. Behagel (Halle: Niemeyer, 1882)). The OHG *Tatian* is a translation of the *Diatessaron*, which harmonizes the four gospel narratives; here it relates Christ's baptism also. The standard edition is *Tatian. Latienisch und altdeutsch mit ausführlichem Glossar*, ed. by E. Sievers (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1892).

⁵ In addition to the expected Psalter glosses this is also true of the metrical Paris Psalter.

⁶ Ælfric's *Grammar*, p. 13 l.20 and p. 48 l.15, Ælfric's Glossary, p. 307 l.11, Second Antwerp, l.1014, Harley 107 l.37, and a glossary edited in Steinmeyer and Sievers' *Die althochdeutschen Glossen*, no.996(c), l.1.

⁷ Blickling Homily II, ll.167-8, Vercelli XVII, ll.11, 66 and 78, *CHI*.9 ll.75-9, 87, 93 and 114-6, and *CHII*.12 l.363.

within the liturgical tradition (perhaps deriving from Song of Songs 4:1-16); to judge from the extant evidence, the idea of a turtle-dove having a beautiful neck did not have much other currency.⁸ The other possible exception is a charter (S 1370, ?961 x 972) referring to a single location called *turlingc ford* (also spelled *turlingcforda* in the genitive).⁹ As it is only attested with these spellings and in this one charter it is not possible to ascertain whether it refers to a place where young turtle-doves breed or whether it is the corruption of a tribal patronymic by some folk-etymology. If this were a genuine case of *turtle* as a place-name element, then it would have implications for the word's use among the general populace; however, it seems more likely that it arose from folk-etymology, because nowhere else do we have the suffix *-ing* affixed to bird-names.¹⁰ It is possible that this ford is named after the descendants of somebody called Turtla, though such an early borrowing of the Latin as a personal name would be surprising.

Old English *cul(u)fre* is more difficult. It is doubtless derived formally from Latin *columba* (as are OIr *columb* and Welsh *colommen*), but the precise path of transmission is unclear: the medial /f/ in the OE word precludes a direct borrowing from the Latin – at least in the form *columba*. Lockwood offers a rather complicated speculation:

The name [*culufre*] derives from Late Latin *columbula*, a diminutive of Classical *Columba* pigeon, in the spoken language contracted to *columbla*, then by dissimilation of the second *l* changing to *columbra*, both stages being attested in modern Romance dialects. The last form can be envisaged as further changing to **colubra*, which in the Latin of Gaul would regularly become **coluvra*, the immediate source of the English borrowing.¹¹

This is the best etymology we have. The form **colubra* is not as tentative as Lockwood makes it sound, as it hardly has to be 'envisaged'. In Vulgar Latin nasals

⁸ *Rituale ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, p. 4.

⁹ S 1370, ll.21 and 27.

¹⁰ For a survey of *-ing* and its meanings see V. Watts, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English-Places* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. xlv-xlvi.

¹¹ Lockwood, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v.. *Culver*.

are often completely omitted before other consonants (e.g. *Decebris* for *Decembris*), and intervocalic /b/ ‘opened into’ the fricative /β/, a sound similar to that represented by Vulgar Latin <v>.¹² This means that *columbra* easily could have developed into Vulgar Latin **colubra*, and that this also could have developed from /kɔlu:bɪə/ to /kɔlu:βɪə/. I do not see any reason why Lockwood should have attributed his postulated **coluvra* specifically to the ‘Latin of Gaul’, when Vulgar Latin was spoken much more widely. At any rate, a street Latin **colubra* could quite directly give us OE *culufre*.

The etymology given above is not without its problems, however. The section on the etymology of ‘culver’ in the *OED* argues that we are not justified in taking *culufre* as an earlier form of *culfre*,¹³ though I find it difficult to imagine how a disyllabic *culfre* could expand into the trisyllabic *culufre*.¹⁴ Furthermore, it may be objected that the conjectured **colubra* would have been identical to *colubra* (‘serpent’), a word which doubtlessly required distinction from ‘dove’, particularly in biblical contexts (e.g. Matt 10:16), though this is not too great an objection given how homonyms can usually be understood from context. It may or may not be significant, on this note, to draw attention to an entry in the Second Antwerp Glossary where OE *culfer* glosses *Coluba*; this may of course be a scribal error, but there is the possibility it reflects a Vulgar Latin form of *columba*.¹⁵

Although much less likely, there is the possibility of the loan coming via Irish or Welsh as the process of intervocalic lenition could also explain the medial /f/ of *culufre*: /b/ lenites to /v/ in Old Irish and /b/ to /β/ in Late Brittonic/Old Welsh.¹⁶ If the Vulgar Latin **colubra* were transmitted through any of these avenues, even

¹² C. H. Grandgent, *An Introduction to Vulgar Latin* (Boston: Heath, 1907), pp. 128 (§306) and 134 (§318). The omission of nasals before consonants must predate late Vulgar Latin as they are reinforced before the Romance languages, p. 128 (§306). The development of /b/ into /β/ ‘apparently began in the first century’, p. 134 (§318).

¹³ *OED*, s.v. ‘culver’, n.1, <accessed 5th February, 2013>.

¹⁴ Campbell supposes that the form *culufre* is earlier when he includes *culfre* in his section on the loss of medial vowels after short syllables; see A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford: OUP, 1959), §388-389.

¹⁵ Second Antwerp I.1003.

¹⁶ See K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, 2nd rev. edn, with an introduction by W. Gillies (Dublin: Four Courts, 1994), pp. 486-495 (§98-101), esp. 489-93 (§99-100). The lenited form of British /b/ (/β/), corresponded to Old English /f/. See *Ibid.* p. 558 (§138).

before the development of /b/ to /β/ in Vulgar Latin, then we would also arrive at the appropriate medial /f/ in *culufre*. However, we can discount the transmission of the particular forms *columba*, *columbra*, *columbla* or *columbula* via these pathways because the consonantal cluster *mb* always remains unlenited in Old Irish,¹⁷ and in Britonic and Old Welsh the cluster *mb* normally assimilates into *mm*, which does not lenite either.¹⁸ As mentioned above, OE *cul(u)fre* can hardly be derived directly from Latin form *columba*, or indeed any of the forms containing the medial *mb* cluster, as there is no evidence for OE /f/ equating to (or developing from) Latin /mb/, and there is nothing to explain the appearance of the penultimate /r/ in *cul(u)fre* either. Therefore, due to these phonological considerations, the most probable origin of OE *cul(u)fre* is a Vulgar Latin form of *columba*. Moreover, the transmission and borrowing of the word seems to be rooted firmly within an oral milieu: the word reflects oral transmission and borrowing.

Whether the etymology given above is accepted or not, it is clear that *cul(u)fre* cannot be a native Old English word; like *turtle/turtla* it is borrowed, ultimately, from Latin. As we shall see, all the extant uses of *culfre* and *turtle/turtla* in the literature are expressions of biblical imagery; and the combination of this usage with the Latin origins suggests that both words were introduced into the language for the sole purpose of Christian instruction. Additionally, there are very few place-names bearing this word, and I have been able to find only three, from three separate charters, that date from the pre-conquest period. As shown below, the use of *cul(u)fre* in place-names must mean that they enjoyed some kind of popular currency, and that by the time these place-names were used people were comfortable with identifying the species of bird indicated by *cul(u)fre* within their landscape. In a Kentish charter dated 19 November, 838, King Æthelwulf grants one hide of land to archbishop Ceolnoth, and one of the boundary-markers was a certain *culfransola* ('dove's mire');¹⁹ another charter, c.900, noting grants of land around Somerset, mentions a *culfrandene* ('dove's valley');²⁰ and finally, a charter dated 972,

¹⁷ R. Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, trans. by D. A. Binchy and O. Bergin, repr. with supplement (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1998), p. 76 (§121(b)).

¹⁸ Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 508-509 (§111-112).

¹⁹ S 286. This survives in the Mod.E. placename Culverstone, attested as *Culversole* in 1381, see Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.v. 'Culverstone Green'.

²⁰ S 1819.

concerning the restoration of land to Pershore Abbey from King Edgar, mentions a *culfran mere* ('dove's lake') among its boundary markers.²¹ This is the extent of Old English charter evidence I have been able to find. In addition to this, there are a number of place-names involving doves which are attested in the Domesday Book, and although these probably reflect terms with currency in the Old English period, it is difficult to say how old they are. There we find *Duvelle*,²² *Dwweland*,²³ *Nortdufelt*,²⁴ and *Suddufel(d)/Suddufelt*,²⁵ and it is important to note that all these terms use the native **dufe* rather than *cul(u)fre*. Other extant place-names containing 'dove' or 'culver' postdate the conquest, and presumably reference the dovecotes brought over by the Normans,²⁶ though there is at least one *cul(u)fre* place-name attested in early modern English that has a possible claim to Old English antiquity.²⁷ This means that there are 3 definite occurrences of *cul(u)fre* in Old English place-names and a further one plausible one in Culver Cliff. One may have expected more dove place-names, but there are many false friends which give the impression that 'dove' place-names are more common than they actually are. Space permits only a few illustrative examples. Culverthorpe, though ostensibly 'dove-farm', more plausibly represents OE **calf-weard* ('herdsman') given that its early extant spellings are *Cal(e)warthrop(e)* and *Kilwardthorp*.²⁸ Similarly, Dousland, attested as *Doveland* in the late thirteenth century, stems from a surname (i.e. 'land of the Dove

²¹ S 786.

²² Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.v. 'Duffield' (= 'dove-field')

²³ Ibid., s.v. 'Dowland'. It is problematic because early spellings point to **dugol/*dugel* as the first element (Ibid., s.v. 'Dolton'). The view that it represents *dufe* ('dove') + *feld* ('field') + *land* is acknowledged by Watts but put forward with more confidence by A.D. Mills, ed., *A Dictionary of British Place-Names*, rev. edn (Oxford: OUP, 2011), s.v. 'Dowland'.

²⁴ Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.v. 'Duffield, North'.

²⁵ Ibid., s.v. 'Duffield, South'.

²⁶ See Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.vv. 'Cullercoats' (= 'dove-cotes'), first recorded c.1600, and 'Dufton' (= 'dove-town', 'dove-farm'), first attested 1176, may imply a dove-cote. 'Dow Grag' (= 'dove-crag'), first recorded 1863, does not reference a dove-cote but it is attested far too late to be of much value in my discussion.

²⁷ Culver Cliff, on the Isle of Wight, first attested as *Culver Cleues* in 1550 (sv. 'Culver Cliff', in Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*), is plausibly from the Old English period and grounded in observation, as *Columba livia* (the rock dove, from which feral city pigeons are descended) nest on cliffs. Culver Cliff is still a nesting site for *Columba livia* and there is no reason to suppose that this site was not used for breeding in the Anglo-Saxon period. See *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*, ed. by J. T. R. Sharrock, et al. (Tring: British Trust for Ornithology, 1976), pp. 240-1.

²⁸ Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.v. 'Culverthorpe'.

family’),²⁹ and Dove Dale and Dove Holes both stem from the river Dove, itself from Primitive Welsh **duβ* (‘dark’).³⁰

It may be worth noting that the three *cul(u)fre* place-names in Old English are from the south (though we must remember that surviving charter evidence is skewed in this respect); the northernmost of these is the *culfran mere* near Pershore Abbey in Worcestershire. The south-western slant of these place-names, in keeping with a greater concentration of Roman settlement, is consistent with the Vulgar Latin origins of *cul(u)fre*, although these places would also be more susceptible to influences from the Continent.

We may find further evidence to support a Latin – and Christian – borrowing of *cul(u)fre* into Old English through the exclusively Christian significance accorded to the bird in vernacular literature.

Dove-lore in Anglo-Saxon England

Most Anglo-Saxon dove-lore is biblical in nature.³¹ The image of the Holy Ghost appearing in dove-form at Christ’s baptism is the most popularly invoked, appearing in the lives of Machutus and Margaret, the OE *Martyrology*, Vercelli homily XVI, the OE *Vitae Patrum* and in five of Ælfric’s homilies (*CHI.7*, I.22, I.30, and II.3). This topos is closely related to the idea of the soul leaving the body in dove-form. Although both these ideas, Christ as dove and the soul as dove, are expected and may be called obvious, a closer analysis of Old English texts reveals some surprising results. One of these is the degree to which the concepts of doves as spirits (both

²⁹ Ibid., s.v. ‘Dousland’.

³⁰ Ibid., s.vv. ‘Dove Dale’, ‘Dove Holes’ and ‘river Dove’.

³¹ Though this may seem self-evident, it is worthwhile contrasting this with the Classical pagan religions and the religions of the Romano-Celts, where doves do seem to have had significance. See M. Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 215-6 and 222.

divine and human) are derived not just from biblical but also from patristic tradition: one reference can be traced specifically to Gregory the Great, both in terms of his work and in terms of traditions surrounding him. This is consistent with what we know about Gregory's influence, but it is important in giving us insight into just how extensive this was. Another surprising find is a seemingly old use of swans in place of doves to represent both Holy Spirit and human soul; the reasons for this are not clear from the evidence, but it seems probable that underlying this decision is some hesitation over endowing as inconspicuous a bird as a dove with such important significance. Before examining these rather sophisticated aspects of doves in Old English, however, their basic characteristics must first be ascertained. Below I shall outline the most commonly attributed qualities and associations of the dove, and then focus specifically on a single term, *bilewit*, which encapsulates these qualities and became so closely associated with the dove that the word was reinterpreted as 'bill-white'.

A number of other biblical themes involving doves are attested in Old English, though they are not discussed in detail here because they are rather straightforward and do not seem to reflect any popular (mis)conceptions. The Old Testament practice of sacrificing a pair of doves or turtle-doves, referred to in Genesis 15:9, Leviticus 1:14, 5:7, 5:11, and Luke 2:24, is repeated often in homiletic texts (Vercelli homily XVII, ll.11, 66 and 78; Blickling homily 2, ll.166-7; *CHI*.9 ll.75-146; *I*.28 ll.87-92, 164-173; and *CHII*.12, l.362) and given exposition as signifying purity, whether generally (Vercelli XVII.77-8,), or as a human quality (*CHI*.9.111-3, *CHII*.12.362). Related to this are the dove-sellers scattered from the temple, whom Ælfric interprets as signifying incompetent teachers of the faith (*CHI*.28.172-4); in this case the doves symbolize both spiritual matters and the purity of proper faith. The well-known dove in Noah's ark (Gen. 8:8-12) is not attested widely, though it will be discussed below, as it was presumably fundamental in the development of the contrast between doves and ravens. Some biblical ideas appear to have no currency in the extant literature. The scattering of the dove-sellers from the Temple (Matt 21:12, Mark 11:16, John 2:14-15) appears only in a single homily by Ælfric (*CH* I.28), and the psalmic image of being endowed with the wings of a dove appears nowhere outside of the psalms,

though this passage may influence, if it is not indeed a source for, the idea of the soul leaving the body in dove-form.

The characteristics we associate with the dove today, such as gentleness, meekness and purity were equally prominent in Old English. The presentation of these qualities is of interest for two reasons. Firstly, as just noted, the term used for all of these qualities, *bilewit*, is an unusual OE word that becomes so closely linked to the dove specifically that it becomes understood as ‘bill-white’; secondly, while these qualities doubtlessly became admirable traits with the consolidation of Christianity and Christian values within Anglo-Saxon England, their unheroic nature means that they are often presented in contrast to the raven, a bird which often embodies qualities that might be termed ‘heroic’.

The Dove, white bills, and *bilewitnysse*

To begin with, it makes good sense to examine the qualities attributed to the dove in Old English literature. Unsurprisingly, given the Latinate etymology of *cul(u)fre*, as well as the bird’s significance in biblical texts, all of the dove’s characteristics given in the vernacular literature (innocence, harmlessness and purity) can be traced to biblical sources. Sometimes these are set up deliberately in contrast with heroic (and at times, heathen) values, rather than just being exhortational; I shall explore these instances below. At other times these qualities are plucked out of the Bible with little modification. Thus, Matt 10:16, *Estote ergo prudentes sicut serpentes, et simplices sicut columbae* (‘therefore be as wise as serpents and as simple as doves’), where the word *simplices* connotes honesty and guilelessness,³² is included unamended in the Alfredian translation of Gregory’s *Cura Pastoralis*, where the quotation is included in a tract on the need to admonish the simple (*bilwite*, Chap.XXXV),³³ and in Ælfric’s homily for the tenth Sunday after Pentecost (*Dominica X post*

³² Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. ‘simplex’.

³³ *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, ed. by H. Sweet (Oxford: OUP, 1871), pp. 236-7.

Pentecosten).³⁴ When it is emended, it seems to be because there is some concern regarding the place of the snake, rather than reflective of any concern – or indeed any particular reaction – towards the dove. The Old English *Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang*, closely following the Latin original, invokes Matt 10:16 with a neat rhetorical flourish in its section addressing the conduct of archdeacons and other office-holders (*prauoste*):

Ðam ærceþiacone 7 þam þauoste gebyrað þæt hi beon swa snottre swa
næddran 7 swa milde swa culfran, þæt is þæt hi beon wise on gode 7
bylewite on yfele
(Cap. VIII)³⁵

It pertains to the archdeacon and to the office-holder that they should be as wise as an adder and as meek as a dove, that is, that they should be wise in good and innocent in evil.

The *Rule* interprets, and embellishes, the maxim ascribed to Christ through symbolic chiasmata. It augments the adage by appealing to other well-known associations of the snake and dove (namely, of evil and good respectively), and then extrapolates by considering the admixture of serpent-like and dove-like qualities in the referent of the Matthew proverb; in this case, archdeacons and monastic office-holders. Crucially, this chiasmus is not the author's own invention, but draws upon no less an authority than Paul: *Sed volo vos sapientes esse in bono, et simplices in malo* (Romans 16:19). This exact combination is repeated in the Alfredian *Cura Pastoralis* (Chap.XXXV), though with the authority of Christ and Paul invoked explicitly. The resulting concoction, in both these texts, pairs dove and snake qualities: the serpent's wisdom with the dove's goodness, and the dove's innocence with the serpent's evil. The *Liber Scintillarum* perhaps indicates an ideological motivation for this coupling when it glosses Matthew 10:16 *drihten segð on godspelle beoð eornostlice snotere swa næddran ond anfealde swa culfran* ('the Lord said in the gospel: be earnestly wise as an adder and as simple as a dove'),

³⁴ *Supp.* II.17, ll.223-229.

³⁵ *The Old English Version of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang*, p. 17.

introducing *eornostlice* where the Latin has no counterpart in order to resolve the problematic issue of taking the evil serpent as an exemplar.³⁶

The Old English *Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang* and the Alfredian *Cura Pastoralis* both use the word *bylewite* to render the Latin *simplices*. This in and of itself is not remarkable, as *bilewit* is relatively common in Old English, with around 110 occurrences, and attested with the meanings ‘pure’, ‘innocent’, ‘virtuous’, ‘meek’, ‘gentle’, and ‘simple’.³⁷ What is remarkable is that this word undergoes folk-etymologizing because of its association with the dove. H. D. Meritt, analyzing some of the unusual methods of word-formation in Old English, included *bilewit* in a brief section on folk-etymologised words, noting that ‘*bilewit*, ‘innocent’, was written also as *bilehwit* and may have been associated with such a literal meaning as ‘bill-white.’³⁸ It should be pointed out that doves do not have white bills. The *OED* still offers the speculation, available to Meritt in its previous guise as the *New English Dictionary*, that the word was interpreted as white of bill, ‘like a young bird,’ based on spellings with a medial <h>, e.g. *bilehwit*.³⁹ This interpretation is bolstered by the spelling of the word in Middle English as *bilewhit*,⁴⁰ and the process of folk-etymologising can be seen in the way that *-hw-* spellings are not attested until the second half of the tenth century.⁴¹ What both the *OED* and Meritt’s suggestions overlook, however, is that ‘white of bill’ does not – and cannot – equate simply to ‘like a young bird.’ While this idea fits quite nicely with *bilewit*’s meanings of ‘innocent’ and ‘meek’, it does not square so well with its meaning of ‘virtuous’, or that not all young birds have white beaks, or indeed with the lack of corroborating evidence to suggest that young birds were thought to have white beaks in Anglo-Saxon England. What we do have is evidence that the word *bilewit* was so closely linked to the dove that this influenced its interpretation, and below I set out to demonstrate this intimate link and thereby refine the suggestions offered by Meritt and the *OED*.

³⁶ *Liber Scintillarum*, chap. 18, l.1, accessed via the *DOEC*.

³⁷ *DOE*, s.v. ‘Bile-wit, bile-wite’.

³⁸ H. Meritt, ‘Some minor ways of word-formation in Old English’, in *Stanford Studies in Language and Literature: 1941 Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of Stanford University*, ed. by H. Craig (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1941), pp. 74-80, at p. 75.

³⁹ *OED*, s.v. ‘bilewhit’.

⁴⁰ *MED*, s.v. ‘bile-whit’.

⁴¹ *DOE*, s.v. ‘Bile-wit, bile-wite’.

In order to prove this link we must first examine *bilewit* in its own right. Its etymology is uncertain, but it probably consists of two elements, *bile* + *wit*, in which the former is related to Middle Irish *bíl* ('good') and Greek *φίλος* ('dear', 'beloved').⁴² On one occasion we find OE *bile* glossing Latin *mitia* ('mild', 'gentle'),⁴³ which the *DOE* suggests is a fragmentary form of *bilewit*.⁴⁴ However, it is possible that *bile* here is the first element of the *bilewit* compound occurring by itself; this is certainly likely given the meanings of the posited cognates for *bile*. The second element is much less clear; the *OED* suggests that it may be *wit* ('mind', 'intelligence') and this would make good sense (i.e. 'good-minded', 'good-natured').⁴⁵ If we accept that *bilewit* is formed of these two elements ('good' + 'mind'), then some of its usage reveals the extent to which it was, by the tenth century at least, highly influenced by the semantics of Latin *simplex*, which it frequently glosses and translates. The second element, *wit*, has nuances of cunning and cleverness which appear to be old; compare the allied OE terms *wita* ('wiseman', 'counsellor'), *witt* ('wits'), and *witan* ('to know', 'to be aware'). This is true of its Germanic cognates too, where prefixes have to be included to pejorate the meaning, e.g. Gothic *un-witi* ('foolishness', 'ignorance') and ON *þr-viti* ('out of one's senses').⁴⁶ This is in contrast with two instances, collected by the *DOE*, in the Old English *Rule of St Benedict* and the *Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang*, in which *bilewit* has the pejorative meaning of 'dull-witted'; in both cases it translates Latin *simplex*, for which both the sense of 'straightforward' and the pejorative were prominent meanings.⁴⁷

The equation of *bilewit* with *simplex* is important because it gives us a clue as to how the dove becomes so closely associated with *bilewit*. As we saw above, *bilewit* was used to translate *simplices* in the Old English *Rule of Chrodegang* and Alfredian *Cura Pastoralis* renderings of Matt 10:16. In the Alfredian text, *culfre* and forms of *bilewit* are coupled three more times; twice in the same chapter as the Matthew quote

⁴² Orel, *Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, s.v. '*bilaz'.

⁴³ This gloss is in Aldhelm's *De laude virginum*, in *Old English Glosses*, ed. Napier, 1.5.

⁴⁴ *DOE*, s.v. 'bile-wit, bile-wite'.

⁴⁵ *OED*, s.v. 'bilewhit'.

⁴⁶ Orel, *Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, s.v. '*witjan'.

⁴⁷ *DOE*, s.v. 'bile-wit, bile-wite', 3.d.; Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. 'simplex'.

and once in a later chapter when explaining why the Holy Spirit appeared in dove form (Chap.XL). Both the Rushworth Gospel gloss and at least one West-Saxon Gospel manuscript (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 140) translate *simplices* in Matt 10:16 with *bilwite* and *bylwite* respectively, and if this were indicative of a standard translation of Matt 10:16 then this would be adequate grounds for a widespread connection between doves and *bilewit*. However, the Lindisfarne gloss has *mildo* for *simplices*, and as we saw above, the *Liber Scintillarum* has *anfealde*, problematising this possibility.

More than anywhere else, it is Ælfric who links the dove with *bilewit*; whether this is merely symptomatic of the chance survival of Old English texts or whether we should credit Ælfric with popularising this connection is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to say.⁴⁸ It is doubtful we will ever be able to ascertain whether the link between doves and *bilewit* in the two possibly related Alfredian texts (the *Dialogues* and the *Cura Patoralis*),⁴⁹ as well as the possibly early tenth-century OE *Enlarged Rule* are the result of a developing popular association,⁵⁰ though the use of *bilewitre heortan* in the latter suggests that a meaning of ‘bill-white’ was not yet present.⁵¹

Most often Ælfric reiterates Matt 10:16, although sometimes he incorporates other bits of biblical lore too. Thus, in his homily for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

⁴⁸ Ælfric links *bilewit* with doves in *CHI*.9, l.110, l.22.162-3, l.26.53-4, l.30.133-4, l.38.143, *CHII*.3.169-170, II.12.362, *Supp.*II.17.229, and in a Homily for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin (in *Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. Assman, pp. 24-48).

⁴⁹ For these texts as complementary educational tools for children of the nobility aspiring towards Church offices, see K. Dekker, ‘King Alfred’s Translation of Gregory’s *Dialogi*: Tales for the Unlearned?’, in *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, ed. by R. Bremmer, jr., K. Dekker, and D. F. Johnson (Paris: Peeters, 2001), pp. 27-50, esp. p. 48, and D. F. Johnson, ‘Why Ditch the *Dialogues*? Reclaiming an Invisible Text’, in *Source of Wisdom*, ed. by C. D. Wright, F. M. Biggs and T. N. Hall (Toronto: University Press, 2007), pp. 201-216, esp. 207-8.

⁵⁰ For the possibility of the OE *Enlarged Rule* being early tenth century see M. Drout, ‘Re-Dating the Old English Translation of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang: The Evidence of the Prose Style’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 103.3 (July 2004), 341-68.

⁵¹ The Old English translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues* links these *cul(u)fre* and *bilewit* when a priest named Spes dies and his soul is seen leaving his body in dove form (IV.11). We are told that this is so because *se God ælmihtiga of þære ansyne gecyþde, hu se arwyrða wer him hyrde, 7 mid hu bilwitre heortan he him þeowode* (‘God could make known by this sign, how worshipful man had tended to him, and how he had served him with a gentle heart’). All references to the OE *Dialogues* are to *Bischofs Wærferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. by Hecht, I.

(*Supp.* II.17, ll.223-229), he merely repeats Matt 10:16,⁵² whereas in his homily on Purification (*CHI*.9) he expands the Matthew passage slightly and says that *culfran sint swiðe unsceððige fugelas and bilewite* ('doves are very blameless and gentle birds', l.110).⁵³ Ælfric also rates *bilewitnysse* as among the most important of the embodied qualities when discussing the dove's suitability to represent the Holy Spirit (e.g. *CH* I.30.133-5). In his homily on Epiphany (*CHII*.3) he explains the Holy Spirit's appearance in dove-form at Christ's baptism as signifying qualities Christian men should have, in this case, *þæt he hæbbe bilewitnysse ðære culfran* ('that he should have the innocence of the dove', l.170), a point he repeats later along with the quality of *unscæððignysse* ('blamelessness', l.188). In a similar vein, Ælfric explains the idea, common in commentaries on the Song of Songs, that the dove symbolizes Mary, again using *bilewitnysse*: *heo is an culfran gecweden on bocum for ðære bylewitnysse þæs beorhtan geleafan, þe ða Cristenan men for Cristes lufe healdap* ('she is called a dove in books because of the purity of that radiant belief, which Christian men hold for Christ's love', *Assman* III, ll.101-2). He repeats this idea in another homily for the Assumption of the Virgin (*CHI*.30, ll.135), this time because Mary *lufode þa bilewitnysse þe se halga gast getacnode* ('loved the purity which the Holy Spirit symbolised'). In addition to these explicit connections between doves and *bilewit(nysse)*, Ælfric also implicitly links them, as does the Vercelli homily on epiphany (*Verc* 16). In the case of the latter, the dove is described as a white creature, in the guise of which the Holy Spirit descended over Christ at his baptism; subsequently Christ is described as coming to *middangearde þæt he wolde mancynne bilhwit & eapmod geweorþan* ('the middle-earth because he desired that mankind become pure and humble', ll.113-120). The implicit connection here is that mankind's journey towards becoming *bilewit* stems from Christ's divine presence, affirmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in dove-form at his baptism. Ælfric articulates the dove's active participation in this in his homily on Epiphany (*CHII*.3, see above), though generally his implicit associations are not as tenuous as in the Vercelli homily. In his homily for Mid-Lent Sunday he reads the sacrifices offered in the Old Testament figuratively, noting that *culfran we offriað, gif we soðe bilewitnysse on urum mode healdað* ('we offer doves, if we truly bear virtue in our

⁵² There are other homilies which give the sense, even if they do not use the wording, of Matt 10:16, e.g. *CHI*.38, l.143: *culfre is bylewite nytenu* ('the dove is a mild creature').

⁵³ For Ælfric's sources for the bird's *unscæððig* nature see M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS s.s.18 (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 73, n.107-17.

minds', *CHII.12*, ll.2-3), quite clearly linking one's mental *bilewitnysse* with the dove. His homily on St Peter and St Paul (*CHI.26*), drawing upon Bede,⁵⁴ relates how Christ calls Peter *culfran bearn for þan ðe he wæs afillled mid bylewitnysse* ('son of the dove, because he was filled with gentleness', l.53), clearly demonstrating the perceived link between *cul(u)fre* and *bilewit(nysse)*.

It is one matter to show that *bilewit* and *cul(u)fre* collocate; it is another to show that this collocation coloured *bilewit*. Above I have shown that both Meritt and the *OED* thought that the use of the medial *-hw-* cluster suggested a popular association with 'whiteness', and whilst this is highly plausible, it must be pointed out that there is no clear link between *-hw-* spellings and the word *cul(u)fre*. This may simply be due to scribal preferences, but occasionally the spellings alternate even within a single text – even when accompanied by a dove reference. To illustrate: in Ælfric's Tenth Sunday after Pentecost homily (*Supp.II.17*), we find *bylehwite swa swa culfran* (l.229) alongside *culfran is swiðe bilewit* (l.249). Indeed, across the Old English corpus we find that there is a preference for spelling *bilewit* without a medial <h>, even when paired with a dove. This is not to say that this excludes the possibility of folk-etymology (which it certainly is), nor that it problematises the influence of doves on the word. It simply means that further evidence must be sought in other types of text.

Conceptually this perception of *bilewit*, used so often of the dove, as *bilehwit* ('white of bill') is straightforward: the dove's whiteness was widely known and frequently emphasised, particularly in terms of its denoting the qualities of innocence and purity. It hardly bears mentioning that it was equally well-known that the dove, being a bird, had a bill, but it is not so well-known that birds' bills indicated their nature in Old English literature. Thus, in the *Seven Sleepers* the carrion-birds which feast on the flesh of the martyrs are described as carrying chunks away in *heora blodigon bilon* ('in their bloody bills'), and other carrion-eaters are similarly described in terms of their bills, such as the *hyrnednebb*a ('horny-beaked') carrion-bird in *Judith* (l.211b) and the similar *hyrnednebban* raven in *Brunanburh* (l.62a). It

⁵⁴ Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 213, n.52-5.

is also easy to overlook the significance of the description of the two ravens which tear up Cuthbert's house in Ælfric's homily on the *deposito* of Cuthbert as working *mid heardum bile* ('with hardy bills', *CHII.10*, 1.192), where this description stresses the damaging capacity of the birds. Therefore, the folk-etymologising that led to *bilehwit* was not the result of an older association of young birds with white bills, but rather of the prevalent association of *bilewit* with doves, subsequently leading to a widespread understanding of its component parts as referring to features of the dove (i.e. its bill and whiteness). The word *bilewit* is so important in this context because it is one of few indicators of any interaction between the mechanics of popular conception (and, therefore, popular perception) and the indefatigably Christian doves, whose associations are with the realms of extremely bookish Christian knowledge.

I would like to round off this discussion of *bilewit* with a brief examination of two descriptions from the so-called *Prose Phoenix*. Both descriptions pertain to the eponymous bird's beak: firstly we are told that *his breost and bile brihte scineð fægere and fage* ('his breast and bright bill shine beautifully and ornamentally'); secondly, that his *fet synden blodreade begen and se bile hwit* ('feet are both blood-red, and the bill white').⁵⁵ Only the former beak-description has any parallel in *The Phoenix* poem in the Exeter Book which reads

... þæt nebb lixeð
 swa glæs oppe gim, geaflas scyne
 innan ond utan
 (ll.299b-301a)

...that beak glistens like glass or a gem, the jaws shine on the inside and outside.⁵⁶

Both the features mentioned in the *Prose Phoenix* easily lend themselves to symbolic

⁵⁵ *The Phoenix*, ed. by N. F. Blake (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), Appendix II, p. 95.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Carmen de ave phoenix* ll.129-136 in Appendix II of *The Phoenix*, ed. by Blake.

interpretations: the shining breast and beak foreshadow the bird's fiery death and rebirth, the blood-red feet foreshadow the phoenix's death and its Christ-like quality of resurrection, and the white bill lends it a dove-like aura of simplicity, innocence and purity. The last item, however, is curious. In both manuscript witnesses to this homily, *se bile hwit* is written as an elliptical phrase without the expected copula *is*.⁵⁷ This is not unusual in itself, but this precise detail – of the phoenix's white bill – is a rather selective translation of the *Carmen's Albicat insignis mixto viridante zmaragdo/ Et puro cornu gemmea cuspis hiat* ('The stainless beak opens, set with gems, it is marked white and mingled with green precious stones', ll.135-6), especially when we compare it with *The Phoenix's* rendering of this on ll.299b-301a, above. It does not help that the relationships between the so-called *Prose Phoenix*, the *Carmen de ave phoenice* and *The Phoenix* are unclear and disputed, and especially so where the composition of the *Prose Phoenix* is concerned.⁵⁸ However, whether the *bile hwit* in the *Prose Phoenix* draws on the vernacular or Latin verse version here, there has either been a misunderstanding (which I think unlikely), or, more likely, it represents a conscious manipulation of the source material.

I do not think that this innovation occurred sporadically, but was rather suggested by the Latin source's description of the Phoenix's feet:

Crura tegunt squamae fulvo distincta metallo;
Ast ungues roseo tinguit honore color.
(ll.141-2)

Scales cover the leg with a distinct reddish-yellow metal;
but the claws are tinged red with dignity.

If the *Prose Phoenix* did indeed derive its description of the Phoenix's red feet from Latin verse, which is very possible given *The Phoenix* describes the bird's feet as

⁵⁷ F. Kluge, 'Zu altenglischen Dichtungen: 3. Zum Phönix', *Englischen Studien*, 8 (1844-5), 472-9.

⁵⁸ See A. J. Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, CSASE 32 (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 169-171 and the notes and references therein.

fealwe ('tawny', l.311a),⁵⁹ then it is possible that behind *his fet synden blodreade begen and se bile hwit* lies something like **his fet synden blodreade and bilehwite* ('his feet are blood-red and virtuous'), where perhaps *bilehwit* renders Latin 'honore' in 'roseo honore' ('with (red) dignity'). If this posited textual origin is credible, it may have come about through a connection to the other quintessential Christian bird, the dove. Until we better understand the composition of the *Prose Phoenix* this idea must remain a speculation, but it would explain the origins of the curious white-beaked attribute of the Phoenix, as well as give visible testimony to the popular understanding of *bilewit* as *bile hwit*.

***Corvidae* and doves**

One of the arguments running throughout this chapter is that there was virtually no dove-lore indigenous to the Anglo-Saxons, and that in some cases they were so reluctant to endow a bird as inconspicuous as a dove with symbolism that they displaced its associations on to the more majestic swan. This is examined in the next chapter. While the fundamentals of the dove/corvid contrast are inherited from Christian tradition, most notable in the story of Noah's ark, it will be seen that occasionally the Anglo-Saxons manipulated their texts to exaggerate this.⁶⁰ The raven, richly imbued with non-Christian connotations as well as with the authority of well-known poetic *topoi*, serves to reinforce Christian qualities of the dove. Paradoxically, it is the symbolic gravity of the raven which empowers the dove, and consequently, the qualities associated with the dove. In my comparisons I shall introduce the corvid first, and the host of negative qualities associated with it, which, whether stated or implicit, become the centre of attention. The dove, introduced

⁵⁹ The *Prose Phoenix* frequently repeats short phrases from *The Phoenix*, suggesting that the *Prose Phoenix* author had access to the vernacular verse. For a list of these see *The Old English Elene, Phoenix, and Physiologus*, ed. by A. S. Cook (Oxford: University Press, 1919), pp. 128-132. It is also worth noting that the translator may have recognised OE *fealwe* as cognate with Latin *fulvus* ('tawny').

⁶⁰ I use 'corvid' here because both ravens and crows are contrasted with doves.

subsequently, will then be seen as fuelled by the sheer bulk of negativity associated with the corvid. In other words, the positive qualities of the dove are defined inversely, through comparison with the better-known and symbolically-charged corvid. This contrast is also notable because it undermines the much older theriophoric naming convention, by making human associations with the raven which were positive, negative.

Although preserved only in late manuscripts, and despite being steeped wholly in the Christian tradition, the Old English translations of Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis* are typical of this relationship.⁶¹ Drawing on the Genesis account of the flood and Noah's ark, and following Alcuin's Latin quite closely, they berate those who defer from converting to Christianity by comparing these procrastinators to the raven. The comparison is centre stage, and the link between the good Christian and dove is only implicit. For the sake of convenience I quote from the older version contained in Cotton Tiberius A.III (s.xi med.):⁶²

Nu, hwonne þu cwyst cras, cras, þæt is tomorgen, tomorgen. Cras eawla þæt is hræfnes stæfn. Se hraefen ne gecyrde na to Noes earce, ac seo culfre cyrde.

Now, when you say 'cras, cras', that is 'tomorrow, tomorrow'. 'Cras', alas, that is the sound of the raven. The raven did not return at all to Noah's ark, but the dove returned.

The description preceding the dove reference is exclusively about the raven; the dove has no description and is only offered as a contrast. This passage is all the more striking given that nothing pre-empts its imagery. Immediately preceding this is a passage warning us not to defer conversion, but the first mention of anything remotely avian is here. All of our attention is firstly on the mysterious sound *cras*, which quickly goes from being interpreted as 'tomorrow', to invoking the connotations of the raven's voice, to the raven launched from Noah's ark. Although the dove is only explicitly contrasted with the last detail (i.e. that the dove returned

⁶¹ For the dating of these see chapter 1.

⁶² For a comparison with the later (s.xii) Cotton Vespasian D.XIV, see chapter 1, above.

to the ark), implicitly it stands to contrast all of the raven's other associations, including the deceitful nature of its cry. The force of this contrast is so great that rhetorically this figure suggests the rapidity with which the pure and innocent man (symbolised by the dove) embraces conversion despite the fact that there is no such implication of speed in Genesis (and indeed, in *Genesis A* we are told that the bird *rume fleah* 'flies widely' before returning, l.1456).

This contrast is used similarly in one of Ælfric's homilies on Epiphany (*CHII.3*), albeit in a much more subtle form. He spends a good deal of the homily engaged in a detailed discussion about the manifestations of the Holy Spirit (ll.134-91), particularly with respect to its appearance in dove-form at Christ's baptism, mentioned earlier in the homily (ll.72-3). The pattern here is slightly different to that seen in *De virtutibus et vitiis* and the *VGM* (examined below). Rather than beginning with the corvid and subsequently moving on to the dove, the emphasis in this homily is very much on the dove. The Holy Spirit appears in dove form because it signified the meekness and gentleness of Christ's humanity (*þæt Crist wæs on ðære menniscnysse swiðe liðe and unhearmgeorn*, ll.154-5), and Ælfric not only draws upon, but also declares, for his audience, the authority of written precedents to support this signification (ll.158-61). This is worth quoting:

We rædað on bocum be ðære culfran gecynd, þæt heo is swiðe gesibsum
fugel, and unscaððig, and buton gealan, and unreðe on hire clawum, ne heo
ne leofað be wýrmum, ac be eorðlicum wæstmum.

(ll.158-61)

We read in books about the nature of doves, that she is a very peaceful bird,
and harmless, and without gall, and unaggressive in her claws, nor does she
love worms, but instead the fruits of the earth.

Godden notes (on the *Fontes* database) that the source for this is probably a Bedan homily,⁶³ but elsewhere articulates that the relationship is less than straightforward:

⁶³ Specifically homily I.12, M. Godden, 'The Sources of Ælfric's Catholic Homilies 2.3', ll.153-8 (Cameron B.1.2.4.028.02)', 1997, *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*.

‘Bede’s interpretation is very different, focusing mainly on the application to the individual Christian, but Ælfric uses some of his details to develop the interpretation of the dove.’⁶⁴ Godden also notes that ‘there is no close parallel to Ælfric’ for this section.⁶⁵ Ælfric has deviated from his sources here, and I suggest that his purpose was to make a contrast with two other birds mentioned subsequently in this homily: the kite (*glida*) and the raven (*hremm*). The addition of the raven in this homily is particularly significant for two reasons. Firstly, this second series homily draws heavily from Ælfric’s Pentecost homily from his first series, and the raven is completely absent in that text (*CHI.22*). Secondly, the raven occurrence is doubly conspicuous because Ælfric avoids them entirely in his first series of homilies, and only mentions them in three homilies from his second series: on Cuthbert (II.10), on Benedict (II.11) and on Epiphany (II.3). It may not be too bold to venture that Ælfric was generally reluctant to use them, given the invasions of Scandinavian pagans in recent years and the importance which we have seen accorded to the raven. It is certainly notable that of the three homilies where Ælfric mentions ravens, two feature the ravens in prominent episodes in his sources (Cuthbert and Benedict). This leaves only the raven in his homily on Epiphany unaccounted for, and Godden notes that the ‘parallels [for this passage] are not close.’⁶⁶

The raven reference in question here complements the kite, and the passage reads:

Ac se man ðe næfð godes gast on him, he nis na godes. Se ðe facn lufað, and smeað hu he mage him sylfum gestrynan and na gode, næfð he na culfran ðeawas, ac hæfð þæs blacan hremmes. Se ðe reaflac lufað, he bið glida and na culfre. Oðre lytel fugelas sind læssan þonne heo sy, and hwæðere hi ofsleað sum ðing, huru ðas fleogan; ne deð seo culfre na swa, ne leofað heo be nanum deaðe.

(II.181-7)

But the man who does not have God’s spirit in him, he is not of God. He who loves deceit, and considers how he may gain for himself and not for God, he

⁶⁴ Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 367, n.150-67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 368, n.182-7.

does not have the manners of a dove, but has those of a black raven. He who loves plunder, he is a kite and not a dove. Other little birds are less than she (i.e. the dove) is, and they nonetheless kill something, at least flies; the dove does not do this, she does not live by the means of any death.

Godden suggests that this passage was ‘probably influenced by Augustine’s long discussion of the dove and comparisons with the raven and kite and other birds’, but the parallels Godden draws particular attention to correspond, by his own admission, only quite generally.⁶⁷ Ælfric had used the kite before in his homily on Andrew (*CHI*.38.150), and in that case had also contrasted it with the dove, though in that homily Godden identified the source as a homily by St Gregory the Great.⁶⁸ As the kite appears nowhere else in Old English literature, but quite frequently in Latin texts, it is most likely that the kite’s association with rapaciousness (OE *reaflac*) was not a widespread Anglo-Saxon idea and was borrowed via these popular Latin works.⁶⁹ We might speculate that the raven was introduced into the kite-dove contrast because of this, but there can be no question that the raven not only augments the contrast with the dove, but displaces both the kite and dove to become the centre of attention.

As the references to the raven, and also the *oðre lytel fugelas*, in *CH* II.3 are unparalleled (or, at least, deviate significantly from their possible sources), they must give us pause for thought. Much like *De virtutibus et vitiis*, above, and *VGM*, below, these references describe the opposite of the dove and what the dove stands for, and by doing so, they emphasize those positive qualities ascribed to the dove. We can also see a more culturally informed comparison taking place here between the dove, unaggressive in her claws (*unreðe on hire clawum*, l.160), and the carrion-tearing raven; the gentleness of the dove’s talons are emphasized even more in this respect by identifying the dove as even less predatory than *lytel fugelas*. This description of the gentleness of the dove’s claws is also in the Old English *Rule of Chrodegang* (ch.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 323, n.143-50.

⁶⁹ In addition to the Gregorian homily and Augustinian tract offered by Godden we find rapaciousness among the kite’s qualities in, for example, Isidore’s *Etymologiae* XII.7.58. Doubtlessly this would have been corroborated by observation of kites and their opportunistic feeding habits too. See *BWP*, II, 31 and 39.

50), and the idea is certainly much older, going at least as far back as Jerome and Cyprian.⁷⁰ However, in the OE *Rule*, Jerome and Cyprian, the dove is not contrasted with the raven specifically, and the fact that Ælfric further mentions how the dove does not live *be nanum deaðe*, probably recalls the raven's profiteering from corpses. Similarly, the dove's nature of being *gesibsum* (l.158) contrasts with the raven's well-known relishing in the conflicts of others. Ultimately, however, these contrasts are much like those in *De virtutibus et vitiis* because they reflect on human behaviour by drawing attention to the undesirability of raven-like (and kite-like) habits. This is most apparent when the dove is re-introduced after the kite and raven: *Se ðe facn lufað, and smeað hu he mage him sylfum gstrynan and na gode, næfð he na culfran ðeawas, ac hæfð þæs blacan hremmes. Se ðe reaflac lufað, he bið glida and na culfre.* The definition here of what constitutes dove-like, therefore desirable Christian, behaviour is expressed in the negative: it is not being self-serving, and it is not being rapacious. Another difference to *De virtutibus et vitiis*, however, is that the characteristics here are arguably heroic, while the raven in *De virtutibus et vitiis* is only associated with paganism and with procrastination.

Another important distinction possibly underlies the corvid-dove contrast in *CH* II.3. The dove is introduced as something which *we rædað on bocum* (l.158), which roots it firmly within the authority of textual tradition. In light of the allegorical exposition of the dove's habits, the textual tradition associated with it may have been identified with the Bible and biblical scholarship, in which exhortations to better living could be read. This would then provide a contrast with the associations of the raven, which by contrast, was the subject of popular lore (such as being prophetic, or relishing in battle). Subsequently, this passage would assert the supremacy of the textual authorities over popular lore. This would fit perfectly with what we know of Ælfric's determination to establish a programme of promoting and upholding orthodoxy;⁷¹

⁷⁰ For Jerome see, for example, homily 60, in *The Homilies of Saint Jerome: 60-96*, trans. by M. L. Ewald, *Fathers of the Church*, vol 57 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1966) at p. 5. For Cyprian see *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, §9, in *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose and Jerome*, ed. and trans. by S. L. Greenside (London: Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 124-142, at p. 130.

⁷¹ M. McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), especially p. 15.

and it would be interesting, though beyond the scope of this thesis, to see if Ælfric reiterates this contrast elsewhere.⁷²

The possibly heroic characteristics, of self-serving and plundering, associated with the raven and kite, are cast into a disapproving light (i.e. of selfishness and robbery). It is possible that contrasts between the raven and dove of the kind which we have just seen contributed to the decrease of *hrefn* elements in theriophoric personal names. It must be stated that we have no records of personal names using *hrefn* in Old English. However, it is reasonable to assume that ‘raven’ names were in use at one point in Anglo-Saxon England given their popularity in Scandinavia and on the Continent. In the former region, where naming is concerned, we find ON Hrafn; and in the latter, Hrabanus Maurus, Chramnesind and Lothar I’s son Chramn.⁷³ Where we do find personal names with raven elements in Anglo-Saxon England, they reflect not OE *hrefn* but ON *hrafn*. Dæghrefn, the Hugish champion in *Beowulf*, is noteworthy but does not constitute evidence of Anglo-Saxon *hrefn*-naming. The PASE (Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England) database returns no hits when searching for names containing *hrefn*, but does return several hits when searching for *hrafn* names (and its spelling variant *hramn*): there are two Hrafn (eleventh century),⁷⁴ one Fastolf Hrafn (mid-late tenth century),⁷⁵ one Hrafnsvatr (mid-eleventh century),⁷⁶ one Hrafnsvatr (mid-eleventh century),⁷⁷ one Hramnwulf (late ninth/early tenth century),⁷⁸ one Lantramn (mid-ninth century),⁷⁹ one Rafnketil (mid-eleventh century),⁸⁰ and one Waldramn (early-ninth century).⁸¹ As these names all show medial <a> rather than <e>, they represent forms of ON *hrafn* rather than OE *hrefn*, and the final –mn of the raven element in Hramnwulf and Lantramn reflects

⁷² It is analogous, but Martin Irvine has shown that Alcuin set up similar dichotomies with the aim of asserting the superiority of the learned (Christian) bookish tradition. See M. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: ‘Grammatica’ and Literary Theory 350-1100* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 332.

⁷³ Both Chramn and Chramnesind can be found in Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, e.g. IV.13 for Chramn and VII.47 for Chramnesind.

⁷⁴ ‘Hrafn 1’, and ‘Hrafn 2’, in *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, <<http://www.pase.ac.uk>> [accessed 9 July 2013]

⁷⁵ ‘Fastolf Hrafn 1’, Ibid.

⁷⁶ ‘Hrafnsvatr 1’, Ibid.

⁷⁷ ‘Hrafnsvatr 1’, Ibid. This may be the same person as Hrafnsvatr, but whether this is the case or not is less important than the attestation and the spelling for my present purposes.

⁷⁸ ‘Hramnwulf 1’, Ibid.

⁷⁹ ‘Lantramn 1’, Ibid.

⁸⁰ ‘Rafnketil 1’, Ibid.

⁸¹ ‘Waldramn 1’, Ibid.

the normal variation found in some words ending in *-fn* in Old English.⁸² It is always dangerous to have any kind of position when confronted with an absence of evidence, but the absence of ‘raven’ names in Old English is especially curious in light of its popularity elsewhere in the Germanic world, and in the corvid-dove contrasts we have a mechanism for depopularising names with raven elements. As we have seen in *CH* II.3, by contrasting the qualities of the raven with the qualities of the dove (and by extension, the good Christian), anyone who is associated with the raven – even if it is only by name – is the opposite of the dove and therefore not a Christian.

To return to Ælfric’s homily, the dove-raven contrast here is unusual because the ordering and weighting of the homily makes clear that the dove (and its associations) were already popular and desirable to the intended audience. Nevertheless, we find a raven reference – which is uncharacteristic of Ælfric – used to emphasize the dove through negative definition. It does, however, present a rather neat inversion of the next item to be examined, the *VGM*, falling as they do at either end of the Anglo-Saxon period.

This example of the corvid-dove contrast *par excellence* is not written in Old English but in Latin. I include it here because it shows the longevity of the contrast and the similarity of its use across over two centuries. In addition, in my next section, I shall argue that the dove, replete with associations of divine knowledge, becomes associated in some cases with the practice of augury. As we have already seen, the *VGM* sets up a contrast between the false prediction given by the *cornix* and the enlightening gifts given by the dove seen upon Gregory’s person. The case here is not as one-sided as it is in the *De virtutibus et vitiis*, below, but the pattern remains much the same: the *cornix* (‘crow’) is introduced first (in chap.15, and the dove is introduced in chap. 26), much more detail is devoted towards the nature and implications of the *cornix*’s actions than for the dove, and the presentation of both birds as perceived donors of divine knowledge invites a comparison between them. It is also worth pointing out that the *cornix* is the centrepiece of chapter 15, whereas the dove is only presented to corroborate chapter 26’s overarching concern with ‘the

⁸² Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §484.

heavens being opened up thereby' for Gregory (*illa celi aperti sunt*), that is, with his access to the divine.

Especially pertinent to my argument here is that it is the falsity and deceit of the *cornix* in chap.15 which enhances the veracity of the dove's divine truth in chap.26. That this episode was conceived of as testimony to divine truth and knowledge can already be seen in the preamble to the event described in chap.15, as when the *VGM*-author introduces the *cornix* episode Paulinus having given 'a sign of his God-given wisdom' (*signum Dei sui sapientię*).⁸³ During the episode itself we have the ironic remark that Edwin's retinue are captivated by the *cornix*'s cry 'as if they believed that the "new song" in the church was not to be "praise unto God," but something false and useless' (*quasi illud canticum novum Carmen Deo nostro non esset vero futurum in ecclesia, sed falso ad nihil utile*), which self-consciously invokes the authority of the Bible by quoting Psalm 39,⁸⁴ and after the episode the pagan's desire to be able to understand the *cornix* is contrasted with the baptised, as per Genesis 1:28, having dominion over all living things. Crucially, the end of chap.15 stresses the naivety of the pagans who, not understanding the dominion granted by baptism, trust their avian soothsayers and their *subtili natura* ('inherent cunning') and are so foolishly deceived by them.

In contrast, chap. 26 is entirely about veracity of divine truth. From its opening Gregory is presented as both preacher and prophet: in preparing a homily about Ezekiel, we are told that the heavens opened up for Gregory in the same way they had for his subject. The *VGM* then proceeds quite tenuously from Gregory's exposition of Ezekiel 1:25, which describes Ezekiel hearing a divine voice coming from the heavens, to an account of a parallel miracle (*signum exempli*) to do with *nostro pape* ('our pope'). To stress the theme of divine wisdom further, the *VGM* does not then relate the famous story of the dove on Gregory's shoulder immediately, but provides another biblical miracle of the same type: the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in dove-form at Christ's baptism. Elements from

⁸³ The translation is on *Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 97, under chap.15, but is under chap.14 in the Latin on p. 96.

⁸⁴ Psalm 39.4: *Et immisit in os meum canticum novum, carmen Deo nostro*, 'and he put a new song in my mouth, a song to our God.'

both these biblical miracles feature in the Gregorian dove incident: the Holy Spirit is manifest in dove-form as at Christ's baptism, and Gregory listens (in the *VGM* account) to the divine voice through this manifestation. The dove in the Gregorian episode itself comes to embody a threefold demonstration of divine truth. Firstly, as with all miracles, it is a token of the truth of the Christian god. Secondly, and this is the sense which the *VGM* indulges specifically, it is a sign of Gregory's sanctity (or, in the words of the *VGM*, *aperto celestas signo claritatis*, 'this clear sign of his renown in heaven'). Thirdly, it places Gregory's teachings on the divine as divine in themselves: the homily on Ezekiel, though written by Gregory, is either narrated to him by the Holy Spirit (if this is what we assume it is doing on his shoulder) or it is approved sanctioned by the Holy Spirit's presence.

The *VGM* is often considered a rather clumsy text, and many would agree with Walter Goffart when he observes the author was especially awkward in combining Northumbrian history with a *vita* about the pope.⁸⁵ Here, however, we can find an instance in which the *VGM* was somewhat successful in its aim of combining Northumbrian and Gregorian history, by taking a locally known event and paralleling it quite artfully with a Gregorian anecdote. Below we will see how, in presenting this parallel, the *VGM* presents the dove in an inculturated fashion and uses the practice of augury to fully communicate Gregory's intimacy with the divine.

Doves and augury

The earliest reference to a dove in Anglo-Saxon literature is in the *VGM*, where, as I have noted above, it forms part of a scene that complements and contrasts with the *cornix* which tests Edwin's faith. The *VGM* introduces this episode with such

⁸⁵ W. Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 264.

ambiguity that it is not possible to tell whether this account was acquired verbally or textually:

Ita super hunc virum Dei vidisse quidam dicitur suis satis ei familiaris, albam sedisse columbam, cum in predictum Ezechielem fecit omelias.

So it is said that a certain member of Gregory's household who was very intimate with him saw a white dove sitting upon the man of God while he was engaged in writing these homilies on Ezekiel.⁸⁶

This is clearly modelled on the descent of the Holy Spirit at Christ's baptism, a description of which is given immediately before it:

De qua super eos scriptum est corpore quo ille in filio hominis unigenitus Patris, per virginem Spiritu sancto superveniente factus nasci dignatus est, aqua a Iohanne baptizato, aperti sunt ei celi et vidit, inquit, Spiritum Dei descendentem sicut columbam et venientem super se.

So we read that when John baptized with water the body in which the only-begotten of the Father deigned to be born of a virgin when the Holy Spirit came upon her, the heavens were opened and John saw "the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him."⁸⁷

Colgrave identifies this as alluding to Matthew 3:16: *Baptizatis autem Jesus, confestim ascendit de aqua, et ecce aperti sunt ei caeli: et vidit Spiritum Dei descendentem sicut columbam et venientem super se.*⁸⁸ Just as the descent of the Holy Spirit in dove-form confirms Jesus' divinity, so here the white dove (and by association, the Holy Spirit) confirms Gregory's sanctity, and his 'status as one whose teachings represent the spiritual miracle of revelation' via a 'parallel between

⁸⁶ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, chap. 26. I have modified Colgrave's translation of *sedisse*; he has 'resting' but I have preferred 'sitting' to stress the proximity between the bird and Gregory as well as the corporeal nature. See my subsequent analysis.

⁸⁷ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, chap. 26.

⁸⁸ 'Jesus, being baptised, immediately came out of the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him: and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming over him.'

Pope and Prophet'.⁸⁹ While the contexts are admittedly very different (baptism vs. homily-writing), there is also another significant discrepancy – albeit a more subtle one. In the biblical texts the verb used to describe the descent and physical proximity of the Holy Spirit-dove to Christ is usually either a form of the verb *venire* ('to come') or *manere* ('to remain');⁹⁰ in the *VGM* this verb is used when relating the biblical incident but the verb *sedere* ('to sit') is used instead when relating Gregory's experience. On the one hand this immediately suggests an extreme degree of intimacy between Gregory and the Holy Spirit, but on the other hand it may have had other connotations. Although I am open to the idea that there may be a common source behind the *VGM*'s choice of *sedisse*, I have not been able to find one, nor have the texts' editors offered sources which would account for this verb.

It is intriguing to note that the *Heliand*, despite drawing on the *Diatessaron*, which uses forms of *venire* and *manere* to describe the dove's relationship with Christ,⁹¹ also opts for a form of OS *sittian* ('to sit'): *endi sat im uppan ûses drohtines ahslu* ('and it sat on our Lord's shoulder', 1.988b). This unusual detail has been explained by G. Ronald Murphy, who has shown that in departing from its source material here, the *Heliand* author 'has portrayed Christ, not only as the Son of the All-Ruler, but also as a new Woden' by appealing to the image of the god's ravens sitting upon his shoulders, as we find, for example, in *Grímnismál* st. 20.⁹² This image does not necessarily imitate the Saxon reflex of Óðinn, however. It may simply draw on the

⁸⁹ K. Rambridge, 'Doctor Noster Sanctus: The Northumbrians and Pope Gregory', in *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, ed. by R.H. Bremmer, K. Dekker, D. F. Johnson (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 1-26, at p. 19.

⁹⁰ John 1:32 has *descendentem... et mansit super eum*, John 1:33 *descendentem et manentem super eum*, Mark 1:10 *descendentem, et manentem in ipso*, Matt 3:16 *descendentem... et venientem super se*, and Luke 3:22 has no correlative verb, reading only *descendit ... in ipsum*.

⁹¹ XIV.4: ... *et vidit spiritum dei descendetem corporali specie ut columbam, venientem super se* ('and he saw the spirit of God descending in the form of a dove, and coming upon him'), XIV.6: ... *vidi spiritum descendentem quasi columbam de caelo, et mansit super eum* ('I saw the spirit descent as a dove from heaven, and remained over him'), and XIV.7: *Super quem videris spiritum descendentem et manentem super eum* ('over which you will have seen the spirit descending and remaining over him'). The OHG *Tatian*, which is closer to the *Heliand*'s source, closely follows the Latin and has the following: XIV.4: ... *inti gisah gotes geist nidarstigant an lichamlichero gisinni samaso tubun, quementan ubar sih* ('and saw the spirit of God coming down in a bodily form like a dove, and coming over him'); XIV.6: *ih gisah geist nidarstigant an samaso tubun fon himile, inti uoneta uber inan* ('I saw the spirit coming down as a dove from heaven, and it remained over him'); and XIV.7: *Ubar then then thu gisihst geist nidarstigant an inti uonentan ubar inan* ('over that then you would see the spirit coming down and remaining over him'). Both the Latin and OHG are from Siever's edition.

⁹² G. R. Murphy, *The Saxon Saviour: The Transformation of the Gospel in the Ninth-Century Heliand* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), pp. 79-80.

aural tradition of augury I have argued for in the Germanic world. The shoulder is the most natural place for a bird to perch when speaking to someone, and we can see that Snorri Sturluson assumed that Óðinn's ravens did this when he introduces *Grímnismál* 20 in his *Gylfaginning* even though *Grímnismál* never mentions the ravens perching, let alone the location they perch on.⁹³ Although the *VGM* does not say where the dove sits, it is probable they imagined it upon his shoulder, as was done by the carvers of an ivory panel (probably a book cover) from Trier, dated to the ninth or tenth century and held at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.⁹⁴

This makes a case for the parallel of 'sitting' verbs in *VGM* and the *Heliand* being more than coincidence, and the case is supported further if we take into account the similar circumstances in which they were composed. It has long been acknowledged that the *Heliand* played some role in the instruction of the newly Christianised Continental Saxons,⁹⁵ and that the *Heliand* in many ways Germanicizes its content.⁹⁶ The *VGM* may similarly be seen to be instructional. The work was composed at a time when Christianity's foothold in Anglo-Saxon England was secure from a political point of view, but it is much more difficult to make any pronouncements about the religious affinities of the general populace, however. There were certainly still pagans in the early eighth century, and even among those who would have considered themselves Christian there were many who held syncretic and superstitious beliefs. The *VGM* panders to these popular beliefs not only in the *cornix* episode, but throughout, as in the identification of Paulinus with the mysterious visitor in Edwin's dream,⁹⁷ Paulinus' swan-soul,⁹⁸ Gregory's consigning of a physician to hell,⁹⁹ his overcoming the malicious magicians which madden his

⁹³ *Gylfaginning* §38: *Hrafnar tveir sitja á oxlum honum ok segja í eyru honum* ('Two ravens sit on his shoulders and speak into his ears').

⁹⁴ The most easily accessible reproduction of this image is on the cover of Colgrave's edition of the *Earliest Life of Gregory*. For the dating of this see W. Sanderson, 'Archbishop Radbod, Regino of Prüm, and Late Carolingian Art and Music in Trier', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 24 (1982), 41-61, at 48, though Sanderson's own view that it is c.900 A.D. is found on p. 61. Sanderson prints a good quality reproduction of the ivory on p. 59, fig.17.

⁹⁵ Bostock, *Handbook on Old High German*, pp. 168-86, esp. pp. 169-176, and Murphy, *Saxon Saviour*, pp. 11-28, esp. pp. 26-28.

⁹⁶ Murphy, *passim*, and Bostock, *Handbook on Old High German*, pp. 169-175.

⁹⁷ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, Chap.16. Compare Bede's account, in *HE* II.12, where Paulinus is not identified with the dream-figure. For more on this see North, *Heathen Gods*, pp. 326-40 and Wallace-Hadrill, *A Historical Commentary*, pp. 70-71.

⁹⁸ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, Chap.17.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Chap.28.

horse,¹⁰⁰ and his baptism of the emperor Trajan by tears.¹⁰¹ Walter Goffart has called the last two of these ‘shocking’, and designated these and some other events in the *VGM* as ‘the unrestrained deployment of folklore motifs’, ‘far out of line with every other hagiography in the age of Bede.’¹⁰² Although Goffart’s use of the term ‘folklore’ here avoids the difficulties of identifying the precise traditions underlying this account, it is clear that many traditions – and not all of them Christian – are being mixed together in the *VGM*. The Latin of the *VGM* reminds us that it had a more educated audience than the vernacular *Heliand*, but we must also remember that monks and nuns were people with their own, sometimes unseemly, interests. As Alcuin’s now famous letter to Higbald, bishop of Lindisfarne clearly illustrates, the clergy could be as guilty of enjoying pagan tales and popular lore as anybody else.¹⁰³

It is not only the dove’s sitting which suggests that the *VGM* account drew upon augury. As I have argued, the practice in Anglo-Saxon England was based around sound and a belief in understanding the speech of birds. Although it is never said in *VGM*, the implication is that the dove is speaking to Gregory.¹⁰⁴ This implication is even clearer if we compare this to our other early medieval records of the Gregorian dove miracle, which is preserved in only three places: the *VGM*, the interpolated version of Paulus Diaconus’ *Vita S. Gregorii*,¹⁰⁵ and the late ninth century *Vita Gregorii* by John the Deacon (Johannes Hymonides). Alan Thacker has suggested that the *VGM* derived, at least in part, from writings by John Moschus (or a follower of his),¹⁰⁶ but there is no evidence that this contained a dove episode. The closest version to the *VGM* is from the interpolated version of Paulus’ *Vita*, and the relevant passage reads:

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Chap.22.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Chap.29.

¹⁰² Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 265 and n.145. He also mentions that the work contains ‘legends that are unseemly in a Christian context’, p. 264, n.141.

¹⁰³ *MGH, Epistolae*. 4, no.124, pp. 181-4.

¹⁰⁴ Colgrave, in his commentary to the *Earliest Life of Gregory*, calls this episode ‘the story of the white dove’s dictating *The Homilies*’, p. 157, n.110.

¹⁰⁵ Paulus’ original *Vita* was composed in the second half of the eighth century at Monte Cassino (M. Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 34 (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p. 49, Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 370), however this version did not contain a dove episode. It is only the later Interpolator who appends this to Paulus’ work, perhaps around the end of the ninth century. See B. Colgrave ‘The Earliest Life of St Gregory the Great’, p. 119, and Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 371 and n.128.

¹⁰⁶ A. Thacker, ‘Memorializing Gregory the Great: the origin and transmission of a papal cult in the seventh and early eighth centuries’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), 59-84.

Denique a fideli et religioso viro, ac huic nostro Patri sanctissimo pro suæ religionis et utilitatis merito valde familiarissimo, fideliter post obitum ejus nobis narratum didicimus, quod cum idem vas electionis et habitaculum sancti Spiritus visionem ultimam prophetæ Ezechielis interpretaretur, oppansum velum inter ipsum et eundem exceptorem tractatus sui, illo per intervalla prolixius reticiente, idem minister ejus stylo perforaverit, et eventu per foramen conspiciens, vidit columbam nive candidiorem super ejus caput sedentem, rostrumque ipsius ori diu tenere appositum: quæ cum se ab ore ejusdem amoveret, incipiebat sanctus pontifex loqui, et a notario graphium ceris imprimi. Cum vero reticebat sancti Spiritus organum, minister ejus oculum foramini iterum applicabat, eumque ac sic in oratione levatis ad cælum manibus simul et oculis, columbæ rostrum more solito conspiciatur ore suscipere.¹⁰⁷

And furthermore, from a faithful and religious man, to this our Father in the most highly renowned merit of his religion and usefulness, we have learned the story as told to us faithfully after his death, that when the same choice divine [i. e. Gregory] and dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit was expounding on the last vision of Prophet Ezekiel, the same servant of his, while Gregory fell more often back into periods of silence, perforated with his pen the curtain which was stretched between him and the listener of his treatise, and, catching sight of the event through the hole thus made, saw a dove whiter than snow sit on Gregory's head, its beak being placed against his mouth for a long time: which bird, when it had moved away from his face, and the Holy Pope began to speak, a text began to be written by a notary on wax tablets. As soon as the Holy Spirit's organ of truth fell silent, the servant again put his eye to the hole, and caught sight both of Gregory with his hands and eyes raised thus together to the heavens in prayer, and of the dove's beak taking itself in the accustomed manner to Gregory's mouth ...

This is quite different from the *VGM* in its clarification. The relationship between the

¹⁰⁷ *PL* 75, p. 58

dove and Gregory is unstated in the *VGM*, beyond its signification of holiness and divinity. One of the biggest differences between the *VGM* and the above extract is how the dove is placed. In the *VGM* we are not told anything other than the dove sat (*sedisse*), but here we are informed that the dove settled on Gregory's head (*super ejus caput sedentem*), a position which is not only bizarre but awkward when we are subsequently informed that the dove puts its beak next to Gregory's mouth. This also has no obvious counterpart in the *VGM*, where we are not told about the dove's actions as Gregory composes his homily. Given the general scholarly consensus that the Interpolator has lifted this episode from the *VGM*,¹⁰⁸ it is only natural to ask how and why these additions have come about.

Firstly, it is possible to establish that there is material in the *VGM* which could suggest these innovations. The first of these, the dove sitting on Gregory's head, seems to derive from a combination of the verb *sedere* in *VGM* coupled with the image of the Holy Spirit's appearance in dove-form at Christ's baptism, lifted from Matt 3:16, where we are told that the dove descends and remains over Christ as he steps out of the water after being baptized.¹⁰⁹ As Christ is presumably standing up, the most practical place for the Holy Ghost-dove to descend to is Christ's head. The second innovation, that of the dove putting its beak to Gregory's mouth, is less obvious. On the one hand there is the development, associated closely with biblical tradition, of *inspirare* from 'breathing in' to 'inspiring' and 'giving a divine gift', seen, for example, in 2 Timothy 3:16 (*Omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata*, 'all Scripture, inspired by God') and Genesis 2:7 (*Dominus Deus... inspiravit in faciem ejus spiraculum vitae*, 'the Lord God... breathed into his face the breath of life'). The text 2 Timothy 3:16 is particularly applicable here, as the *VGM* chapter 26 opens with an account of Gregory's divine inspiration for his homily on Ezekiel. This would then account for half of the second image, i.e. of the dove putting its beak next to his mouth and letting him breathe in (*inspirare*) its divine wisdom. The second half of this image perhaps owes its origins, ultimately, to John Moschus. The *VGM* states that Gregory *os aureum appellatur* ('was called golden-mouthed')

¹⁰⁸ Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 371, n.128., Colgrave, 'The Earliest Life of St Gregory the Great', p. 119.

¹⁰⁹ This detail is also found in Mark 1:10.

because of his *aurea oris* ('golden rhetoric'),¹¹⁰ an epithet Thacker has found attested at quite an early period among the Greeks.¹¹¹ This would then account for Gregory's divinely inspired speech after receiving inspiration from the dove.

These apparent innovations, which are actually just silent expansions of suggestions in the *VGM*, imply that the Interpolator was somewhat puzzled by the *VGM* account and felt the need to expand it, probably for sense, but perhaps for dramatic effect too. This also points to the Interpolator not having any other source to draw on when writing this account, and this is corroborated by the lack of any similar dove episode in Paulus' original *Vita*. The originality of the dove episode to the *VGM* is further supported by the only other reference we have to it. The late ninth century *Vita Gregorii* by John the Deacon (Johannes Hymonides) draws on Paulus Diaconus' text almost *verbatim*, and he refers to Gregory as one *super cujus caput ipse Spiritum sanctum in similitudine columbæ tractantis frequentissime perspexisset* ('over whose head the Holy Spirit itself in the form of a dove was seen to be frequently drawn').¹¹² The context that this is introduced in is vastly different from either the Interpolator or the *VGM*: in John's text, Peter the Deacon relates these details while imploring an angry crowd not to burn Gregory's writings. This needs not problematize the idea that the episode is derived from foreign sources, however: as Thacker has pointed out, John Moschus himself believed that the episodes in the *VGM* originated with the English.¹¹³

If the dove episode is originally English – and the evidence tends to suggest that it is – then not only is its presentation in the *VGM* in connection with the *cornix* more significant, but we must face the possibility that the dove episode is presented in terms of augury. The unstated relationship between Gregory and the dove replicates

¹¹⁰ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, Chap.24.

¹¹¹ On this epithet see Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great', pp. 62, 68, 71, and for his statement of its antiquity p. 77. See also Colgrave's commentary in *Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 155 n.99, where he notes that the Greeks used this term for any esteemed speaker. P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800*, CSASE 3 (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 187, holds a contrary opinion, suggesting that the epithet in the *VGM* and later in Old English came, 'directly or indirectly', from an Irish source. This is endorsed by C. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, CSASE 6 (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 20.

¹¹² *PL* 75, IV.69, p. 222

¹¹³ Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great', p. 72, Colgrave, 'The Earliest Life of St Gregory the Great', p. 119 and n.2.

rather than contravenes that between the Deirans and the *cornix*. Previously in my thesis I have shown that both the *cornix* and the dove were depicted in terms of divine knowledge, and in the preceding section showed the extent to which they were contrasted in these terms. Where the *cornix* tries to claim that the ‘new song in the church’ (*novum carmen ... in ecclesia*) is ‘false and useless’, the dove would confirm the veracity of that *novum carmen*. It is worth considering whether chapter 26’s unusual arrangement, with its inordinate focus on access to divine wisdom in a Christian context, and with not one but two different precursors in the Bible (Ezekiel 1:25 and Matt 3:16), could be read as cautiously defensive, not syncretistic.

I started this section with the unusual verb *sedere* in the *VGM*’s account of Gregory and the dove, and found that it corresponded to the syncretic use of augury in the *Heliand*. An examination of the other attestations of this episode showed that the *VGM* was the ultimate source, at least as far as our evidence allows us to find one, and that the Paulus-Interpolator had to expand the episode for clarity. This in turn raised the possibility that the *VGM* entry could be so terse because its associations with popular lore, and its contrast with the *cornix*, were readily understandable.

This quasi-paganism of dove in the manner of raven may explain why the *VGM* seems to have had such an unfavourable reception in later Anglo-Saxon England. That it was known in some capacity is very probable.¹¹⁴ Bishop Wærferth of Worcester uses *gylden muþe* of Gregory, explaining that Romans call him *Os Aureum* and the Greeks call him *Chrysostoma*,¹¹⁵ and Gretsch, Thacker and Colgrave acknowledge the possibility that this reflects an acquaintance with the

¹¹⁴ Although now in only one Continental manuscript (St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, 567), it must have been available more widely than this. See Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, pp. 50-51, who I think better ascertains its circulation than Thacker, ‘Memorializing Gregory the Great’, p. 82, who thinks it ‘can never have achieved a wide distribution’.

¹¹⁵ *Bischofs Wærferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, I, pp. 179 and 94: p. 179 is the introduction to Book III of the OE *Dialogues*, and it reads: *Her ongimmed se bridda flod of ðam neornawanglican wylle, þe þurh þone gyldenian muþe forð aarn þæs halgan papan 7 biscopes sancte Gregories, þone Romane for þære fægran worda gyfe Os Aureum nemniad* (‘Here begins the third stream of that paradisiacal well, which runs forth from the golden mouth of the holy pope and bishop Saint Gregory, who the Romans call *Os Aureum* because of his gift of beautiful speech’); p. 94 is the introduction to Book II and it includes the description that Gregory *mid Grecum Crystostomas is gehaten* (‘is called [recte] *Chrysostoma* among the Greeks’).

VGM.¹¹⁶ Thacker also recognizes, however, that Wærferth may have had access to a ‘related text’ rather than the VGM,¹¹⁷ and Patrick Sims-Williams thinks it more likely that a common text lies behind both the VGM and Wærferth’s *Dialogues*, a possibility Gretsche also entertains.¹¹⁸ More tantalising is the evidence of the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology* (OEM) and Ælfric’s homily on Gregory (CH II.9). These will both be discussed in more detail below, but for now it is worth making a few remarks on their sources. Christine Rauer has noted that exact source of the OEM’s entry for Gregory¹¹⁹ ‘remains unidentified’,¹²⁰ though on the *Fontes* database she gives the interpolated Paulus’ account, reflecting what she considers the closest analogue.¹²¹ However, we must bear in mind that we have no evidence for Paulus Diaconus’ text reaching Anglo-Saxon England,¹²² and Gretsche has drawn our attention to how this is problematic for Ælfric’s claim that he knew that Gregory had *fela wundra on his life geworhte* (‘performed many miracles in his lifetime’, CH II.9.256).¹²³ She remarks, however, that if we assume Ælfric had some acquaintance with the VGM, ‘such an assumption would lend substance to Ælfric’s assertion’.¹²⁴ Ælfric does use the very popular punning story about Gregory and the Anglian slave-boys (CH II.9.59-80), and he could have read this in VGM chap. 9 as well as in Bede’s *Historia* (HE II.1). Although Ælfric never mentions the story about the dove, it may count among the many miracles attributed to Gregory which are mentioned in the most vague way at the end of his homily:

Se eadiga gregorius gedihte manega halige trahtbec. and mid micelre
gecnyrdnyse godes folc to ðam ecan life gewissode. and fela wundra on his
life geworhte.

(CH II.IX, ll.254-6)

¹¹⁶ Gretsche, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, p. 30, Thacker, ‘Memorializing Gregory the Great’, pp. 67-69, *Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 155 n.99.

¹¹⁷ Thacker, ‘Memorializing Gregory the Great’, p. 68.

¹¹⁸ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 187-8, and Gretsche, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, pp. 29-30.

¹¹⁹ OEM No.42/March 12. For ease of reference I will use not only the Kotzor/(Rauer) entry numbers, but also the dates of the entries. All references to the OEM, unless otherwise stated, will be to *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. by C. Rauer.

¹²⁰ Rauer, OEM, p. 244 n.42.

¹²¹ C. Rauer, ‘The Sources of the Old English Martyrology, Pope Gregory the Great (Cameron B.19.042)’, 2000, *Fontes*.

¹²² Gretsche, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, pp. 61-2.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 62, with a survey of the possible links pp. 29-33.

The blessed Gregory composed many holy treatises, and with great eagerness directed the people of God to the eternal life, and performed many miracles in his lifetime.

Malcolm Godden has pointed out Ælfric's generally critical attitude towards miracles (an attitude that borders on scepticism);¹²⁵ and Mechthild Gretsch has found how much this attitude governed Ælfric's treatment of Gregory's miracles. She summarizes his reasoning precisely when she says that:

it is clear that choosing not to relate any miracles performed by Gregory was a decision deliberately taken by Ælfric. The Gregory that he wanted to mediate to his audience was the apostle of the English and the preacher to the Romans as well as to the English in their distress. Miracles would only have distracted the attention of the audience from focusing this narrative icon of the *bonus pastor*.¹²⁶

This is quite a different presentation of Gregory to the *VGM*, whose subject returns from the dead to kill his papal successor with a kick to the head (chap.28), exorcises a possessed horse, and blinds pagan wizards (chap.22). If Ælfric did know of, or indeed use, the *VGM*, it is easy to see why he did not name it.¹²⁷

Despite the content of the *OEM*'s Gregory entry seeming closer to the interpolated Paulus Diaconus *Vita* than the *VGM*, it is possible that others made the same sort of expansion that I have argued the Interpolator did with the *VGM*, above. It is of course possible that the episodes from the *VGM* circulated orally, and this could actually better account for the slight variations we see (and provide another possible reason for the *VGM* not being named as a source) in subsequent texts, but this would require more evidence than I could supply in the course of my bird-lore arguments. For the sake of convenience I shall continue to refer to the *VGM* in arguments about

¹²⁵ M. Godden, 'Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles', *Leeds Studies in English*, 16 (1985), 83-100.

¹²⁶ Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, pp. 62-3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 29-33 and 61-3 suggests that Ælfric did know the *VGM*.

it being a source for Gregorian dove-lore, although it would perhaps be more accurate to speak of the ‘VGM tradition’.

If these texts did use the *VGM*, then we may speculate that its crude use of popular belief may have meant it was preferable not to name it. I have raised the issue of the dissemination of the *VGM* here because an examination of dove-lore in Anglo-Saxon England shows a pervasive Gregorian influence. One of the most remarkable facets of Anglo-Saxon dove-lore is its use of the Holy Spirit in dove-form to denote sanctity in a way that suggests familiarity with the events recorded in *VGM* chap.26. In order to demonstrate that this is not cultivated directly from the Bible and biblical tradition, I will firstly outline the biblical traditions of the dove and Holy Ghost, before pointing to features that suggest Gregorian origins.

Doves and the Holy Ghost

A brief, let alone complete history of the relationships between doves and God, and doves and souls in the Christian tradition, remains to be written, and would be a massive undertaking. For example, 4 Ezra, offered by James Cross and Thomas D. Hill as a possible source for the *Prose Solomon and Saturn* (see below), is of problematic origin, canonicity and date.¹²⁸ These issues are just as true of the *Odes of Solomon*, which Anna Maria Luisella Fadda proposes as a source for dove imagery too (see below). Rather than get embroiled in this complexity, it is sufficient, for our purposes, to state that by the time Old English was written, patristic writing knew of a pervasive association between doves and the Holy Spirit, in an association which was justified by the well-known qualities of the dove. Ælfric repeatedly states that it

¹²⁸ For this unusual book and the vast scholarship associated with it see M. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Fourth Book of Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). For this as a possible source for the *Prose Solomon and Saturn* see Cross and Hill’s commentary on pp. 93-5 of their edition.

is because of the qualities of the dove that it comes to signify the Holy Spirit,¹²⁹ and this sentiment is also expressed in the *Prose Solomon and Saturn*:

Saga me hwilc fugel ys selust.

Ic ðe secge, Culfre ys selust; heo getacnað þone halegan gast.

(SS 29)¹³⁰

Tell me which bird is best.

I tell you, the Dove is best; it signifies the Holy Ghost¹³¹

The association between the dove and Holy Ghost is so well known to us that it hardly needs repeating here. The image has its origins in the canonical gospels (John 1:32, Luke 3:22, Mark 1:10, Matt 3:16), in which the narrators each report seeing the Holy Ghost, in the form of a dove, descending from the heavens and remaining over Christ. Each gospel account uses slightly different phrasing to indicate the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit: Matthew and John suggest some distance between the pair (*venientem super se* and *mansit super eum*, respectively), whereas Mark and Luke suggest closer proximity (*manentem in ipso* and *descendit... in ipsum*, respectively). The verbs and their implications are also important to bear in mind: *venire* ('to come') implies movement, whereas *manere* ('to remain') does not. This means that by comparing the lexical and syntactical choices of any allusion it is possible to identify which (if any) of these accounts is being used as the source, whether directly or ultimately. Thus, Vercelli XVI, which reads *He ða, Sanctus Iohannes, geseah Godes gast of heofonum astigende, on culfran onsyn ofer hire cumende*, ('then he, Saint John, saw God's spirit descend from heaven, coming over them in a dove's appearance') can confidently be identified as drawing on Matt 3:16: *et vidit Spiritum Dei descendentem sicut columbam, et venientem super se*. The close parallels of *sicut columbam/culfran onsyn* and *ofer hire cumende/venientem super se* (including the parallel use of participles) are too similar for the Matthew passage not

¹²⁹ E.g. CH I.22.128-138,156-174, CH I.30.133-5 and CH II.3

¹³⁰ *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, p. 30.

¹³¹ Without a conjunction or subordinator it is impossible to tell the relationship between these two statements. Here I read it as 'the dove is the best bird, and for this reason it signifies the Holy Ghost', though the text seems to subsume cause and effect to an ultimate truth, which, if analyzed, becomes circular: the dove is best because it signifies the Holy Ghost, and it signifies the Holy Ghost because it is the best of all birds.

being the source. Somewhat differently, in Ælfric's homily on epiphany in the first series (*CH I.VII*), he mentions how *se halga gast on culfran hiwe uppon him* [Christ] *gereste*, and the wording here seems to be composite (and, therefore, suggests quotation from memory). The choice of verb and preposition most appropriately renders *mansit super eum* of John 1:32 (where *gereste* = *mansit* and *uppon him* = *super eum*), but the description of the Holy Ghost *on culfran hiwe* does not correspond so neatly to John's description of seeing the *Spiritum descendentem quasi columbam de caelo* ('Spirit descending, as a dove from heaven'). In spite of these discrepancies, it is clear that this description is indebted to the gospel accounts of Christ's baptism.

In Old English literature, the Holy Ghost appears frequently in dove-form to confirm the sanctity of a saint, just as it appeared to confirm Christ's sanctity at his baptism. In Ælfric's *Life of Basil*, the eponymous saint is undergoing baptism when

Efne þa færlice com fyr of heofonum
 and an scinende culfre scæt of þam fyre
 into ðære ea, and astyrede ðæt wæter.
 Fleah siððan upp, forðrihte to heofonum,
 and Basilius eode of þæm fant-baðe sona...
 (ll.72-76)¹³²

Just then beautiful fire came from heaven, and a shining dove shot out of that fire into the water, and stirred up the water. It flew up afterwards, directly into heaven, and Basil went immediately out of that font-bath...

Although not explicitly stated to be the Holy Ghost, this identification is made clear in the passage's dual invocation of the Spirit's manifestations: firstly in its appearance as fiery tongues at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:3-4), and secondly in its descent in dove-form. The force of this association carries through to the next dove reference

¹³² Ælfric's *Lives*, I, III, p. 54.

in this *Life*. Here St Basil has a portion of the eucharist worked into a gold ornament shaped like a dove, which moves three times whenever the eucharist is taken.¹³³ This image serves to accentuate the unity of the Trinity by drawing special attention to the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit, yet it also stresses the sanctity of the saint who is able to bring this miracle about.

In addition to the gospels, I suggest that the other major source of dove-lore were the writings of, and traditions surrounding, Gregory the Great. The tradition, first attested in the *VGM*, of the Holy Spirit whispering to him in dove-form, has been discussed above. Although this draws on the gospel accounts of the Holy Ghost in dove-form, it differs in two key ways which can form criteria for source identification. The weaker of these criteria is the proximity of the dove: in the biblical accounts we have indefinite proximity with verbs such as *venire* and *manere*, whereas in the *VGM* we have the more precisely practical *sedisse*, and the Interpolator of the *Paulus-Vita* is equally practical in describing the dove as *super ejus caput sedentem* ('sitting on top of his head'). The stronger criterion is that of a particular association with divine (or divinely-sanctioned) wisdom: in the gospels the Holy Spirit appears to affirm Christ's divinity (and so connotations of divine wisdom are, at best, implicit), whereas in the *VGM* and the interpolated *Paulus-Vita* the Holy Spirit's appearance affirms both Gregory's sanctity and his divine wisdom.

More firmly connected to the historical personage of Gregory himself is his *Dialogues*, which are subsequently translated into Old English as part of the Alfredian reform. The *Dialogues* records two souls flying to heaven in dove-form: St Benedict's sister, St Scholastica (II.34); and a priest named Spes (IV.11). These images probably underlie the souls leaving the dying in bird-form which we find, for example, in the *VGM* chap.17, as we shall see that the preferred depiction of a devout soul was as a bright light; and that there is no evidence of a pre-Christian concept which could be pressed into service in this way. In the following analysis of depictions of the Holy Spirit as a dove, I will indicate whether the Old English text is drawing only from the gospels, as well as where it draws from Gregorian tradition.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 58, ll.126-131.

The Holy Ghost-dove features four times in the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology*, a compilation of terse descriptions of various saints' lives.¹³⁴ George Herzfeld remarked that the sheer brevity of some of the entries in the *OEM*, and their sparse and allusive manner, pointed 'to a monastic audience, and to a service in a place where laymen would not be present',¹³⁵ and that 'we may readily infer that they were mainly intended to refresh the memory of the preacher, and to supply him with the groundwork of his sermon.'¹³⁶ However, his former point seems inadequate on two counts: if the *OEM* served to remind a preacher of the most pertinent points of a saint's life, there seems to be no reason why this information could not be employed in a sermon for the laity; moreover, the very fact that the *OEM* is in the vernacular suggests a much wider audience than a learned (group of) preacher(s) in need of a reminder. Christine Rauer is on much firmer ground when she describes the *OEM* as clearly serving an educational purpose, and 'that it certainly made a broad range of native and foreign Latin sources more easily available which might otherwise not have been accessible (for linguistic or geographical reasons).'¹³⁷ In spite of the terseness of the entries, some passages seem to portray complex ideas through such literary techniques as direct speech, which suggests that there was educationary and meditative value in reading them as literary artefacts as well as liturgical prompts.¹³⁸ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to demonstrate these aspects of the *OEM*, but I will draw attention to the *OEM*'s literariness when the evidence I offer permits.

Of the four dove references in the *OEM*, none appeals closely to the wording of the descent of the Holy Ghost-dove in the gospels. The description of the day of Pentecost is closest to the Bible in its imagery and its nuances: it begins with the Holy Spirit manifesting in a noise from heaven and images of fire over apostles (cf.

¹³⁴ These four occasions are: No.s 26/Jan 19 (Ananias, Petrus, etc.), 28/Jan 20 (Pope Fabian), 42/March 12 (Gregory), and 88/May 15 (Pentecost).

¹³⁵ *An Old English Martyrology*, ed. and trans. by G. Herzfeld, EETS o.s. 116 (London, Trübner, 1900), p. x.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* p. xi.

¹³⁷ C. Rauer, 'The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 89-109, at 98.

¹³⁸ For the use of direct speech see C. Rauer, 'Direct Speech, Intercession, and Prayer in the Old English Martyrology', *English Studies*, 95 (2012), 563-71.

Acts 2:2-3), and granting them the ability to speak all tongues and the ability to work wondrous deeds afterwards through the Holy Spirit (*mihton ... heofonlico wundor ðurh þone gast*). The passage then continues unusually [atypically? other examples needed], moving to baptism and then to a bizarre dove description, unparalleled in Old English literature:

Ðæm gaste æghwelc gefullwad man nu onfehð þurh biscopa handa
onsetenese, ond se gast wunað mid æghwelcne þara þe god deð. Ond he
gefyhð on ðæs clænan mannes heortan swa swa culfre ðonne heo baðað hi on
smyltum wætre on hluttere wællan.

(*OEM* No.88/May 15)

Every baptised man now receives the spirit by the laying on of the bishop's hands, and the spirit lives in all those who do good. And it exalts in the heart of the pure man like a dove when it bathes in the calm water of a clear spring.¹³⁹

No source is given for this in the *Fontes* database, and Rauer avoids this tricky issue on two occasions, firstly noting in *Fontes* that 'the source situation of this section is somewhat unclear; Cross suspects the use of a liturgical handbook',¹⁴⁰ and secondly in her edition of the *OEM*, where she refers us to Kees Dekker's article on Pentecost for dove imagery – an article which only discusses the motif of the fire-breathing dove in illustrations of the Pentecostal miracle, and which nowhere discusses this particular passage.¹⁴¹

The apparently ornithological note of the dove bathing in the pristine waters, is very

¹³⁹Note that Herzfeld's edition of the *OEM*, at p. 85, translates *gefyhð* as 'sinks', it is now generally accepted that *gefyhð* represents one of many variant spellings for the third person singular present of *gefeon* 'to exalt', 'to rejoice'. See *DOE*, s.v. 'ge-feon¹, ge-feagan'. In his addenda and corrigenda (p. 230) he acknowledges this misreading but does not correct his translation.

¹⁴⁰C. Rauer, 'The Sources of the Old English Martyrology, Pentecost (Cameron B.19.088)', 2000, *Fontes*; see also J. E. Cross, 'On the library of the Old English Martyrologist', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes*, ed. by M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 227-250, at p. 247.

¹⁴¹C. Rauer, *OEM*, p. 261, n.88; K. Dekkers, 'Pentecost and Linguistic Self-Consciousness in Anglo-Saxon England: Bede and Ælfric', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 104 (2005), 345-72.

curious. There may well be an observational basis for this, as *Columbidae* display various bathing habits (whether in dust or in liquid). This naturalistic observation is coupled, however, with an ideologically charged flourish: the European rock dove (*Columba livia*), from which domestic and feral pigeons derive, is not particularly selective about their sources of bathing water and most frequently use puddles in the wild. The emphasis on the purity of the water in which the dove bathes should alert us to symbolic meanings, especially with the collocation of the bird and the baptism references. As the elements of Holy Spirit, dove and baptism all occur in the gospels, it seems probable that this *OEM* entry is grounded in those sources, and is also supplemented at some point – perhaps by a compiler – to include some pertinent naturalistic observations which easily lend themselves to symbolism.

The movement from Pentecost miracle to baptism, and then to dove, is associative. The association of the Pentecostal miracle with Christ's baptism was widespread, as homilists from Gregory to Ælfric pondered over the significance of the forms of the Holy Spirit's manifestations: in fire at Pentecost, and like a dove at Christ's baptism.¹⁴² On the other hand, the ability to perform wondrous deeds bestowed by the Holy Spirit onto the apostles is associated with each person's ability to work good deeds by accepting the Holy Spirit at baptism. We thus have a triangulation of associations between the Pentecost miracle and baptism through the Holy Spirit's manifestation on the one hand, performing great deeds through the Holy Spirit on the other, and finally, the dove as symbolising both the human and divine souls, which rejoice in goodness. This unusual passage stresses the sanctity of the soul not only through the dove reference, but by indicating what valuable acts it is responsible for and encourages.

At least two of the *culfre* references in the *OEM* draw on Gregorian traditions. One of these is the *OEM* entry for Gregory, the other for Pope Fabian. In the Gregory entry the *OEM* records how:

¹⁴² K. Dekker, 'Pentecost and Linguistic Self-Consciousness', *passim.*, but especially pp. 356-7, 364-6, and 369.

Gregorius cnihta sum geseah hwite culfran of heofonum ond sittan on
Gregorius heafde ond him eþode on ðone muð þone godcundan wisdom þe
he on bocum wrat.

(*OEM*, No.42/March 12)

A certain one of Gregory's servants saw a white dove from heaven and
sitting on Gregory's head, and it breathed into his mouth the divine wisdom
which he wrote in books.

Rauer notes that the interpolated version of Paulus Diaconus' *Vita S. Gregorii* 'seems to represent the closest analogue for this section.'¹⁴³ Rauer presumably bases this on the details of the dove sitting *on Gregorius heafde*, and its breathing (*eþode*) divine wisdom into his mouth. However, the wording is substantially different enough to exclude the possibility of direct influence, and the idea of the dove breathing (*eðode*) inspiration into him is absent from any other account. In the Interpolated *vita* by Paulus for example, the act of breathing may be inferred but is not stated; the dove only holds its beak up to Gregory's mouth. I have made the case, above, that the Interpolator could have drawn all these details from the *VGM*. Whether this is the case or not, it is possible that the medieval audience may have made this same deduction. This may be more evidence for the circulation of Gregorian episodes orally, where the *Paulus-vita* and *OEM* bear witness to accumulative embellishments of the *VGM* episode, but until this is studied more systematically this will have to remain a hypothesis. The apparently 'missing' verb in our *OEM* entry (in the phrase *cuftran of heofonum*)¹⁴⁴ could support this hypothesis too, as it does not closely match any of the gospel accounts but does seem to reflect an understanding of the important elements (i.e. the Holy Spirit in dove-form is a dove from heaven).

It may be coincidence, but the wording of the *OEM*'s Gregory entry is very close to

¹⁴³ Rauer, 'The Sources of the Old English Martyrology, Pope Gregory the Great (Cameron B.19.042)', 2000, *Fontes*.

¹⁴⁴ Rauer, in her edition of the *OEM*, says 'a verb in the infinitive seems to be missing here', p. 245 n.42.75. Herzfeld's edition of *OEM*, inserts 'cuman', p. 38 n.21.

that of the St Christopher entry. The passage follows a description of Christopher's monstrous appearance, his belief in God, and his inability to speak:

Ða bæd he God ðæt he him sealde monnes gesprec. Ða stod him æt sum wer
on hwitum gegirelan ond eðode him on ðone muð; ða mihte he siððan
sprecan swa mon.

(*OEM*, No.73/April 28)

When he prayed to God that he give him the speech of men. Then a certain
man stood by him in white clothing and breathed into his mouth; then he
[Christopher] could afterwards speak as a man.

This entry does not closely reflect any known *Passio S. Christophori*,¹⁴⁵ though *BHL* 1764 is very close and provides a close analogue for this episode.¹⁴⁶ There is the interesting possibility that this influenced the *OEM*'s Gregory entry, as the phrase used is nearly identical: *eðode him on ðone muð* (No.73/April 28) differs only in the placement of the pronoun (compare *him eþode on ðone muð*, No.42/March 12). Furthermore, inherent to both descriptions are connotations of divinely granted knowledge and eloquence, and this latter aspect may allow us to speculate that the *OEM* compiler knew of Gregory's epithet *os aureum* (or its vernacular equivalent *gylden muþe*).

Elsewhere in the *OEM* we find a close parallel to the Gregory entry. The *OEM*'s entry for January 20th, the feast day of Pope Fabian, reads:

þæm wæs þurh haligne gast getacnod þæt he onfenge Romeburge
biscopdome: Culfre com fleogan of heofonum ond gesæt ofer his heafde.

(*OEM*, No.28/Jan 20)

¹⁴⁵ Rauer, *OEM*, p. 255 n.73.

¹⁴⁶ T. H. Leinbaugh, 'St Christopher and the *Old English Martyrology*: Latin sources, and the phrase *hwæs gneaðes*', *Notes and Queries*, 32 (1985), 434-7, esp. 435.

It was by signified by the Holy Spirit to him that he would come to the bishopric of Rome: a dove came flying from heaven and settled over his head.

The dove is evidently used here to affirm his sanctity and suitability as Pope. It is curious, however, that this rather dramatic portion of the brief *OEM* entry has no counterpart in the entry's source, the *Liber Pontificalis*.¹⁴⁷ The closest parallel is the Gregory entry in the *OEM*, and although the wording is not *verbatim* in the two entries, both are about popes whose worthiness is signalled by the advent of a heavenly dove. In both these cases the idea of the heavenly dove sitting upon the pope's head is also repeated. One has to wonder to what extent it would be possible to combine the constituent parts of the famous Gregory story without eliciting a comparison. Certainly, by the late middle ages, the presence of a dove had become the identifying characteristic for depictions of Gregory, and John the Deacon in his *Vita* remarks: *hic est quod consuetudinaliter Spiritus sanctus in specie columbae super scribentis Gregorii caput depingitur* ('this is why Gregory is traditionally depicted writing with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove over his head').¹⁴⁸

There is one item which potentially problematizes this equation, however: in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 389 (s.x²),¹⁴⁹ on fol. 1.v, there is a drawing of a tonsured man sat in a church writing. Above his head there is a dove and in the background a curtain is being drawn to one side. While the details all conform to those in the Gregorian anecdote, this image prefaces the *Life of Paul* (the hermit) by Jerome, and the text begins with an ornate letter <h> and the words *Hieronimus presbiter*, indicating that the image is intended to depict Jerome rather than Gregory. However, these depictions of Jerome and Fabian are almost certainly drawing on Gregorian associations in order to portray those ideas of divine wisdom and eloquence which we have seen repeated. In addition to statements such as those in John the Deacon's *Vita* (and indeed, the Gregorian dove episodes in the other two

¹⁴⁷ J. E. Cross, 'Popes of Rome in the *Old English Martyrology*', in *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar: Second Volume 1979*, ed. by F. Cairns, ARCA: Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 3 (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1979), pp. 191-212, at p. 194.

¹⁴⁸ *PL* 75, IV.70, p. 222

¹⁴⁹ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 316.

vitae), we have iconographic evidence to support our case here: there is the ninth or tenth century ivory panel from Trier, mentioned above, and the eighth/ninth century Bradbourne cross,¹⁵⁰ in Derbyshire. The Bradbourne cross has, at the base of its north face, a figure with the dove on his shoulder which can be identified as Gregory on other grounds.¹⁵¹ Taking all this together with the *VGM*, there seems to be a strong case for wide circulation of the image of Gregory and the dove.

The final reference to a dove in the *OEM* to be considered here is in the entry for St Ananias. The *OEM* relates that the *hæðenan caseres* ('heathen emperor') Diocletian has sent Ananias to suffer in jail for twelve days without food or water, when the jailer, called Petrus, comes in:

Pa geseah he sittan ðone halgan gast on culfran hiwe on ðæs carcernes eagdura, ond spræc¹⁵² to Annani þæm Godes men, ond eft fleogan to heofonum.

(*OEM*, No.26/Jan 19)

Then he saw the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove sitting on the prison's window – and it spoke to Ananias, the man of God – and afterwards flying to heaven.

Unlike the Gregorian tradition, there is no gift of wisdom, or even inspiration, here. The talking Holy Spirit instead demonstrates the intimate relationship Ananias has with God and to stress Ananias' sanctity. Ananias is held as an example of the greater importance of the nourishment of the soul compared to the nourishment of the body. It is perhaps noteworthy that in comparison to the entry for Gregory, the

¹⁵⁰ J. Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great and Angelic Mediation: The Anglo-Saxon Crosses of the Derbyshire Peaks', in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature in its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. by J. Roberts and A. Minnis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 431-448, at p. 431, and J. Moreland, 'The World(s) of the Cross', *World Archaeology*, 31 (1999), 194-213, at 196.

¹⁵¹ Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great and Angelic Mediation', pp. 445-7.

¹⁵² I have followed Kotzor and Herzfeld here, and ignored Rauer's suggested emendation *spræc<an>*, which she justifies only on the grounds that it follows the Latin more closely (Rauer, *OEM*, p. 238 n.26.52). Rauer herself acknowledges that the unusual construction here (non-finite to finite and back to non-finite) could be an 'example of the martyrologist's anacoluthic style'.

OEM takes pains to stress the divine identity of the *culfre* in both the Ananias and Fabian entries. No mention is made of the *halgan gast* in the Gregory entry, perhaps attesting to how well-known this particular tradition was.

The Gregorian dove incident may colour other instances in Old English where the Holy Spirit manifests in dove-form, although this is difficult to prove when they do not have the two diagnostic criteria of proximity and divine wisdom, or if they could plausibly derive directly from the gospel accounts. One of the most interesting uses of the dove to represent the Holy Spirit is in an anonymous translation of a tale from the *Verba Seniore*, associated with the popular *Vitae Patrum* cycle.¹⁵³ The translation is very close to the Latin original (though the precise source text is not known); in spite of this it is worth examining.¹⁵⁴

In the tale in question, a hitherto chaste monk lusts after the daughter of a pagan priest, and acquiesces to the priest's demands that he forsake the Christian god. As soon as he does this, the priest sees *ða sona fleon ut of his muþe swilce hit an culfre wære and an an up wið þæs lyftes weard* ('something, as if it were a dove, then immediately flying out of his mouth and directly towards the sky', ll.84-5). The departure through the monk's mouth is curious because this image is otherwise used of an individual's soul at death (for which, see below); here it is the Holy Spirit leaving the once virtuous monk. In spite of the apparent abandonment of the monk by the Holy Spirit, we are told by the devil that this is not indeed the case (ll.88-9). The pagan priest tells this to the monk, who, reinvigorated in his faith by a god so compassionate that he still cares for such a sinner, travels to see a hermit and undertakes a three week fast while staying with him. Each week, the hermit asks the monk whether he has seen, and each week, the monk reports the dove getting closer and closer. The first week, *he geseage up on heahnesse þære heofonan ane culfran flyceriende ofer his heafod* ('he saw up in the highness of heaven a dove flying over

¹⁵³ The best introduction to these largely ignored texts is P. Dendle, 'The Old English "Life of Malchus" and Two Vernacular Tales from the *Vitas Patrum* in MS Cotton Otho C.i: A Translation (Part 1)', *English Studies*, 90.5 (October 2009), 505-517. I have used Assman's edition in his *Homilien und Heiligenleben* (no.XVIII), and all references will be to section and line numbers in Assman's volume.

¹⁵⁴ For the source see the *Verba Seniore*, PL 73, 884-5. For a discussion of the sources see Dendle, 'The Old English "Life of Malchus"', 512-3.

his head', ll.108-9); the second week *an culfre fluge wið þæt heafod oft and gelome, swilce heo þær on ufenan settan wolde* ('a dove flew by his head again and again, as if she wanted to settle on top of it', ll.112-3); the third week *an culfre come and gesette up on his heafde, ac þa ða he hy niman wolde, þa aras heo of his heafde and innan his muð gewænde* ('a dove settled on top of his head, but when he wanted to try and grab it, it got up off his head and went into his mouth', ll.116-8).

As unique as this is, it essentially repeats the commonly found pattern of using the Holy Spirit in dove-form as an indicator of sanctity, also found in its source. Despite the silence in the gospels about the proximity of the Holy Spirit at Christ's baptism, the logic behind this image is straightforward: if having the Holy Spirit nearby indicates one's sanctity, then surely the closer it is, the holier one is. It is unproveable, but possible that this description would have recalled the image of St Gregory and his dove, whose legendary sanctity was demonstrated by the dove's close proximity to him. Similarly, in the third week the dove *gesette up on his heafde*, and *innan his muð gewænde*, two images that closely resemble the Paulus-Interpolator's and *OEM*'s descriptions of Gregory's divine inspiration.

The use of this image raises the question – which I cannot answer within the scope of this thesis – of whether the two criteria I have set out for Gregorian dove tradition are actually eastern motifs that are to found in the lost *vita* by John Moschus and in the eastern source for the *Vitae Patrum*.¹⁵⁵ There are perhaps further hints of an eastern tradition in the unusual use of the Holy Spirit in dove-form in the *OEM*'s entry for an eastern saint, Ananias (No.26/Jan 19), though even if this were the case I think these motifs were strongly associated with Gregory in Anglo-Saxon England in any case. I have raised this possibility because within Old English literature there are depictions of the Holy Spirit (in dove form) which do not draw (exclusively) on the canonical gospels for inspiration, but draw upon other smaller-scaled and often localised sources and traditions.

¹⁵⁵ For the Moschus *vita* see Thacker, 'Memorializing Gregory the Great', passim., and for the eastern sources of the *Vitae Patrum* see Dendle, 'The Old English "Life of Malchus"', p. 505.

The Old English *Life of Machutus* is a lesser-known prose work which has barely survived in an eleventh-century copy, and it closely follows the Latin of its source, the Breton scholar Bili's ninth-century *Vita Sancti Machutis*.¹⁵⁶ Internal and external evidence points towards the Old English translation being done at Winchester during the episcopate of Æthelwold.¹⁵⁷ It is not impossible that Gregorian tradition informed the Holy Spirit depiction in this text, and I think it is very likely that, for an Anglo-Saxon audience, it recalled the Gregorian episode. However, we shall see a detail which confirms that this particular Holy Spirit in dove-form is derived from, at least in its immediate textual history, from a different tradition to any we have seen so far.

The OE *Machutus* reports that during Machutus' consecration as a mass-priest, a white dove appears, but the text is so illegible here we can only make out ...<hwi>*t culfre w... <sculd>re* (OE6.19-20). The Latin source at this point, says that the dove is seen *super scapulum eius dextrum* ('over his right shoulder', L6.17) and remains there until the ritual is completed. The spacing of the text on London, British Library, MS Otho.A.viii 29v suggests that the OE text maintains its close translation of the Latin here, and so we can safely assume that the OE would read something like **ofer ðone swiðran sculdre*. Although indebted to the gospel accounts and using a common trope for demonstrating the saint's sanctity, the detail of the dove being over his right shoulder is curious. This detail must be because the *Life of Machutus* is paying homage to the *Vita S. Samsoni*, another text composed in Brittany, where upon Samson's consecration as deacon, a dove *in scapula dextera eius descendit* ('descends onto his right shoulder').¹⁵⁸ Pierre Flobert's commentary rightly states that 'c'est bien entendu la figuration du Saint-Esprit', but also adds 'noter qu'elle [la colombe] se pose sur l'épaule droite, le côté favorable' ('note that the placement of the dove on the right shoulder, the favourable side') and contrasts this with a demonic *Aethiopem* ('une sorte de négriillon', 'a kind of little black boy') Samson

¹⁵⁶ *The Old English Life of Machutus*, ed. by D. Yerkes, Toronto Old English Series 9 (Toronto: University Press, 1984), pp. xxv-xxvi. All references to the text are to this edition, and will be in the form of page and line number for both the Latin and Old English (e.g. L34.1 for Latin page 34, l.1).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xxxvi-xlii, esp. xlii.

¹⁵⁸ *Vita S. Samsoni*, I.13, in *La Vie Ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol*, ed. and trans. by P. Flobert (Paris: CNRS, 1997), pp. 166-9.

sees on a certain deacon, *in sinistro eius scapula sedere* ('sitting on his left shoulder').¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, in her analysis of the traditions of Welsh saints, Elissa Henken observes that

There are several motifs in Samson's *Vitae*, which, though not unusual in themselves, occur with a repetition which causes them to appear peculiar to Samson. One is the heavenly dove which appears at the saint's ordination as deacon, priest, and bishop.¹⁶⁰

This repetition of dove appearances is also found in the Old English *Life of Machutus*, though it is only found twice: once when Machutus is consecrated mass-priest (OE6.19-20), and again when consecrated bishop (OE28.10). This second instance is even more unusual: as Machutus is consecrated bishop, the dove appears *ofer his sweoran* ('over his neck, OE28.10, cf. *super collum eius*, L.28.18), only to be seen flying to heaven (*seo culfre to heofonum fleah*, OE28.14, cf. *in cello uolauit*, L.28.23) afterwards. I have not been able to locate a source or parallel for this, it is tempting to speculate that this dove description comes from a *passio*, where a saint is beheaded and a dove flies from the neck up to heaven. In any case, the repetition of dove appearances is unusual within the larger context of Anglo-Saxon literature, would thus seem to owe its peculiarity to drawing upon the *Vita S. Samsoni*. In spite of all its peculiarities, the symbolism associated with the appearances of the Holy Spirit in dove-form are very regular: the dove really only connotes sanctity and divine favour.

In a similar vein is the Old English *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which forgoes the gospels for an apocryphal text for its dove imagery.¹⁶¹ The *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* was composed in Latin between 550 and 700,¹⁶² and was translated into

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ E. Henken, *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), p. 117.

¹⁶¹ Two versions of this text are edited in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, pp. 117-37 but a more recent edition is available in M. Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 26 (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), at pp. 164-91. I refer to this edition throughout.

¹⁶² M Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 2 (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 13. For the circulation of this and other Marian apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon England see pp. 23-4.

Old English at some point between the ninth and eleventh centuries.¹⁶³ In the OE *Pseudo-Matthew*, when Mary comes of age she refuses marriage and prefers to offer her virginity to God. The archbishop Isachar does not refuse her request, but instead asks that God *us gecyðe hwilcum wære we hi befæstan sculan to healdenne* ('that he make known to us to which man we should entrust her to look after her', VIII,1). The Old English then deviates from the Latin. Clayton remarks that:

The Old English translation abbreviates this section of the Latin, in which the priest offers a sacrifice to God, who then makes known, in direct speech, how the custodian of the Virgin is to be decided upon. In handling the Latin freely here, the translator makes it seem as though the priest is giving the orders of his own volition, rather than at the command of God.¹⁶⁴

The order that Isachar gives is for all the unmarried man from the tribe of Judah to acquire staffs, which Isachar put into the Sancta Sanctorum. Isachar then pronounces that the next day they should all take their staffs, and a dove would fly to heaven from the staff of appointed custodian (VIII,2). I do not completely agree with Clayton's reading of this abbreviation. Rather more important than the elevated position of the priest is the elimination of the first instance of divine intervention (when Isachar sacrifices to God). The effect of removing this is that the narrative changes from being about the fulfilment of a divine prophecy to being about divine sanction in a more familiar form: we have already seen how popular the notion of using the Holy Spirit in dove-form was for affirming an individual's sanctity. The removal of the first divine pronouncement also means that the appearance of the dove from the staff becomes the only divine signal, and the OE *Pseudo-Matthew* recognizes the dramatic nature of this moment by introducing it with the interjection *hwæt*:

Ða clypode se biscop mid mycelre stefne hine and hine cigde, and he ða sona onfeng þæra gyrda of ðæs bisceopes handum. Hwæt, þær of sona fleah culfre

¹⁶³ Clayton, *Apocryphal Gospels*, pp. 138-141, esp. 138, where Clayton expresses a preference for an eleventh-century dating rather than the ninth, though acknowledges that there is no reason it could not have been translated during the tenth century.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206 n.57.

swyðe hwit and geondfleah þa heannysse¹⁶⁵ þæs temples, and heo ða gewat into heofonum.

(VIII, 3)

Then the bishop called him in a loud voice and chose him, and he immediately took the staff from the bishop's hands. Behold, immediately a very white dove flew from the staff and soared through the highest part of the temple, and then it departed into heaven.

In this way, the OE *Pseudo-Matthew* mirrors what Sharon Rowley has called the 'dynamics of presence and absence' in the *OEHE*, in which new meanings are created out of the elimination of episodes and from the resulting juxtapositions.¹⁶⁶

The fact that the depictions of the Holy Spirit in dove-form are so unusual in the OE *Pseudo-Matthew* and the OE *Machutus* may be due to their status as translated texts with roots in relatively unpopular traditions. In spite of this, we see that they share the idea, found in the Gregorian and gospel traditions, of the appearance of the Holy Spirit indicating sanctity in the form of a dove. We shall now move on to examining the closely related idea of the spirits of holy people being depicted in dove-form, and that the dove indicates an individual's sanctity in these cases too.

¹⁶⁵ Clayton, *Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 207 n.63 comments that only one manuscript follows the source's *fastigium* and translates *heannysse*; the other two have *hwæmmas* ('corners'). In either case it is clear that the white dove is dramatically wheeling round the temple and in order to manifest the message of divine sanction.

¹⁶⁶ S. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica*, p. 5. Most of Rowley's book is devoted to demonstrating the new meanings that arise in the *OEHE* from this process, but it is particularly notable in her chapters on salvation history (pp. 71-97) and on the effect of repositioning Gregory's *Libellus responsionum* (pp. 114-133).

Chapter Five

The Bird-Soul

Souls in Dove-form

It is difficult to disentangle references to the soul in dove-form from allusions to the Holy Ghost's appearance at Christ's baptism, because these ideas are closely related. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to examine whether the image of the Holy Spirit influenced conceptions of the soul, or whether the latter image drew on pre-existing conceptions, although *a priori* it seems more plausible that the motif progressed from depicting *the* Holy Spirit to depicting *any* holy spirit. The widespread apocryphal text *The Odes of Solomon* (c. 70 AD) hints at this development.¹ Recalling that the Holy Spirit descended on to Christ in dove-form at his baptism, Ode 24 of this collection, set immediately after the death of Christ, describes the dove flying 'over the head of our Lord the messiah,'² thereby equating the dove-shaped spirit with Christ's own soul.

In this section I shall survey the extant vernacular material for souls in dove form, teasing out the nuances which, because we are accustomed to the idea of sanctified souls appearing as doves, are often lost upon us. Today we might call the association between birds and souls obvious and somewhat hackneyed – but this only affirms the value in returning to this image in Old English and trying to excavate the associations and connotations it would have had for a less wearied audience. Before proceeding, however, it would be beneficial to separate avian images used of the

¹ This was first noticed by A. M. L. Fadda, 'The Mysterious Moment of Resurrection', in *Text, Image, Interpretation*, ed. by Minnis and Roberts, pp. 149-67, at p. 164.

² *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, ed. and trans. by J. R. Harris and A. Mingana, 2 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1916-20), II (1920), p. 341.

mind and avian images used of the soul. As Leslie Lockett has already done this in detail, I offer only a summary here.³

There can be no denying that the defining the boundary between the mind and the soul in the early medieval world, let alone Anglo-Saxon England, is no easy task, for the soul, in Christian doctrine, was closely associated with the uniquely human gift of rationality – a faculty we would attribute to the mind rather than the soul. Lockett, as Godden before her, has found that there is very little evidence for the ‘unitary soul’ (by which she means soul as mind) in Old English outside the works of Ælfric.⁴ Delimiting the separate entities is also complicated by the fact that in medieval narrative they both seem to be able to leave the body (and often in avian, or bird-like, form). In *The Seafarer*, aspects of the mind (*hyge* and *modsefa*) leave the narrator’s chest and soar over the seas in bird-form (ll.58-66), and in Bede’s *Historia* the monk Drythelm dies for a night and has his soul led on a tour of heaven and hell (V.12). Although it is never called his soul, the way in which the entity is directly addressed as Drythelm himself fits perfectly with Christian conceptions of the soul as the self, inhabiting a temporary body while the person is still alive.

Nevertheless, we are fortunate enough to be able to differentiate the mind and soul according to two key criteria. Firstly, and most obviously, we can deduce references to mind and to soul respectively from the terms used, as long as we are careful to be consistent about their definitions and semantic ranges. It also seems arrogant to presume that we understand Latin and Old English better than the early medieval writers did themselves, and thus I generally allow them to make the semantic distinctions, using their own criteria which are based on their usage of particular terms. In my approach, therefore, Latin *mens* and Old English *hyge* firmly denote mental activities, whereas Latin *anima* and Old English *sawol* denote spiritual ones. Secondly, we can generally diagnose whether an entity is the mind or soul based on theological doctrine. The key diagnostic here is the presence or absence of death: the

³ For a fuller exploration of the differences between the mind and soul in Old English see Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, pp. 33-41.

⁴ For a definition of the ‘unitary soul’, see Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, pp. 17 and 182. For Ælfric’s use of the ‘unitary soul’, see pp. 397-400 and 411-8.

body cannot live without the soul,⁵ but it can live (and indeed, must be alive) for the mind to wander the world as it does in *The Seafarer*, Ambrose's *Hexameron*, Alcuin's *De Anima ratione*,⁶ or even in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.⁷ It is very probable that this conception of the mind in avian form, which dates back to and perhaps even beyond antiquity, is intimately linked with the equally old image of the soul in bird form. Nonetheless, it is important to be able to separate these out in our material.⁸

There is a long biblical tradition of using doves to mirror mankind, whether in their qualities (for which see below) or to describe spiritual yearnings, as in Psalm 55.6, *quis dabit mihi pennas sicut columbae, et volabo et requiescam?* ('who will give me wings like a dove, and I can fly and be at rest?'). Although one can see how verses such as Psalm 55.6 could be taken to refer to the soul, especially in light of the Augustinian notion of the soul as self, it is not until the writings of Gregory the Great that the idea of saintly souls in dove form seems to have gained any widespread currency.⁹ In Book II of his *Dialogi*, Gregory relates the death of St. Benedict's sister St. Scholastica, and in Book IV the death of a priest named Spes is recorded.¹⁰ In both cases the newly-departed soul is seen in the form of a dove. Unlike the Old English examples which I examine below, the link here must be stated explicitly. Benedict, for example, returning to his own monastery after visiting Scholastica, is sat in his cell when 'he raised his eyes towards the sky and saw *the soul of his sister*, which had departed from her body and penetrated the mysterious regions of heaven

⁵ See, for example, *CHI* 10.118-29, *LS* 1.141-147, *Christ II*, ll.817-9, *Soul and Body II*, ll.37-41, *Elene* ll.876b-7 and ll.887b-9a. See also Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, pp. 19-28.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the roaming mind in these texts see P. Clemoes, '*Mens absentia cogitans*', pp. 62-77.

⁷ In Book IV prose 1 and metre 1 there are references to the mind (*mens*) being given wings, and I take this to be of a piece with the roaming mind in the aforementioned texts.

⁸ The history here is complex and would benefit from further study. Plato, for example, in his *Phaedrus*, describes the soul as having wings, and the bird-like soul has some currency in the Classical and ancient Egyptian worlds. See H. D. Rankin, *Plato and the Individual* (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 22, and J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: CUP, 1903), pp. 200-2.

⁹ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to trace the development of this idea too, though it is worth noting that there is evidence for some circulation of the dove as symbolising the soul from quite an early era in Christian thought. See, for example, Apponius' *Expositio* (9.22-27) on Song of Songs 6:4-9, in *CCSL* 19:223-225.

¹⁰ *Gregorii Magni Dialogi, libri IV*, ed. by U. Moricca, *Fonti per la storia d'Italia, scrittori 6* (Rome: Tipografia del senato, 1924), II.34 for Scholastica, IV.11 for Spes.

in the form of a dove [emphasis mine].¹¹ When Gregory narrates Spes' death, he describes how all the monks are gathered with Spes in the oratory singing psalms. At the moment of his death, we are told that:

Omnes vero fratres qui aderant ex ore ejus exisse columbam viderunt, quae mox, aperto tecto oratorii egressa, aspicientibus fratribus, penetravit coelum. Cujus idcirco animam in columbae specie apparuisse credendum est, ut omnipotens Deus ex hac ipsa specie ostenderet quam simplici corde ei vir ille servisset.¹²

All the monks who were present at the time saw a dove leave out of his mouth, which soon, leaving by the open roof of the oratory, and while the monks were watching,, penetrated into heaven. Indeed, it is believed that a soul appears in the shape of a dove because of almighty God, and by this sight reveals with what simple heart the man had served Him.

In the case of Scholastica, we are told immediately that it is her soul (*ejusdem sororis suae animam*), and the details of its dove-like appearance follow on (*in columba specie*); in the above case, conversely, we are presented first with the dove issuing out of Spes' mouth (*ex ore ejus exisse columbam*) and then with an identification of this image with the soul. Moreover, Gregory's remarks are intriguing, because they have the appearance of an apology or defensive justification, one which might indicate that such a belief was not particularly widespread.¹³ It should also be pointed out that Gregory's justification of its currency is self-fulfilling: if we accept that 'it is believed that a soul appears in the shape of a dove' then we finish by validating it. While this raises the possibility that the dove-soul image was only just gaining popularity in the sixth century, it is significant that at no

¹¹ Ibid. II.34: *elevatis in aera oculis vidit ejusdem sororis suae animam de ejus corpore egressam, in columba specie coeli secreta penetrare.*

¹² Ibid. IV.11.

¹³ We can compare this with the OE *Dialogues*, which is more specific in its referent: *Forþon hit is to gelyfanne, þæt þy wære his sawle ætywed in þære culfran onlicnesse...* ('therefore it is believed, through his soul being manifest in the form of a dove'), *Bischofs Wærferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, p. 275, ll.18-19. The difference is subtle, but by adding a personal pronoun, whether through misunderstanding or not, Wærferth has changed it from a general musing to a specific explanation.

point is the dove's suitability for this role questioned. There was enough scriptural justification for this, both in the qualities ascribed to the dove as well as in the appearance of the Holy Ghost as Christ's baptism. The simple phrase *in columba specie* seems to have had the authority of the description of this event in the canonical gospels.

Given the prominence of the cult of Gregory in Anglo-Saxon England, as well as Gregory's involvement in the conversion, it is likely that Gregorian texts were a main pathway for transmission of the idea of the soul in dove-form. Colgrave's identification of the deaths of Scholastica and Spes (as recorded in the *Dialogi*) as the main sources for the account of Paulinus' death in the *VGM* (chap.17), corroborates this supposition.¹⁴ An eighth- or ninth-century ivory carving depicting the Last Judgement, now held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, is the earliest representation of resurrection, and this shows the souls of the dead returning, in dove-form to their awaiting bodies.¹⁵ It also has a Gregorian connection in its use of iconography to explain the Last Judgement and resurrection.¹⁶ Anna Maria Luiselli Fadda links the production of this ivory with the notion expressed in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, subsequently championed by Gregory, that 'indoctrination, knowledge of the scriptures, and communication between men could occur, inter alia, whether mediated through "signs" (*signa*) which address the "eyes" (in a way, "visible words": *uerba uisibilia*), or whether mediated through "signs" which address the "ears" and transmit sounds full of meaning (*significantem sonum*).'¹⁷ She further notes that Gregory 'recognized and underlined the usefulness of images as instruments of indoctrination for the unlettered: images were vested with a special importance in catechesis because they clarify immediately and lucidly the realities which are difficult to express and communicate with language.'¹⁸

Alongside the London Ivory, Fadda discusses the slightly younger Cross of the Scriptures of Clonmacnois (Co. Offaly, Ireland), datable to the second half of the

¹⁴ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 150 n.68.

¹⁵ A. M. L. Fadda, 'The Mysterious Moment of Resurrectio', pp. 149 and 156. For an illustration of this see p. 150, Fig.9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-157.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

ninth century.¹⁹ On the bottom panel of the west side of the cross-shaft is a portrayal of Christ lying dead within the tomb.²⁰ As Fadda notes, the image follows the details of Matthew 27:59-60 closely in all respects but one: a dove peers over the top of Christ's tomb and places its beak within his mouth, 'restoring to him the breath of life'.²¹ The image here is very similar to that in *The Odes of Solomon*, where the dove partakes of Christ's dual nature, as both Holy Spirit (i.e. the divine) and soul (i.e. the human). I see no reason, however, to endorse Fadda's suggestion that we should look to eastern, and specifically Egyptian, iconography for the immediate origins of these depictions of the soul (re-)entering the body on both the Clonmacnois cross and the London ivory.²² The primary meaning of Latin *spiritus* ('breath') and its acquired meaning ('spirit') are known well enough that I hardly need to repeat it here, and this link alone, I think, can sufficiently explain the curious detail of the souls in bird-form entering, and leaving (as in the case of Spes in the *Dialogi*), via the mouth. The existence of this Irish example does not necessarily problematise a Gregorian path of transmission for the dove-soul idea to Anglo-Saxon England, but it does raise the possibility of other routes of transmission.²³

There may also be evidence that the idea of the soul in dove-form was not considered orthodoxy in early Anglo-Saxon England. It is always problematic to argue from negative evidence, but nowhere does Bede appear to make a connection between doves and the soul of an individual. He perhaps comes closest to acknowledging such a connection in his commentary on Song of Songs 6:8, where he calls the church a dove 'on account of this unity in the Spirit', and that the church is 'made completely one out of the just from all the peoples'.²⁴ He further remarks that 'because the Holy Spirit descended upon the Lord, the word "dove" or "doves" rightly signifies the spiritual sense and gifts.'²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁰ For an illustration of this in detail see Ibid., Fig.13, p. 166.

²¹ Ibid. p. 169.

²² Ibid., pp. 158-160.

²³ For a survey of the bird-soul in Irish and an argument for its influence in Old English see Henry, *Early English and Celtic Lyric*, pp. 137-51.

²⁴ *The Venerable Bede On the Song of Songs*, trans. by A. Holder (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2011), p. 188.

²⁵ Bede, *In Cantica canticorum*, I, l.14, in *CCSL* 119B, pp. 208, 686-9. See also G. Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 12 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), pp. 38-9.

The idea that people can partake of the Holy Spirit by bonding together in communion with the church, and the idea that doves can signify ‘the spiritual sense and gifts’, may both go some way to showing us the theological foundations from which a dove-shaped soul sprang. However, it is important to note that ‘the spiritual sense and gifts’ are not the soul itself but faculties and experiences associated with it. For Bede the only dove-shaped spirit is the Holy Spirit; nowhere in his *Historia* does he depict a man’s soul in this way. There are many holy men and women whose souls are seen flying to heaven upon their deaths, but in no case are they ever in any sort of material shape. Eorcengota, daughter of Eorcenberht of Kent, is carried away in a great light shining down from heaven (III.8), as is Hild of Whitby (IV.23), Chad’s soul is escorted to heaven by a company of angels (IV.3), and a bright light marks the entry into heaven of several nuns from Barking who died from the plague (IV.7). In Drythelm’s vision, the human souls in hell appear like sparks rising through smoke (V.12). This image of the newly-departed soul as a bright light, or accompanied by brightness, frequents other eighth-century texts. For example: in Felix’s *Life of Guthlac* (c.730 x 740), the eponymous saint’s death is heralded by heavenly light,²⁶ in the *Anonymous Life of Cuthbert* the bishop Aidan’s soul is seen as if in a globe of fire (*quasi in globo igneo*),²⁷ and in Bede’s *Life of Cuthbert* Aidan’s soul is described as *anima claritatis eximia* ‘a soul of extraordinary brightness’.²⁸

Even within Old English, the use of the dove to depict an individual saintly soul is not common. It occurs in four of the *OEM* entries and only three times elsewhere. Moreover, each of these three instances makes use of Gregory’s *Dialogi*: two are in the Old English translation (translating the Scholastica and Spes incidents, II.34 and IV.11, respectively), and one is in Ælfric’s homily on Saint Benedict (*CH* II.11). These are generally very faithful translations, with the exception of the insertion of a pronoun in the OE *Dialogues* account of Spes.

²⁶ *Felix’s Life of Guthlac*, Chap.50.

²⁷ *Anonymous Life IV*, in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*.

²⁸ *Bede’s Life IV*, in *Ibid*.

The *OEM* entries are more intriguing. The four which have souls in dove form are those for St Vitius (no.102/June 15), St Quentin (no.217/Oct 31), St Benignus (no.220/Nov 1), and St Eulalia (no.234/Dec 10), but this idea is missing from the entry we would most expect it for, that is, for St Benedict (no.51/March 21). In the entry for St. Vitius, the souls of Vitius and his foster-father St. Modestus are seen flying to heaven *swa swa culfran, ond hi wæron seofon siðum hwittran þonne snawe* ('like doves, and they were seven times whiter than snow'). After the beheading of St. Quentin, we are told, *sona fleah of ðam lichoman culfre swa hwit swa snaw, ond seo fleah to heofenum* ('immediately a dove, as white as snow, flew from that body, and it flew to heaven'). A snow-white dove (*snawhwit culfran*) is seen leaving St. Benignus's body immediately after his neck is broken, and as soon as St. Eulalia is decapitated we are told that *þa com þær fæger culfre of þam lichaman and fleah ymbe þone lichaman and hyne freode, and þa fleah to heofenum* ('a beautiful dove then came from the body and flew around and caressed it and then flew to heaven').

The description of things being 'snow-white' is not uncommon, and Ælfric has a habit of expanding references to Latin *nix* as *snaw-hwit*.²⁹ It is, however, only infrequently applied to souls. Outside of the *OEM* I have found it used of a soul only in Blickling XIII, where we are told *seo eadige Marie hæfde swa hwite saule swa snaw* 'the blessed Mary had a soul as white as snow'. Usually the description *snaw-hwit* is symbolically used of garments,³⁰ and Ælfric himself explains the whiteness of the garments as signifying the meekness and purity.³¹ The meaning behind such a description of the soul is evidently a marker of sanctity, and while the qualities of

²⁹ E.g. in *CHI*.15.25 and 105, where an angel is *swa hwit swa snaw* ('as white as snow'), and Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, pp. 121 and 124, has identified Matt 28:2-8 (esp. Matt 28:3, where we are told of the angel that *vestimentum ejus sicut nix*, 'his garments are like snow') and Gregory's Homily 21 as sources for this. See also *CHI*.27.246-7, where it describes leprosy (cf. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 229 n.210-47), and *CH* II.10.33, where it described Cuthbert's horse (cf. Godden, *Commentary*, p. 416 n.28-47: 'his *snawhwitum* horse presumably derives from the *niveo* garment of Bede's verse Life and the 'not dissimilar' appearance of the horse').

³⁰ E.g. 'The Transfiguration of Christ', l.12, in S. Irvine, ed., *Old English Homilies from MS Bodley 343*, EETS (Oxford: University Press, 1993). See also A. Napier, 'An Old English Vision of Leofric, Earl of Mercia', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 26 (1910), 180-88 at ll.11-12, and *CH* I.15.25 and 105.

³¹ *CHI*.15.105: *on snawe liðnes þære beorhtnysses* ('and in the snow is the meekness of brightness'). This is a rendering of Gregory's Homily 21, which reads *in nive autem blandimentum candoris* ('and in the snow is the delight of whiteness'), from Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 124 n.101-9.

meekness and purity would not be amiss in the case of martyred souls, I think a more pertinent nuance may be found if they allude to Psalm 50:9: *Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor* ('sprinkle me with Hyssop, and I will be cleansed; wash me, and I will be made whiter than snow').³² Although this most readily relates to baptism, the final part of Psalm 50:9 clearly denotes the acquisition of a purer state of being, an acquisition certainly made by the souls of the martyrs in the *OEM*. Moreover, the dove-shape of the souls hints at such purity too, as the dove-form must have been, first and foremost, associated with the Holy Spirit.

Even more unusual is the enumerative description of the dove's whiteness in the entry for St Vitius. The enumerative style is characteristic of Irish monastic authors and seems to have been circulated in Anglo-Saxon England under their influence.³³ Furthermore, J. E. Cross has shown that the *OEM* was influenced by Irish texts and traditions.³⁴ However, neither Charles Wright nor Cross discuss St Vitius in their studies, and it is not clear why the number seven was chosen specifically.³⁵ Whatever numerological significance there is (and although I am unable to find any it seems probable that there is one), the superlative whiteness of the doves in these images stresses those qualities which we have seen it associated with throughout this chapter: purity, gentleness, and sanctity.

³² Although the glossed psalters tend to be excruciatingly literal about translating this, e.g. *The Stowe Psalter*, p. 96: *super nivem dealbabor = ofer snaw ic beo ablicen*, the Paris Prose Psalter more reads more prosaically with *ic sy hwitra þonne snaw*, in *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*.

³³ See Wright, *The Irish Tradition*, pp. 49-105.

³⁴ J. E. Cross, 'The Influence of Irish Texts and Traditions on the 'Old English Martyrology'', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 81 C (1981), 173-92.

³⁵ Wright, *Irish Tradition*, writes about some of the enumerative associations of the number seven but none of them seem to be applicable here. See the topics in his index, p. 313, under 'enumerative motifs: seven'.

Swans, souls and doves

We must be cautious in our analysis of the dove-soul in Anglo-Saxon England as some evidence suggests a reluctance to endow the dove with, or endorse its possession of, such an association. As a starting point let us consider the account of Paulinus' death in the *VGM*, which has no parallel in Bede's *Historia*:

Nam fertur a videntibus quod huius viri anima in cuiusdam magne, qualis est cignus, alba specie avis, satisque pulchra, quando moritur migrasset ad celum.

(Chap.17)

For it is related by some of those who saw it, that the soul of the man, in the form of a very handsome and white bird, like a swan, journeyed to heaven after he died.³⁶

This is probably modelled after the examples in Gregory's *Dialogi*, as noted by Colgrave, where doves are seen after the deaths of both Scholastica and the priest Spes.³⁷ However, the anonymous author of the *VGM* makes the unusual decision to describe the soul not just as *alba specie avis* (which would be appropriate for a dove), but *qualis est cignus*. Why does the *VGM* not follow Christian precedent and depict the bird in the form of a dove? Colgrave tries to explain this through reference to the Old Norse concept of a *fylgja*, which he presents as '[an] accompanying spirit, which, according to the Norse sagas, left the body at death, [and] was occasionally seen in the form of a swan.'³⁸ However, *fylgjur* most often appear in the form of women, and as Orchard has pointed out, are more frequently attached to families than to individuals,³⁹ and Tolley's brief note on animal *fylgjur* shows that they are

³⁶ *Earliest Life of Gregory*, p. 100. Own trans. based on Colgrave's, p. 101.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.n.68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ See A. Orchard, *Cassel's Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (London: Cassel, 1997), s.v. *fylgja* and also Simek, *Dictionary*, s.v. *fylgjur*.

portents rather than figurations of the soul.⁴⁰ The only early swan-*fylgja* I am aware of is the late thirteenth century (1270 – 1280) *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* ('Saga of Gunnlaug snake-tongue'), and this example affirms Tolley's observation: the swan-*fylgja* in a dream is a thinly-veiled portent of the saga narrative which sees Helga the fair (*Helga in fagra*) at the centre of a love-triangle which proves fatal to the men vying for her hand in marriage.⁴¹ The swan is her *fylgja*, and at no point does it portend her death; she survives the saga. There is little, then, which corroborates Colgrave's suggestion. It does not stand to scrutiny and should be put to rest. If we are to find an explanation for this curious swan-soul image, we must look elsewhere.

Anna Gannon, in her study of the iconography of Anglo-Saxon coinage, finds a number of curious depictions analogous to the swan-soul in the *VGM*. Late seventh and early eighth century coins of Series B and J contain birds on crosses, and 'following Early Christian precedent, the bird on the coins can be identified as a dove.'⁴² In a footnote, Gannon observes that 'on some issues the bird has the long neck and stance of a swan', and shows some examples of the bird.⁴³ She also speculates that 'possibly the swan's whiteness and elegance made it a suitable alternative to the dove on the coins',⁴⁴ which would square with the description given in the *VGM* of the bird as *alba specie avis*. Although this combination of coins and the *VGM* is a rather small data set, taken together, they suggest the possibility that some Anglo-Saxons were not content with the identification of the soul (whether of man or, in the case of the dove on the cross, of God) with as small and unimpressive a bird as a *Columbid*. It is evident that some people felt this way, as Ronald Murphy observes, as the *Heliand*-poet seems somewhat embarrassed about the species of bird concerned when the dove descends over Christ at his baptism.⁴⁵

It would be far beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt a comprehensive survey of swan-like birds representing the soul in Anglo-Saxon England, though another two

⁴⁰ Tolley, *Shamanism*, I, 242.

⁴¹ *Gunnlaugssaga ormstungu*, ed. by P. G. Foote and R. Quirk (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1974). For the date see p. 9. The swan-*fylgjur* is in Þorsteinn's dream in chapter 2 (p. 17).

⁴² A. Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 108.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 108 n.12. See particularly Fig. 4.1.b. on the same page.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Murphy, *Saxon Saviour*, p. 80.

examples would illustrate the relative prevalence of this association. In the Lindisfarne Gospels (London, BL, Cotton MS Nero D.iv) f.139r, on the incipit page for the gospel of Luke, there are some long-necked birds usually identified as cormorants.⁴⁶ These birds inhabit the interlace which forms the border to the page. The bottom corner of the right-hand border terminates in a rather naturalistic cat head, and so the birds within the interlace border appear to be moving up through the insides of the cat's digestive tract. Michelle Brown has interpreted the iconography here as not only a humorous illustration of oblivious birds being crammed into an alert cat's stomach, but with a 'darker meaning' of 'the ever-present threat of evil, waiting to pounce upon the unwary.'⁴⁷ The association here is implicit but straightforward: if the cat is the embodiment of the evil waiting to ensnare the unwary, then it is, typologically speaking, the devil, and the birds seized and devoured by it would then symbolize souls. The second example is the front panel of the Frank's Casket. Here, preceding the three Magi at the Adoration of Christ is a bird, which, as Richard Abels notes,

is unique in representations of the Magi and has never been explained satisfactorily. If the artist intended the bird to be a dove, one would read this scene as the Holy Spirit (or an angel) guiding the Magi to Christ, but, as depicted, the bird looks more like a duck or a goose.⁴⁸

In spite of this observation, Abels does not attempt to explain the presence of a goose beyond noting that it is associated with Martin of Tours and that Martin's cult was

⁴⁶ A high-quality plate of this page can be found in M. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe* (London: British Library, 2003), pl.21, and for a close-up of the cat and one of the birds see fig.85 on p. 219. For the identification of these birds as cormorants see J. Backhouse, 'Birds, Beasts and Initials in Lindisfarne's Gospels Books', in *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to A.D. 1200*, ed. by G. Bonner, C. Stancliffe and D. Rollason (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), pp. 165-74, at 166-7. Despite the relatively widespread acceptance of this, I would draw attention to my arguments regarding the wide semantic field of OE *ganet*, above, and propose that we identify the birds in this fashion rather than with modern conceptions of taxonomy. Accepting these birds as **ganetas* would also justify their place in the current discussion on swans, as *ganet* was applied to describe any bird with a relatively squat body and long neck, including swans and cormorants.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Lindisfarne Gospels*, p. 341.

⁴⁸ R. Abels, 'What has Weland to do with Christ? The Franks Casket and the Acculturation of Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum*, 84 (2009), 549-581 at 559.

popular in Northumbria.⁴⁹ It is also worth noting that the depiction of an angel guiding the Magi towards the Christ is common in Byzantine art but only occurs ‘occasionally in later northern European art.’⁵⁰ The most plausible identification for the bird here is that it is the Holy Spirit confirming the sanctity of the new-born Jesus, an idea supported by the association (noticed by Abels) between the Adoration by the Magi and the appearance of the Holy Ghost-dove at Christ’s baptism found in the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*. Cuthbert and two monks find themselves in need of food, and Cuthbert comforts his associates:

‘Puto enim quod aliquid nobis Dominus donauerit, ad celebrandum diem in quo magi cum muneribus adorauerunt eum, et in quo spiritus sanctus in specie columbe baptizato in Iordane super eum descendit...’

(II.4)

‘For I think that the Lord will give us something to celebrate the day on which the Magi worshipped him with gifts and on which the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove descended upon him at his baptism in Jordan....’⁵¹

Abels does not, however, add that Ælfric makes the same point in his homily *VIII Idus Ianuarii Epiphania Domini*:

Des dæg is gehaten epiphania domini, þæt is godes geswutelungdæg. On þisum dæg crist wæs geswutelod þam ðrim cyningum, þe fram eastdæle middaneardes hine mid þrimfealdum lacum gesohton. Eft embe geara ymbrenum he wearð on his fulluhte on þisum dæge middanearde geswutelod, þa ða se halga gast on culfran hiwe uppon him gereste 7 þæs fæder stemn of heofenum hlude swegde.

(*CH I.VII*, ll.37-42).

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 559 n.22.

⁵⁰ M. Smyth, ‘The Dove and the Star: Enduring Ideas from Seventh-Century Ireland’, *Peritia*, 20 (2008), 98-134, at 105 n.22.

⁵¹ *Two Lives of Cuthbert*, pp. 82-3. Abels notes this passage in ‘What has Weland to do with Christ?’ p. 559 n.22.

This day is called *epiphania domini*, that is, ‘God’s manifestation-day. On this day Christ was revealed to those three kings, who from the eastern portion of the world sought him with threefold gifts. And after the course of many years, he again on this day was manifest to the world during his baptism, when the Holy Ghost remained upon him in the form of a dove and the father’s voice sounded loudly from the heavens.

As these sources are at least two centuries apart, it is probable that this idea circulated widely. Ælfric’s reasoning, in particular, would explain why the Holy Spirit would be attending Christ’s birth with the three Magi, in that they are both depicted as testimonies to Christ’s divine nature.

The identification of the goose-like bird on the Adoration panel with the Holy Spirit is supported by the iconography of the coins of Series B, mentioned above, where the bird on the cross is often long-necked and squat-bodied. However, the closest parallel to the birds of Series B coins is not the bird on the Adoration panel, but its counterparts on the Weland panel, where Weland the Smith offers Beadohild a cup.⁵² At the far right of this scene, bordering the Adoration, is an image of a man shooting down geese with a bow which can only be satisfactorily explained through recourse to thirteenth-century *Piðrekssaga*, which mentions Weland (here Velent) having a brother called Egill:

Þat er eitt sinn, at Velent biðr Egil, broðor sinn, fa ser allar fiaðar, bæði storar oc smar, oc segir at hann vill gera ser einn flygil. Egill ferr i scog oc veiðir allz kyns fvgla oc faer velent. Nv gerer velent einn flygil, en þa er gor var, þa er því likazt sem fiaðrhamr vëri fleginn af grip eða af gambr eða af þeim fvgl

⁵² Gannon, *Iconography*, pp. 109-110: ‘The bird of Type 85, although conceptually related, is innovative compared with the modelled birds of Series B, as it is executed in a linear style of simple elegance. The nearest parallels, allowing for differences in materials, can be drawn with the Franks Casket, which is chronologically, and, arguably, geographically, close to the coins of Series J, where the birds are similarly simplified with comparable wing-scrolls, tail-feathers, and S-necks, and also with the spiral wing joint of a Northumbrian belt-chape.’

er stvz heitir.⁵³

(Chap.77/§130)

At a certain time, Velent asks Egil, his brother, to get him all sorts of feathers, both big and small, and says to him that he intends to make himself a *flygil* (cf. German *flügel*, a ‘wing’). Egil goes into the forest and hunts all kinds of birds and brings them to Velent. Now Velent makes a *flygil*, which when it was made, most resembled a feather-cloak made from the feathers of a griffin or of a vulture or of that bird which is called an ostrich.

The species of bird used are not firmly identified in *Piðriks saga* – it only states that birds ‘both big and small’ (*bæði storar oc smar*) were used, and it may be that these birds of various size are replicated on the Franks Casket panel.⁵⁴ However, I am inclined to agree with Abels’ observation that the figure presumed to be Egil on the Franks Casket ‘is strangling birds that look very much like the bird leading the Magi to the Christ Child.’⁵⁵ It is important that we note that these birds are not *identical*: the birds of the Weland scene each have a spiral wing-joint while that of bird in the Adoration is more naturalistic. Abels is correct in recognising the similarity between the birds in the Weland and in the Adoration scenes, but the subtle differences here assure us that we are meant to understand that these are not the same birds. If we read the juxtaposition of these two scenes as contrasting depictions of gift-giving (the Adoration scene as worshipful and life-giving, the Weland scene as malicious, vengeful and death-giving), then the interpretation of the various birds as denoting souls enhances this reading. The Holy Ghost-bird marks the sanctity of the birth of Christ and, as an image of the soul, the renewed hope for souls which rightfully commit to worshipping him. The limp and dead birds in the Weland panel, by contrast, reflect upon the rampant bloodshed and the throng of deaths associated with the revenge-oriented Weland story; their limp bodies are turned away from Weland

⁵³ *Piðriks saga af Bern*, ed. by H. Bertelsen, SGNL (Copenhagen: Møllers, 1905-11), p. 125-6. I have retained the spelling but have silently punctuated Bertelsen’s text in consultation with the less scholarly *Piðreks Saga af Bern*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1951), p. 112.

⁵⁴ Dronke, on the other hand, thinks we see the ‘long necks of large aquatic birds’, *PE* II., p. 270 and n.33. I agree that some of these are swan-like, but am less sure about the smaller birds in the background.

⁵⁵ Abels, ‘Whas has Weland to do with Christ?’, p. 559.

to stress the cacophony of this scene and its associations, while the Holy Ghost-bird is turned towards Christ and Mary, like the Magi, to emphasize its harmony.

Having surveyed the swan-soul connection in the iconographic sources, we now return to the textual sources to examine the only place in the vernacular to reference such an association. This is in Exeter Riddle 7 (Williamson 5), commonly solved as ‘swan’, but can be identified with some certainty as referring specifically to the mute swan (*Cygnus olor*):⁵⁶

Hrægl min swigað þonne ic hrusan trede
oþþe þa wic buge oþþe wado drefe.
Hwilum mec ahebbað ofer hæleþa byht
hyrste mine ond þeos hea lyft,
ond mec þonne wide wolcna strengu
ofer folc byreð. Frætwe mine
swogað hlude ond swinsiað,
torhte singað, þonne ic getenge ne beom
flode ond foldan, ferende gæst.

My garments are silent when I tread on the ground, or when I dwell in the town or stir the waters. At times my ornaments and this high air raise myself above the abode of men, and the power of the clouds carries me over people. My adornments whistle loudly and cry out, brightly sing, when I am not close to the water and the land, a travelling guest/ghost.

Of central importance to my argument here is the well-known pun of the last line. *Gæst* means ‘spirit’, whereas *gæst* means ‘guest,’ and the phrase *ferende gæst* is usually translated ‘a travelling guest’ and taken to refer to the migratory habits of the swan.⁵⁷ It could also mean ‘travelling spirit’, and it is not significant that the scribe of the Exeter Book chose not to put an accent mark over *gæst*, in part because the

⁵⁶ See my chapter on taxonomy, above, and P. Kitson, ‘Swans and Geese in Old English Riddles’, 79.

⁵⁷ Two of the three species of British swan (the whooper swan and the Bewicks swan) are migratory; the mute swan is now resident but will travel large distances in resident areas.

presence of accent marks in the manuscript varies wildly from poem to poem,⁵⁸ and otherwise because accent marks can indicate both short stressed syllables and long vowels in the Exeter Book.⁵⁹ The page containing this riddle (fol. 103b) has only one accent mark on the preposition *on*, belonging to l.7 of the previous riddle.⁶⁰ Going by the sense of the poem then, both ‘spirit’ and ‘guest’ seem to be invoked in the last line, as the riddle’s subject is ghostly and ephemeral, but also transitory and migratory, flitting from settlement to settlement. Furthermore, the phrase *ferende gæst* recalls the numerous instances where forms of *feran* (‘to go’) are used to denote the passing away of an individual and the movement of their souls (or life force) out of their bodies.⁶¹ Given that riddles often recast the familiar and quotidian into the realm of the exotic and wondrous, what we may be seeing in the ‘swan’ riddle is a reversal of a standard simile: instead of the soul envisaged in swan-form, the swan is envisaged as a soul or spirit.

To view this another way, the combination of the phrase *ferende gæst* in the last line as well as the description of something that is more animated when it leaves the ground could suggest to potential (and incorrect) solvers that the riddle is about a soul. This is what in riddling terminology is called the *focus*, described by Patrick Murphy as the metaphors or extended metaphors used to mislead the solver, or ‘the expected response of an imagined solver who took the riddle much too literally.’⁶² Murphy provides a detailed analysis of Riddle 54 (solved ‘churn’) and demonstrates how, despite ostensibly being about (male) masturbation or sex, the riddle provides contradictions and logical *non sequiturs* which exclude these actions as the riddle’s solution.⁶³ In spite of such readily available internal evidence, however, we are able to see the riddle’s focus because we are more familiar with the frame of reference employed by it, and we are more confident in identifying which descriptions are

⁵⁸ *ASPR* 3, p. xxv.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. lxxxvii.

⁶¹ See, for example, Ælfric’s *CH* l.30, p. 438, where *feran* is used of the movement of the *gæst*, and in the prose *Life of Guthlac* it is used of the *saw* leaving the body. For many more examples see entries I.B.1.a and II.D under *feran* in the *DOE*. I am grateful to Jane Roberts for suggesting I explore this possibility when another version of this section of my thesis was presented as a paper at the London Old and Middle English Research Seminar (LOMERS) in May 2013.

⁶² P. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), p. 47.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-95.

meant to lead us astray and which exclude incorrect solutions. In proposing that ‘a soul’ is the focus for Riddle 7, it must be conceded that this is a difficult position to argue for given firstly that the focus cannot neatly match all the criteria specified by the riddle (as that would make it the solution!), and secondly given our lack of frame of reference: Christians today spend much less energy on conceptualising the appearance, movement and journey of the departed soul than they did in the Anglo-Saxon period, for example.

To corroborate my argument that Riddle 7’s focus is a soul, I shall draw attention to its clothing paradox. Considerable attention is devoted to describing the garments of the object, and how the garments allow the wearer to perform actions (ll.1, 4, 6b-8a), and this must surely have evoked the popular Christian idea of the body as a garment, shed upon death.⁶⁴ Conversely, this focus on unusual ornaments could also have evoked the glorious apparel bestowed upon good souls, found in *The Phoenix* (ll.590-610),⁶⁵ and popular in homilies in the sense of the virtuous being clothed in their good works.⁶⁶

This link between swans and souls may have implications for the provenance of a Latin text called ‘The Swan Sequence’, first recorded in the tenth century, but which, as will see, has Anglo-Saxon affinities.⁶⁷ Its earliest manuscript witness is a collection of sequences from the abbey of Saint-Martial, in Limoges (Paris,

⁶⁴ This motif is found in, for example, in *CH* I.14.215 (*Se lichama þe is þære saule reaf...* ‘the body, which is the garment of the soul’), and in *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, I, 1.176-7, where *Ælfric* says the soul is *mid þam lichaman befangen* (‘clasped with the body’). Furthermore, twice in *The Phoenix* (after resurrection the bird was *feþrum bifongen*, ‘dressed in feathers’, l.380a, and likewise people are *flæsce bifongen* after resurrection, l.535a) and in *CH* I.10.122-9, *Ælfric* makes clear that the body cannot perform any activity without the soul present within it, and this would make for typical riddle paradox (where, in Riddle 7, the *hrægl* is only active once it has left the ground, that is, if we were to indulge the focus, when the soul leaves the body on dying).

⁶⁵ Of particular relevance is that the souls in heaven are described as *fægrum frætsum* (‘beautifully adorned’, l.610a), using the same word that occurs on l.6b of Riddle 7.

⁶⁶ E.g. in *Vercelli* XXI.45-61, *CH* I.14.99-106, and *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, I, 1.209-210. The ultimate source for this seems to have been Psalms 131:9.

⁶⁷ It is also known by other titles such as *Planctus cigni*, *De cigno*, *Candidi planctus cigni* and *Cinnica*. See J. Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry 750-1150* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) p. 105. Godman, in his edition, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, titles it *Clangam, filii*, after the first line, though he also uses, like most English scholarship, ‘The Swan Sequence’.

Bibliothèque Nationale, Lat. 1240)⁶⁸ which, judging by the style of its musical notation, also has Aquitanian influence.⁶⁹ It should be noted that ‘The Swan Sequence’'s attestations solely in Continental manuscripts does not in preclude ties to Anglo-Saxon England. In the most extreme case we find Anglo-Saxon texts which are only preserved in Continental manuscripts, such as penitentials from the ninth century and earlier,⁷⁰ and the general intellectual connections are well-known.⁷¹ Peter Godman includes the poem in his collection of Carolingian poetry, presumably based on the provenance of its earliest manuscript witness, though he has little discussion of its authorship or origins, remarking only ‘who [the author] was we cannot tell.’⁷² The poem relates the plight of a swan, who, exhausted from flying, is caught out at sea and is trapped among the buffeting waves. Then, revitalized by the dawn, the swan rises up into the air and carries on flying to pleasant lands. The poem ends with birds thronging together and proclaiming the glory of God (here called the ‘great king’, *regi magno*).⁷³ Various interpretations have been put forward for the poem’s allegorical meaning.⁷⁴ Godman notes, without source or further comment, that ‘for a medieval copyist of this text, it was an allegory of man’s fall from grace,’⁷⁵ and endorses this reading with the supplement that it is also about Redemption.⁷⁶ The medieval copyist Godman refers to was working about a century after our earliest manuscript (Paris, BN, Lat.1121, dated 1025-8),⁷⁷ and actually titled ‘The Swan Sequence’ *Prosa per allegoria[m] ac de cygno ad lapsum hominis* (‘a text about an allegory on the fall of man, as if it were about a swan’).⁷⁸ While it is

⁶⁸ This is the generally accepted date for this manuscript. See P. Dronke, ‘The beginnings of the sequence’, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 87 (1965), 43-73, repr. in *The Medieval Poet and his World*, ed. by P. Dronke (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984), pp. 115-44, at p. 129, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, p. 69, Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals*, p. 105, and K. Levy, *Gregorian Chant and the Carolingians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 131.

⁶⁹ K. Levy, *Gregorian Chant and the Carolingians*, p. 131.

⁷⁰ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 69.

⁷¹ See, J. Story, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c.750-870* (London: Ashgate, 2008), as well as the still very useful W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946).

⁷² *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, p. 69.

⁷³ For the text and a translation of *Clangam filii* see *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, pp. 322-5.

⁷⁴ For a summary of these see Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals*, p. 106.

⁷⁵ *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, p. 69.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71 and 322, note for text 59.

⁷⁷ For the dating of this see J. Grier, ‘Roger de Chabannes, Cantor of St. Martial de Limoges’, *Early Music History*, 14 (1995), 53-119, at 117.

⁷⁸ *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, ed. by G. M. Dreves, vol 7 (Leipzig: Fues, 1889), p. 253.

certainly going too far to dismiss the rubric as an outright mistake,⁷⁹ we must also take into account the fact that ‘The Swan Sequence’ is also found between two Easter sequences and elsewhere identified as a hymn for Pentecost.⁸⁰ In these differing contexts, ‘The Swan Sequence’ could be viewed as not only about the fall from grace (and, as such, also about Redemption), but also as thematically appropriate for celebrating Christ’s resurrection and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

‘The Swan Sequence’ shares affinities with *The Seafarer* and *The Phoenix*: like the former the swan is in exile upon the seas (Swan Sequence stanza 4: *exsulata* ‘I am in exile’), miserable as it is buffeted by waves; like the latter, there is a thronging of birds when the swan makes it to the *amoena arida* (‘pleasant lands’). In *The Phoenix* (ll.335-41) as in *Guthlac A* (ll.733-6), the thronging of birds stands in for the thronging of angels around the heavenly host (as seen, for example, in *The Dream of the Rood*, ll.150-5). Although *The Phoenix* is not a neat representation of Christ and his resurrection, or indeed of the good Christian,⁸¹ it is concerned with resurrection, the fate of the soul, and Redemption,⁸² and in these themes parallels ‘The Swan Sequence’. If the poem is Anglo-Saxon in origin – and the swan-soul comparison, the *peregrinatio* theme and the thronging motifs suggest to me that it is – then there may be an inter-lingual pun in its first line: *Clangam, filii* (‘I shall cry out, sons’). In the Lindisfarne gospels the *uocauī filium meum* of Matt 2:15 is translated *ic ceigde suona min* (‘I choose my son’), where *suona* is homonymous with *suan* (‘swan’).

Whether ‘The Swan Sequence’ is Anglo-Saxon or not, it is clear that the swan-soul connection never became orthodox, and its continued existence in the tenth century is only certainly evidenced by a play on popular conceptions in Exeter Riddle 7. It is clear why it never crops up in the homilies: as we have seen, the dove-soul link was closely related to the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the dove

⁷⁹ This is the view of H. Spanke, *Studien zu Sequenz, Lai und Leich* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1931), p. 156.

⁸⁰ Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals*, p. 105.

⁸¹ J. E. Cross, ‘The Conception of the Old English *Phoenix*,’ in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. by R. P. Creed (Providence: Brown University Press, 1967), pp. 129-52, at pp. 135-6.

⁸² J. N. Garde, *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective: A Doctrinal Approach* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 196-200, H. E. Fox, ‘The aesthetics of resurrection: goldwork, the soul and the *Deus Aurifex* in *The Phoenix*,’ *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 63 (2011), 1-19, esp. 10-12.

occupied too prominent a position in the Christian tradition to be substituted. The reason for substituting the swan for the expected dove is not completely clear. The most likely explanation is that it lies not in any pre-Christian significance of the swan, but in the swan being a majestic white bird considered better suited to bearing spiritual meaning than the inconspicuous dove. Whiteness was the only frequently mentioned aspect of the dove's appearance, and so the swan must have naturally suggested itself for the part. Above it has been seen that Colgrave's suggestion, that a swan-*fylgja* might lie behind Paulinus' death in the *VGM*, does not stand up to scrutiny; and below I further argue that the swan-soul connection does not stem from any non-Christian traditions, insofar as our extant evidence permits.

Excluding transformational traditions: the case of the swan-maidens

There are very few examples of swans in Old English literature. If we exclude those sources which tell us very little about the lore associated with swans, such as charters and glossaries, then we find them in *The Seafarer* l.19a, *Andreas* l.196b, *Beowulf* l.200a, *The Phoenix* l.137b, Exeter Riddle 7 (though it is never named as such), the Old English *Hexameron*,⁸³ and enumerated among the *fugas þa þe heard flæsc habbað* ('the birds which have tough meat'), prescribed as a remedy for feelings of extreme hunger in Bald's *Leechbook*.⁸⁴ Some general characteristics can be discerned, nonetheless. They are associated with music (*Exeter Riddle 7*, *The Seafarer*, *The Phoenix*), water (*Hexameron*, *Beowulf*, *The Seafarer* and *Andreas*), and more specifically, with travel. This latter association is most manifest in the

⁸³ Chap.VIII: *Ða fugelas soðlice þe on flodum wuniað syndon flaxfote be Godes foresceawunge, þæt hi swimmað magon and secan him fodan. Sum beoð langsweorode, swa swa swanas ond ylfettan, þæt hi aræcan him magon mete be ðam grunde* ('Truly, the birds which dwell on the waters are flat-footed by God's providence, so that they can swim and find themselves food. Some are long-necked, like swanas and ylfettan, so that they may reach food for themselves on the ground'), *Hexameron*, p. 24.

⁸⁴ Bald's *Leechbook* II.16, in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, ed. and trans. by T. O. Cockayne, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1864-6), II (1866), 196. In Bald's *Leechbook* I.31 (*Ibid.*, II, 74), there is a plant called *swanewyrt* ('swan-wort') used for a 'dead swelling' (*deadum swile*), but I have omitted this from my list as it tells us very little about swans.

swan's appearance in the compound *swanrade* ('swan-road') for the high seas in *Beowulf* and *Andreas*, but also in the swan's appearance at sea during the voyage in *The Seafarer*; it doubtlessly has some foundation in the migratory habits of the three British swan species too. If any Anglo-Saxon swan-lore influenced the depiction of souls in swan-form, it was grounded in observation: swans are liminal creatures which can traverse the water, air and land, and they are endowed with a peripatetic nature which could be associated with a journeying soul.

However, in order for us to disprove a pre-existing concept that would lend itself to the swan-soul, let us take as our starting point the assumption that the ejection of the soul from the body was a transformation, or indeed, that newly-Christianised and pagan Anglo-Saxons imagined this as a transformation. This would be the most appropriate framework for examining whether certain non-Christian traditions influenced the concept of the soul in appearing swan form. Joyce Salisbury, in her wonderful survey of the complex animal-human relationships which permeated the medieval world, makes the following bold claim:

The early Christian Middle Ages also inherited the idea of metamorphosis from northern pagan tradition. For example, early Irish myths show frequent examples of shape shifting. A beautiful woman spends every other year as a swan, and the man who loves her changes into a swan to possess her. Another woman is impregnated by a man appearing as a bird, and another couple turns into swans to escape an irate husband. These transformations link the human and animal worlds at moments of sexuality, a time when the animal side traditionally emerges. The metamorphoses into birds may also recall an ancient mythological association of woman, fertility and birds.⁸⁵

Although Salisbury's examples are all from the Irish tradition, her subsequent discussion of the 'Nordic tradition of shape shifting that survives in myths and sagas', as well as her general appeal to 'northern pagan tradition' here make clear that she is painting in broad strokes and referring to Germanic pagan traditions as

⁸⁵ Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, p. 140.

well.⁸⁶ Had she supplemented her swan-women examples with non-Celtic episodes, she almost certainly would have included the so-called swan-maidens found at the beginning of *Völundarkviða*. This poem is particularly useful because of its close ties to Anglo-Saxon England,⁸⁷ and it may have been composed there.⁸⁸

Any discussion of these mysterious maidens must begin with some concessions. One of the most vexing peculiarities of the *Völundarkviða* swan-maidens is that they are so ill-defined. They occur only here, and it is often overlooked that only Svanhvít explicitly has swan characteristics (in her name and in her drawing *svanfiðrar* over Slagfiðr, Völundr's brother, when she embraces him, 2/6). Nevertheless, it has become convention to refer to the three as 'swan-maidens' and I shall do so here for the sake of convenience. The proem tells how Völundr and his two brothers find three women spinning linen by a lake, and describes how *þar vóro hiá þeim álptarhamir þeira; þat vóro valkyrior* ('there were their swan-cloaks next to them; they were valkyries').⁸⁹ Nowhere in the poem are the women called *valkyrjur*, nor, as one may suspect due to their spinning, are they called *nornir* either.⁹⁰ The only collective term used for them is the vague *meyiar* ('maidens', 1/1, 3/7), though there is clearly something supernatural about them. They are marked out as *alvitr* ('foreign creatures', 1/3, 3/9),⁹¹ they arrive and leave abruptly, and they possess wings of some kind which are closely associated with swans (*álptarhamr* in proem, *svanfiðrar*, 2/6).⁹² Furthermore, the swan-maiden with whom Slagfiðr is paired is named Svanhvít ('swan-white', proem and 5/4).

There is some tension between the introductory prose and the poem which suggests

⁸⁶ The stories she refers to are, in order, *Aislinge Óengusso* ('the Dream of Óengus') and two episodes from *Togail bruidne Da Derga* ('the Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel').

⁸⁷ This link has been known for a long time now, but for details see Dronke, *PE II*.258-86, J. McKinnell, 'The context of *Völundarkviða*', *Saga-Book*, 23 (1993), 1-27, esp. 1-13, and A. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 39.

⁸⁸ J. McKinnell, 'The context of *Völundarkviða*', pp. 11-13.

⁸⁹ All references to *Völundarkviða* are to Dronke's *PE II*. The translations are my own.

⁹⁰ Both K. Bek-Pedersen, *Norns in Old Norse Mythology* (Edinburgh: Dunedin, 2011), pp. 124-7, and Dronke, *PE II*, pp. 301-2, have noted that the behaviour of these women is not appropriate for valkyries. Bek-Pedersen also demonstrates that these women cannot be *nornir*.

⁹¹ See Dronke's commentary, *PE II*, p. 303, and J. McKinnell, 'The Context of *Völundarkviða*', 1-2.

⁹² However, as Dronke notes, if we do not accept that *alvitr*, 1/3, is a replacement for an earlier form of *álptir* ('swans'), then the reference to the *svanfiðrar* on 2/6 is 'the only indication that they are swan maidens', *PE II*.p. 301.

that, at some point, there was difficulty in categorising, and indeed in fully understanding, the swan-maidens. We have already seen how the swan-maidens are called *valkyrior* in the prose with little justification in the poetry, and it is possible that the prose's statement that the swan-maidens *flugo þær at vitia víga* ('flew away to seek battles') is an attempt both to justify the valkyrie interpretation and to explain the womens' bewildering and apparently motiveless departure (st.3).⁹³ More evidence of this categorical confusion, and subsequent characterisation of the swan-maidens as valkyries, can be seen in the names given to the swan-maidens. While only two of the swan-maidens are named in the poem proper (Qlrún, 5/2, and Svanhvít, 5/4), the proem names all three and gives them more valkyrie-like names:

þar vóro tvær dætr Hlōðvés konungs, Hlaðguðr Svanhvít ok Hervor Alvitr;
en þriðia var Qlrún Kiárs dóttir af Vallande.

'there were two daughters of King Hlōðvér, Hlaðguðr Svanhvít and Hervor Alvitr;⁹⁴ the third was Qlrún, daughter of Caesar of Valland'.

The prose-editor's misinterpretation of *alvitr*, 1/3, for a proper name ('All-wise'),⁹⁵ is especially revealing of the degree to which these women troubled readers. Although several interpretations have been offered for the names Hlaðguðr and Hervor,⁹⁶ it is clear that these names conform to the pattern expected of valkyries in a way which Svanhvít and the misread Alvitr do not.⁹⁷ Qlrún may have been left untouched because of its readily apparent associations with either the ale-runes

⁹³ All we are told of their departure is that, after staying for seven years, they *in átta [vetr]/ allan þráðo* ('yearned all of the eighth winter') and left to fulfil their fate (*ørlög drygja*, 3/10).

⁹⁴ This could be a title as well as a proper noun, and Larrington translates it 'Hervor, the strange creature', in her translation of the *Poetic Edda*, p. 102.

⁹⁵ McKinnell, 'Context of *Völundarkviða*', 3.

⁹⁶ Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, s.v. 'Hlaðguðr', gives 'weaver of battles', from *hlaða* ('to weave') + *guðr* ('battle'), supporting this interpretation with reference to *Darraðarljóð*. Bek-Pedersen, *Norns in Old Norse Mythology*, improves Simek's suggestion by pointing to meanings of *hlaða* such as 'to make a pile' and 'to kill', p. 125, and this ties in much better firstly with an ostensible valkyrie name, and secondly (and more importantly), the lack of evidence connecting valkyries to weaving. For the latter see Bek-Pedersen, *Norns in Old Norse Mythology*, pp. 123-149.

⁹⁷ It is important to note that despite a superficial resemblance, the valkyrie name *Sváva*, found in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, is not related to *Svan* ('swan'). Its derivation is unclear but is probably related to *svæfa* ('to sleep'). See Simek, *Dictionary*, s.v. 'Sváva', and Orchard, *Dictionary*, s.v. 'Sváva'.

mentioned in *Sigrdrífumál* 7/1 and 19/3,⁹⁸ or a compound of Primitive Old Norse *alu* ('good luck',⁹⁹ 'dedication'¹⁰⁰) plus *rún* in either of its senses (i.e. 'rune' or 'secret').¹⁰¹

The valkyrie-like pedigrees of Svanhvít and Qlrún are found in the poem after this prelude (15/5-8), and Dronke is alone in considering them 'intrusive' on rather tentative and subjective grounds.¹⁰² However, it is unusual that the names Hlaðguðr and Hervør are mentioned here for the first time in the poem (though Qlrún is repeated, 15/7), with no attempt to match either of them up with the previously named Svanhvít, or assist in mapping identities by referencing which man they had previously paired with. Moreover, while it is possible to see how the combination of references to wealth in stanza 15, and how calling the swan-maidens *drósir* ('noblewomen', 1/7) could lead to this deduction, Hlqðvér is never called a king in the poem itself. There are two possibilities here: either Hlqðver was known as a king, or, as I think is more likely given the other discrepancies between the prose and the poem, the prose-editor assumed Hlqðver was a king as befits the ancestry of valkyries.

By examining the discrepancies between the prose-editor's summary and the poem itself, I hope it is clear that the swan-maiden was not a form of supernatural woman that the prose-editor was acquainted with, and that the swan-maidens were therefore presented as valkyries. There was some justification for this in a tradition that linked women to swans.¹⁰³ Bek-Pedersen collects some material in support of this, and although I agree with her point (to an extent, see below), some of her evidence is unconvincing. Her linking of the southern origins and sudden arrival of the swan-

⁹⁸ 'Ale-rune' is Orchard's preferred interpretation, *Dictionary*, s.v. 'Ölrún', and although Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, is doubtful about a relationship with ON *ql*, he nonetheless gives credence to 'beer-rune', s.v. 'Qlrun'.

⁹⁹ J. McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Old Norse Myth and Legend* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), p. 212.

¹⁰⁰ M. MacLeod and B. Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006) p. 24, and detailed examination of some *alu* inscriptions pp. 72-101.

¹⁰¹ Bek-Pedersen, independently, also considered these both viable options, *Norns in Old Norse Mythology*, p. 125.

¹⁰² Dronke, *PE II.*, p. 313. She says: 'I do not see any evidence that the poet of stanzas 1 to 3 wishes his swan maidens to have human connections, such as valkyries have in ON heroic verse.'

¹⁰³ Bek-Pedersen, *Norns in Old Norse Mythology*, p. 126.

maidens in *Vǫlundarkviða* is tenuous (as many birds migrate) and does not take into account that most migratory swans journey from the north into Britain and Scandinavia.¹⁰⁴ Slightly less tenuous is her suggestion that the *svani dansca* ('Danish swans'), embroidered for Guðrún in *Guðrúnakviða II* (14/8), are linked to women and battles because a battle is depicted on the embroidery (15/1-8), and because the embroidering is done by a woman called Þóra (14/1). Bek-Pedersen's strongest evidence is in *Vǫlsunga Saga*, where Brynhildr, responding to Sigurðr's marriage proposal (as he poses as Gunnar), is described sitting on her seat clad in armour and looking *sem alpt af báru* ('like a swan on the waves', Chap.29).¹⁰⁵ Bek-Pedersen also draws our attention to the use of swans in battle-related kennings for eagles and ravens, though this is much more difficult to interpret. She lists the following: Eyvindr skáldspillir's *Háleygjatal* 11 (*svanir Farmatýs*, 'Óðinn's swans' = ravens or eagles), Einarr Skúlason's *Øxarflokkur* 5 (*Gautreks svana*, 'Óðinn's swans'), Goþþormr sindri's *Hákonardrápa* 1 (*Jalfaðs svangæðir*, 'Óðinn's swan-feeder' = warrior), and Meissner in *Die Kenningar der Skalden* lists many more.¹⁰⁶ One of the main problems with this sort of evidence is that it is impossible to tell how significant the swan reference is, especially as birds from cranes (ON *trani*) to swallows (ON *svalr*) are also used in these kennings.¹⁰⁷ Further, it should be noted that *svan* is also used for men, as in Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* 8/3-4,¹⁰⁸ where the warrior is *sverða sverrifjaðrar/ svanglýjaði* ('the swan-gladdener of the sword's swarming-river [*sverrifjaðrar*=blood]').

Without wishing to devote too much space to this tangent, and with the acceptance that it is desirable to have a range of words beginning with different phonemes for metrical considerations, my own view on this issue is that the birds chosen for kennings are selected to emphasize characteristics closely associated with said bird, while simultaneously remaining conscious of the kenning's meaning. By this reasoning, other birds are used in raven and eagle kennings in order to stress characteristics they already possess: in *sveita mǫr* ('black gull'=raven), for example, the gull's greed and garrulousness reflect those of an excited raven faced with fresh

¹⁰⁴ *BWP* I, 317, 381-2.

¹⁰⁵ *Vǫlsunga Saga*, ed. and trans. by R. G. Finch (London: Nelson, 1965), p49.

¹⁰⁶ R. Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, pp. 121-3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-123, for a list of various examples of this.

¹⁰⁸ *Skj* B1, p. 118.

slaughter; in *hanga vals* ('falcon of the gallows'=raven), it may be the falcon's speed and ferocity paralleling the ravens hungry for food, or it may be an inversion of a falcon's loyalty to its lord (where the raven is only loyal to a supplier of corpses).¹⁰⁹ There must also be contextual reasons for this too: in *Vellekla* 8, where the blood shed in battle is described as a raging river, phrasing the raven (or eagle, for that matter) as a *svan* paints a powerful picture in which the bird revels in the gushing blood as a swan looks resplendent drifting along a channel.

The swan-terms in kennings, then, do not necessarily represent a straightforward swan-battle association, but employ other associations of swans to colour the kennings. Let us now return to the other examples given by Bek-Pedersen to see if this is the case there too. It is more convenient to begin with the less mysterious passage of Brynhildr's comparison with a swan on the waves (*sem alpt af báru*), as the *svani dansca* of *Guðrúnakviða II* is more opaque, and so I shall return to this later. The Brynhildr quote in context reads: *Hon svarar af áhyggju af sínu sæti sem alpt af báru ok hefir sverð í hendi ok hjálm á hofði ok var í brynju* ('She answers with concern from her seat, like a swan on the waves, and she has a sword in her hand and a helm on her head and was in armour').¹¹⁰ The referent of the simile is not completely clear, and as it stands it could refer either to Brynhildr herself or to her concern. I understand the simile as referring directly to Brynhildr, and the comparison to the *alpt af báru* as referring to the swan's habit of busking.¹¹¹ In this instance, the comparison does not operate on a single level, for busking swans are both beautiful and majestic, and both these characteristics are viable for the armoured Brynhildr. Moreover, the use of the swan as an image of beauty fits in with other descriptions of comeliness in the Eddic poetry. In addition to such general

¹⁰⁹ In Tindr Hallkelsson's *drápa* for Hakon Jarl (stanza 7) the use of *hanga vals* suggests that the ravens are like falcons which flock to the *Jarl* who is the subject of the stanza. See *Skj* B1, p. 137.

¹¹⁰ The sentence meaning can change slightly depending on how we read *áhyggju* here. R. Cleasby and G. Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn by W. A. Craigie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), gives 'care' and 'solicitude' (s.v. 'á-hugi'); Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon Poeticum antiquæ lingvæ septentrionalis. Ordbog over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*, 2nd edn by Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Møller, 1931), gives 'bekymring' ('concern'), s.v. 'áhyggja'; Finch, *Völsunga Saga*, translates *svarar af áhyggju* as 'made solemn reply', p. 49; *The Saga of the Völsungs*, ed. and trans. by J. L. Byock (London: Penguin, 1990) renders it 'answered gravely', p. 81. If we read 'care' then we are in danger of over-sentimentalising Brynhildr; 'concern' seems better suited to her prudence and self-confidence here.

¹¹¹ 'Busking' refers to the familiar pose of the mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), in which the neck is curved and the wings are half-raised along its back, *OED*, s.v. 'busk, v.2'.

correspondences as *hvít* to denote beauty (e.g. *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 28/3), we find Guðrún called *gaglbjarta* ('goose-bright') in *Atlakviða* 40/2.¹¹² Dronke's view, that *gagl* might recall kennings for raven, is the more or less the inverse of my view on the relationship between the kenning's elements and its meaning outlined above (in which the kennings recall characteristics of the birds used).¹¹³ These two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and there is some merit in Dronke's idea given that this description follows the Huns' discovery of the gruesome contents of the meal Guðrún has prepared.

The simplest approach to *gaglbjarta* and Brynhildr's swan comparison, however, is to take them as references to whiteness and therefore to the women's beauty, and it is well worth noting at this point that the geese (*gæss*) which Guðrún owns in *Guðrúnarkviða I* (16/6) are called *mærir fuglar* ('glorious birds', 16/7). This value-based connotation of *gagl* fits with the *Atlakviða* passage, where Guðrún is destroying all of Atli's possessions, including the gold that led to her current predicament: it depicts her as one of the valuable treasures collected by the tyrant-king and how this treasure (both Rhine gold and wife) bring about his downfall.

The *svani dansca* of *Guðrúnarkviða II* are introduced with such subtlety and so inscrutably that one cannot help but wonder if some cryptic reference or obscure joke underlies their presence. If this is not the case then two possibilities suggest themselves to me: that the *svani dansca* illustrate the wealth of the 'southern halls' (*sali suðræna*, 14/7) which are also depicted on Þora's tapestry; or that the *svani* refer to Sigmund's ships with *gyltar grímor* ('gilted beaks', 16/3) mentioned in a subsequent stanza. Bek-Pedersen would have linked the *svani dansca* with the warriors mentioned at the beginning of stanza 15, but it seems fairly probable from this analysis that a direct swan-battle link is unlikely. What is possible is that there is some special connection between women and swans: in addition to Brynhildr being compared to a swan and Guðrún being called *gaglbjarta*, we also find Guðrún's emotions being tied up intimately with her *mærir fuglar* in *Guðrúnarkviða I*. The

¹¹² ON *gagl*, 'goose' has no Germanic cognates (Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. '*zazalan'), and this makes determining its meaning and semantic range problematic. However, given its probable imitative origins, I think we are justified including both honking swans and geese under *gagl*.

¹¹³ Dronke, *PE I*, p. 71.

prose introduction states that Guðrún had also eaten of Fáfnir's heart and so knew the speech of birds (*fugls rødd*). We are then informed that

Dá grét Guðrún,	Guðrún then wept,
Giúca dóttir,	Gjúka's daughter,
svá at tár flugo	so that tears ran
tresc í gognom,	along the tresses of her hair
oc gullo við	and the geese out in the yard
gæss í túni	cried out with her
mærir fuglar,	the glorious birds
er mærr átti	which the maid had.

(st. 16)

The connection here is three-fold: Guðrún can understand their speech; the geese reflect Guðrún's own state of mind; and both are referred to with words indicating beauty. The geese are *mærir* and Guðrún is a *mærr* ('maiden'), which may contain a nuance of the adjective *mærr* ('glorious') under influence of *mærir* in the preceding line. A fuller study of the connection between swans (/geese) and women are beyond the scope of this study, but it is clear nonetheless that this connection does not have anything to do with battle, as Bek-Pedersen proposed, nor does it have anything to do with the sorts of transformation we see in *Völundarkviða*. At its core seems to lie a matrix of ideas in which whiteness and brightness are beautiful, and that swans and geese, known for their whiteness, become common-place vehicles for describing women's beauty.¹¹⁴

We have already seen that the prose-editor of *Völundarkviða* characterised the unfamiliar swain-maidens as valkyries, and that there also seems to have been a pre-existing connection between women and swans which informed this decision. What there has not been any evidence of, however, is an association between transformation and swans. For this peculiarity in *Völundarkviða* we are better off

¹¹⁴ Pertinent here are the etymology of one of the Germanic words for swan (ON *álpt*) and Pliny's remarks on the *ganae* of the Germanic peoples in his *Natural History* X.27.

looking for an explanation not in Old English or Old Norse traditions, but in the northern Eurasian traditions from which the swan-maiden motif emerged. Dronke has noted a Lappish connection for Völundr and his brothers,¹¹⁵ and such a northern Eurasian connection would also nicely accommodate the ‘swan-maiden’ motif. A. T. Hatto has put forward a very strong, and generally accepted, case for the ‘swan-maiden’ story originating ‘in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions’, and that ‘north Eurasian’ origins are most likely for story as it appears in European literature.¹¹⁶

Having identified that the swan-maidens are a Eurasian borrowing, and that there was no widely spread tradition or concept of swans being closely related to people, we can safely dismiss the notion that a pre-existing belief paved the way for the swan-soul. This means that the most plausible reason for the swan-soul concept was an Anglo-Saxon wonder at endowing an inconspicuous and generally unoutstanding bird as a dove with such prominent symbolism, and that the swan was a similarly coloured but much larger and more noticeable bird.

¹¹⁵ *PE* II, pp. 287-8.

¹¹⁶ A. T. Hatto, ‘The Swan-Maiden: A Folk-Tale of North Eurasian Origin?’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 24 (1961), pp. 326-52, repr. in A. T. Hatto, *Essays on Medieval German and Other Poetry* (1980), pp. 267-97, quotes from pp. 293-4. See also Tolley, *Shamanism*, pp. 552-6 for some north Eurasian analogues.

Conclusions

Summary

This thesis set out to examine birds in Anglo-Saxon England through investigating three interrelated strands: the aural primacy of bird-experience, both in life and on the page; the information-bringing capacity of birds, both literal and symbolic; and the syncretic borrowing of pre-Christian features of bird-lore into Anglo-Saxon Christianity. The first chapter demonstrated the aural primacy of Anglo-Saxon bird experiences, and that this primacy manifested itself not only in the naming of birds, but in their literary depictions, where the focus is on the songs and calls of birds rather than on their appearances. The second chapter argued for the literary representations of an on-going belief in augury, in which aurality was also central: unlike the Classical practice, in which the location of the bird mattered, Anglo-Saxon, and indeed, Germanic, augury seems to have been predicated on understanding the language of birds. This could have come about quite naturalistically, if, as I suggest, ravens and wolves had learned to follow groups of armed men to combat: both creatures cry in order to alert others of their kind to join the meal, and an observer could have interpreted their presence as prophetic knowledge – prophetic knowledge that could be accessed by learning to understand their calls and cries.

The third chapter, focussing on sparrows, began by confirming the suspicions of a large number of scholars: that there was some fictitious aspect to Bede's sparrow simile. The sparrow simile did more than just covering up a tradition associating King Edwin with augury, however. An analysis of biblical sparrows indicated that Bede's simile was designed to cast the episode as a self-fulfilling prophecy: through their associations with souls and fore-knowledge, the simile suggested that Edwin's conversion to Christianity was inevitable. A survey of sparrows in Old English showed that the ideas of sparrows-as-souls and sparrows indicating fore-knowledge had some significant circulation. Chapter four examined the more complicated depictions of doves, and suggested that the account of Pope Gregory talking to the

Holy Spirit in dove-form might owe something to the Germanic practice of augury. It also made clear that the dove was associated with divine knowledge – either as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, or as a clear signal of one’s holy spirit. Chapter five demonstrated a different sort of pre-Christian tradition interacting with the Christian dove symbolism – that of bird-taxonomy. Although the motivation for casting long-necked birds in the guise of souls is not clear, it was speculated that the dove’s innocuous appearance may be to blame, and the *ganot*, fulfilling the criterion of whiteness, seemed to be an acceptable substitute. This may also owe something to *ganot*’s flexible semantic field, explored in chapter one. Chapter five also demonstrated that there is unlikely to be any pre-Christian tradition underlying the swan-soul depictions, but rather, that this must derive from a liberal interpretation of the dove-soul.

Future implications

The primacy of aural experience has vast implications not only in the field of literary studies, but beyond too. Scholars, working in a climate where empirical verification is primarily visual, have overlooked an important part of the Anglo-Saxon world by ignoring the place of sound. As I have shown, sound was the primary means by which birds were experienced and identified, and this aural inclination should serve as a reminder that while texts are preserved in visual forms, this is not how they were experienced by the majority of their audiences.

The aurality of birds also points to the overlaps, outlined in the introduction, between science, magic, and religion. This is most clear in the case of aural perception of wolves and ravens communicating to each other before eating leading to a belief in their prophetic abilities. Although some work has been done on speech-as-action in Old Norse literary studies, and particularly on the articulation of an idea as affirming

its veracity,¹¹⁷ the divinatory dialogue of the beasts of battle suggests that such analyses could be applied to Old English profitably too.

The information-bringing aspects of both Christian and pagan bird-lore bears witness to the mechanism of syncretism in religious change. It is interesting, however, that the interaction between the two should be so one-sided: Christian bird-lore was influenced by the pre-Christian beliefs, but the pre-Christian beliefs – if I am correct – were largely untampered but were instead vitiated. If this sort of pejoration with very little change can be shown for other aspects of pre-Christian belief, then it provides us with an important methodological tool. Until further corroborating research is done, however, this must remain speculative.

It is hoped that despite appearing to be a niche subject, that the study of birds and bird-lore in the literature of Anglo-Saxon England may influence fields beyond those concerned with Anglo-Saxon religion and ecology. Within these fields, however, I hope that my arguments can provide further stimulus for thinking about the interaction between the Anglo-Saxons' lived experience of the natural world, their changing beliefs, and the protean zone that encompasses their religion, science, and magic.

¹¹⁷ Bek-Pedersen, *Norns in Old Norse Mythology*, pp. 182-92 and notes.

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