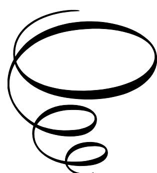
Old Englishness in *King Horn* and *Athelston*

Old Englishness in *King Horn* and *Athelston*

By

Sonya Louise Veck Lundblad

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Old Englishness in *King Horn* and *Athelston*

By Sonya Louise Veck Lundblad

This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2020 by Sonya Louise Veck Lundblad

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-4849-X
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4849-7

This book is dedicated to you, Dad.

†

Si, Dios preste vida. Esta prestada vida.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ix

Introduction 1

Chapter One 17
The Elegiac Tone in Old English Texts

Chapter Two 35
Anglo-Saxon *Communitas*

Chapter Three 53
The Natural World in Old English Texts

Chapter Four 59
Elegiac Tone in *King Horn*

Chapter Five 75
King Horn, Kenosis, and the Comitatus Code

Chapter Six 93
Prince Horn, Agent of Providence, Deliverer of Saracens

Chapter Seven 113
Old Englishness in *Athelston*: Ninth-century Connections

Chapter Eight 127
The Elegiac, Nature, and Grace in *Athelston*

Chapter Nine 143
Oral Tradition, Mythology, and the Midlands

Conclusion 157

Bibliography 161

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my much beloved mentor, Dr. Alexandra Olsen, who gave her time and careful attention to many students discovering medieval literature over the years, including me, at the University of Denver. It was a tremendous gift. Thanks especially for inspiring my love of Old English poetry. It was challenging to turn the dissertation project into a book and took many years to accomplish. Heartfelt thanks go out to anonymous reviewers for their thorough, detailed, and thoughtful feedback. I have attended to it the best I could given the nature of this as converted dissertation. The shortcomings that remain are mine alone. Thanks to all the simpatico colleagues at IKS and my University of Stavanger community. You make academia a great field to be working in. I am also most grateful for feedback at conferences from many kind and encouraging scholars. I want to thank them and all listed below who generously lent support during this process, or “lent an ear” along the way in things professional and personal, allowing work and life in general to carry on. Special thanks go out to: Oliver M. Traxel, Holly Barbaccia, Kathleen Bishop, Tim W. Machan, Merja R. Stenroos, Jan Erik Mustad, Kjetil V. Thengs, Jeremy Smith, Jakob Lothe, Ion Drew, Inger Helene Skjærpe, Torill Hestestræett, Brita Strand Rangnes, Delia Schipor, Nancy Wood, Odd Magne Bakke, Signe Ekenberg, Unni Puntervold Pereira, Per Kristian Hyldmo, Klaus Johan Myrvoll, Christopher Spencer, Annjolie Tho Bergtun, Tavo, Alana, Anelise, Kaelin, Glorianne & Katie Trippe, Daniel Robinson, Michael Wallacavage, Charles Gorsuch Strauch, Torgeir Ehler, Theodore Sherman, Margaret E. Whitt, Jeffrey D. Hass, William & Claire Newton, Tom and Maria Wolter, Jenni & Rob Cassidy, Sr. Agnes David Lalu, Sr. Joan Paule Portenlenger, Fr. Matthew Russick, Fr. Sigurd Markussen, Fr. Juan Carlos Rolden, Mike, Harper & Finn Lundblad, Arthur the Puppy, Lotte Skogstad (the Puppy Whisperer), Vibeke Risa, Andy Dick, Louise Peterson, Perry Joe Croom, Roxanne Boling, Candace Pitkin, Gayle Hudgens, Chanz Robbins, Amber, Josh & Ainsley Kidder, Deanna, Mark, Chantel & Blue Rice, and Chelsea, Kris, & Keagan Johnson. Most of all, I wish to thank my parents, Jerry & Sherry Veck for their tireless support, constant encouragement, and unconditional love.

INTRODUCTION

In the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, the dreamer gazes up at the cross and describes it as "on lyft laedan, leohte bewunden …," (5, 108) meaning "lifted on air, wound round with light" (5, 109).[1] This line captures the way earthbound realities are often infused with heightened spiritual sensibility and metaphysical experience in Old English poetry. It is explored in this study with a view towards the particular spirit of *communitas* going through Anglo-Saxon culture and the particular reverence for the natural world they had, along with the elegiac expression of divine providence that flowed from it. In addition, this is linked to modern perspectives as it illuminates female characterization across the periods in two insular romances and that of the Islamic other, a figure prevalent in Middle English romance. The foundation for this is romance's epic roots. Oral epics were composed by purposeful poets, as John Miles Foley explains, "we have learned that the Homeric epics served the society that perpetuated them as a set of oral encyclopedias, a digest of attitudes, beliefs, behavior patterns, and customs encoded in the exemplary actions of their heroes. Far from being simple folktales, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* chronicled the oral culture's observations about itself [in] repeated and collectively authored oral repositories" (*Oral Tradition in Literature* 5). In epic fashion, *King Horn* and *Athelston* are imbued with a sense of the culture's deeply held beliefs, ones that retain and/or resurrect certain older ideals. Pre and post-Conquest holy figures like St. Wulfstan inspired much in the Midlands, including Old Englishness in *King Horn* and *Athelston,* examples of texts that received a certain infusion of values tied to the past that we also value today. The post-Conquest situation was rife with awareness about England's past, its special, healing, metaphysical sensibilities, which poets were keen to associate with themselves, those continuously living on the land. About the Old English concepts, *lande* and *hlaford,* Laura Ashe writes " … England, the land, the nation, [is] one of the most ideologically 'real' values of the twelfth century … transhistorically, vertically connected to a divine truth embodied in a providential history" (*Fiction and History* 207). Transhistorically speaking, *King Horn* and *Athelston* participate in the

[1] This is quoted from Elaine Treharne's *Old & Middle English c.890–c.1450: An Anthology.* The translation is hers.

carrying forth of a set of divine truths like this one about the land and the people. In doing so, they tap into values we cherish today like feminine strength, seeing commonalities with other cultures, and having respect for nature. My hope is that this endeavour meets the recent turn toward rejuvenation as in Rita Felski's *The Uses of Literature* which sets forth recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock as ways literature engages us. Felski says that literature allows us "to weave our way between the Scylla of political functionalism and the Charybdis of art for art's sake, striving to do justice to the social meanings of artworks without slighting their aesthetic power" (9). This is a kind of healing engagement as poetry's social function, and I hope to offer Old English poetry for that cause. I also hope that by investigating these specific features (the elegiac, the *communitas*-laden heroic, the sorrowing woman, and the natural world) in both pre and post-Conquest texts, this study will be a small contribution to the growing evidence for the problem of periodization after 1066 as much as it adds something to the body of work on the nature of Old Englishness in Middle English texts, particularly in romance studies.

Middle English romance typically marks a new beginning with regards to vernacular literature in England after the Norman Conquest. The genre grew in popularity and variation in England, producing metrical and alliterative romances during the Middle English period. Around eighty verse romances set in England, Europe, the Middle East, and what was then considered the Far East survive in Middle English. Romances with an English setting (or a conspicuously English setting) have come to be known as the Matter of England, or insular romances. Susan Crane writes: "all six [Matter of England] romances are marked by strong similarities in narrative design, in theme, and in social values" (25). Because they are romances, the forms and content of many of these are thought to have been inspired by the early French *chansons d'geste* and the Anglo-Norman *breton lai*. However, those romances emerging from the Midlands region of England are of special interest because they are non-Arthurian Middle English romances and the content is not based on an apparent French original or any Anglo-Norman source. Knowledge about the romance form and post-1066 production is derived from long-held categories of periodization based on linguistic change and shifts in style of the written texts attributed to the arrival of the Normans. While Old English was copied after 1066 for a short period,[2] literary production is thought to have ceased until manuscripts were

[2] See Treharne and Swan's *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century* for a discussion of pre-Conquest texts recopied in the twelfth century. Treharne and Swan investigate what manuscripts were created in Old English after the Conquest, and much of this material was recopied rather than newly composed.

written in variations of Middle English beginning in the twelfth century. However, this is beginning to be considered as a mere gap in literary production since many elements of Old English literature resurfaced, made their way into Middle English texts, albeit in different forms. According to Ashe's work on pre and post-Conquest texts, "from the Anglo-Saxon period into the later Middle Ages, there is much greater continuity in English culture and literature than has been recognized …" ("Exile and Return" 317). While the overall romance form was innovative for the time in England, examining the ways the thematic content and use of tropes retain aspects of the earlier poetic tradition in English helps answer questions about continued cultural influence, and it problematizes periodization. Foregrounding the various perspectives is the place to begin as Tim William Machan points out that "what medieval English is depends in part on who is looking at it, how, when, and why" (*Imagining Medieval English* 12). This sense of understanding the English language applies to our study of extant medieval poetry because we are looking for glimmers of modernity but ever mindful of how the medieval produced and received these texts. Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan comment on how difficult it is to escape one's own preconceptions formed by experiences with earlier scholarship, and it would do well to remember that any study can become an over engagement with our times, like the "refashioning and reactivating" of "collective identities" that have occurred throughout history and for various ends (7).[3] Striking a balance therefore comes from formal elements beginning with the texts themselves. In "Imagining the Literary in Medieval English," Andrew Galloway discusses the importance of beginning with the apparent concerns of the composers and listeners of these texts (Galloway 218). He stresses the problem of seeing medieval texts as halfway points between products of old ritual and modern, proper literature. Early work on *King Horn* by Anna Hunt Billings and Walter French highlights this problem in Matter of England romance.[4] The early structuralist method,

---

[3] Higham and Ryan touch upon a similar issue raised by Rita Felski in *The Limits of Critique.*

[4] Anna Hunt Billings placed *Horn* in the "1000–1250 Transitional Period" category. According to her interpretation of the period, all romances before 1250 are "transitional," perhaps because they had not the complexity of later romances. Billings defines this category based on the fact that the English had not yet won the rights set forth in the *Magna Carta*, suggesting that the poem may have come from a more primitive folk culture (xii). *King Horn* graduated to full romance status when Walter French's *Essays on King Horn* was published in 1940. At the time of French's book, a sophisticated, streamlined form was valued over folk qualities. That a work operated less systematically and showed folktale qualities caused it to

then, has accomplished much to highlight elements of the overall romance form as technical and artful and the nature of romance as a shift in literary production. [5] As C. S. Lewis commented in *The Discarded Image*, medieval writers are cataloguers and classifiers (5); the structuralist method of study via tropes suits the age itself, showing how poets consciously manipulated and borrowed conventions for their stories while illuminating the combination of syntactical or lexical patterns recurring in romances. Doing so meant more emphasis on how aesthetic elements emerge from the elegance of later, more practiced romanciers. However, Galloway states, "we must begin with their forms, rather than our concerns … [which] allows us to reconsider one particularly clear way in which medieval writers established discourse with special authority, sometimes making clear claims to aesthetic achievement …" (224). I am interested in how aesthetic elements can be discovered in insular romances (from all possible locations on the orality continuum) by examining the choices made in the composition and articulated traditional meaning which even the smallest reference or intertexuality with Old English poetry can impart to the romance form. Galloway's formalist method serves romance study well because finding artistic merit involves a balancing act of "appreciating [a medieval text] in its 'own' terms" and "adapting [the terms of modern literary studies] to articulate what the [text] cannot" (216). He explains that medieval poets create a "conjuring of words" and have "a special kind of power to make a 'concrete universal'."[6] In this way, discovering metaphysical concepts and the efficacious manner in which poets present

---

be of less literary value. While it is classified as a romance by Joseph Hall, French notes that it has generally been considered "rough and primitive," and he wanted to show *King Horn*'s sophisticated elements (1). In this scholarly climate, French maintains the belief that *King Horn* was not written for court and defended the poet's use of meter, tropes, structure, and scheme. W. H. Schofield states that *King Horn* is "a minstrel's song, written primarily, it seems, for public delivery before audiences of plain people, and therefore unaffected in tone and succinct in style" (261). French admonishes Schofield and others who pejoratively call it popular and vulgar because it was composed for a peasant audience. He defends it as composed by an "accomplished" poet. French wanted to revive *King Horn* as "an accomplished work, on the technical side with a sure and practiced art behind it." In order to keep *King Horn* from being subordinated to more eloquent romances, French showed that it was not primitive or non-aristocratic in its execution (1–2).

[5] Eugene Vinaver and John Finlayson were interested in the romance as a genre/form, interpreting its progression. John Finlayson's essay on "The Definitions of English Romance" illuminates what romanciers were doing at the height of the genre.

[6] Galloway explains the origin of this concept in W. K. Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon.*

them in romance, allows *King Horn* and *Athelston* to be treated as aesthetic literary texts as well as songs for "plain people" with certain values worth contemplating today (Schofield 261).

New formalism is especially useful for investigating the ways a romance is situated firmly in a historical context, in the belief system, and the issues and tensions within it, occurring in the time in which it is was written.[7] Michal Beth Dinkler's new formalist approach to narrative Christology is relevant for studying these insular romances given the prevalence of shared belief (i.e. high context cultural milieu) in Christianity before and after 1066. In "A New Formalist approach to narrative Christology: Returning to the structure of the Synoptic Gospels," Dinkler explains that new formalists are not debating the "constitutive features of narrativity," like narratologists, but discussing the formal features of narrative along with causal connections and a teleology or communicative goal. She clarifies this by saying, "The Gospel narratives clearly mean to evoke experientiality in a way that contemporary academic historiography does not" (n9). This means we can try to discover what experience a romancier intends his audience to have with his or her narrative which would have been based on shared belief. Erich Auerbach has described biblical narrative and experientiality thusly: "Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history" (*Mimesis* 14). So, this experientiality dovetails nicely with the idea of oral tradition working in insular romance. In *Writing the Oral Tradition*, Mark Amodio discusses the "affective dynamics" that resonate powerfully after the Conquest from an oral poetic present and past (180). I am especially interested in how certain elements of the elegiac continue in romance via the contemplative tone as well as the expression in romance of kenotic "love" in comitatus codes. This is discoverable through what has been described as a lively oral tradition in addition to and alongside the growing literate channels.[8] John Miles Foley

[7] See Lee Patterson's *Acts of Recognition* (56–83) and *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (280–321) for examples of his view, which sidesteps prevailing Christian contexts by explaining the ways medieval authors might transcend the moral imperatives behind so many medieval poems and texts. Patterson's ideas are valuable in terms of the way they lift up and privilege the poet's own creative ability over medieval traditions and formulas, but I want to fully engage with the poet's context, present and past.

[8] It is not my intention to examine the levels of literate or oral production in the manuscripts of *King Horn* and *Athelston*, even if this study has depended on evidence from both, acknowledging that a mixture of them was employed by poets in post-Conquest texts.

established metonymic referentiality as means for understanding how themes and ideas endure via oral tradition into the Middle English period (*Immanent Art* 7). Residual orality[9] helps explain the way we can imagine performance as well as think in terms of a continuum of orality with texts becoming more conscious of themselves as written texts later in the period.[10] While the interpretations presented here are no doubt coloured by our times and our perception of the poets' times, they suggest ideas and concerns behind the impulse to create, imagining scenarios of aesthetic expression based on various bits of evidence to discover how generations negotiated the Anglo-Saxon past[11] and integrated the new. It matters less in my study how they retained the ideas across time (or resurrected them), than it does that they were behaving as artists and poets, carefully choosing words and situations that carried certain ideas, meanings they were invested in because of their spiritual sensibilities and metaphysical ideals and wanted to convey them as an experience of art. These romanciers (insofar as the term represents the many poets and scribes in the oral tradition) have made creative choices that reflect aspects of the Anglo-Saxon past worth preserving or reimagining, regardless of the degree of orality and literacy they exude.[12] The purpose of this study is to discuss imaginative "choices" made in ways that evoke the romancier's Old English predecessors. *King Horn* and *Athelston*, then, as examples of early and late insular romance, can be discussed as work emerging from an efficacious poetic impulse, ones that have a similar geographical origin in the midlands.[13] Meaning can be discussed via formal elements like diction, i.e. the words we have on the "page" and the discoverable features of the historical, social, and artistic context stretching across periods. It might seem like speculation to say that poets engage creative faculties while employing conventional devices and motifs, but the idea of tapping into oral tradition or *auctor* traditions in performance and imagining the performance aspect makes it possible

---

[9] See Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, wherein residual orality refers to a sense of the creative act normally associated with oral poetic invention felt in what we know came down to us on the page via scribal transmission.

[10] See Lori Ann Garner's "Proverbs in Middle English Narrative," where she "explores how two romances situated at different points along the medieval orality/literacy continuum employ traditional genres within narrative to create meaning in very different ways" (256).

[11] See Frantzen and Niles, *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity.*

[12] I have delimited my study in this way, but I acknowledge how important it is to place this study in the context of these matters.

[13] According to the York Database of Middle English Romance https://middleenglishromance.org.uk/

despite how "highly speculative" it is to say that composers read and were influenced by each other's writing and little is known about romance production processes (Amodio *Writing* 40). Allen Trounce, a recent editor of *Athelston*, states this simply when he writes that "conventional phrases are often used by the author of *Athelston* with a twist of meaning and significance" (97). This means considering and interpreting conventional phraseology and tropes in context to understand multiple interpretations of a particular episode, ones that connect these romances to earlier deeply held beliefs and ideas. As Foley put forward in *Immanent Art*, these romances are seen as texts, but infused with a sense of their performance wherein at any point an interpretation can be felt through critically imagined dynamics that occurred between singer and audience,[14] thereby relying on the way the text *is* a performance – but also a text in a modern literary sense. In this way, we can talk about "the poet" as many poet-singers and speculate how their imagination created romance features out of the historical context through what Foley calls "word-power."[15] At times, I have also drawn upon some of the ways to discover what the reuse, or "re-narration,"[16] of known tropes might have inferred or were meant to infer, hermeneutically speaking, in conjunction with individual or collaborative oral story creation, the idiopoetic creative role of the scribe.[17] Therefore, my study has depended on the way historical texts in English, in various phases of the language, can be read in the context of cultural ideals expressed by various class levels, "cultures," and gendered perspectives with the help of tropes and conventions, always recognizing an imaginative dynamic between poet, audience, and scribe. The chapters which follow make cross-period connections between Old English and Middle English which are navigated with the help of the aforementioned methods, along with some interdisciplinary help from medieval clerical theology and classical philosophy of interest during the periods as historical, social context. Formal analysis became a useful starting point which is why chapter one works from contemplative tone as a formal element. Examining formal elements infused with the special

---

[14] For reception studies in the Middle Ages see Ruth Finnegan and Joyce Coleman on "aurality."

[15] Amodio describes this as connected to moments in the poems that "reach outside their individual instances to larger than textual realities and stand *par pro toto* for complexes of ideas too evanescent for commitment to a single occurrence" (23).

[16] For a more in-depth understanding of orality see Nancy Mason Bradbury's *Writing Aloud: Storytelling in Late Medieval England*.

[17] See A. N. Doane, "*Beowulf* in Scribal Performance," which examines the different scribes and the level of orality/anticipation for oral performance that come through textual features indicating the way scribal work contributes to the art of the poem.

authority Galloway described for accessing concrete universals opens up otherwise-unreachable spaces of interpretation (225). Romance elements such as tone express that which remained part of the tradition, uncovering what was essential to the fabric of society and worth preserving or reconstructing.[18] Romance therefore becomes a mode of expression for ideas about the natural world, intercultural contact, gender, and class that survived the Conquest, in spite of the rapid language change, political strife, and continental influences of the time.

Discovering various perspectives on pre-Conquest cultural and literary influence in England beyond 1066 requires discovering the delicate interplay of these ideas. Foley's theories mitigate the formulaic aspects of romance, allowing the repeated tropes and phraseology (and other formulaic aspects unique to oral and orally derived texts) to be interpreted, making their historical, social contexts manifest to the modern reader. However, Amodio specifically explains the way Old English oral poetics continued in Middle English verse and establishes why it is fitting to consider features of *King Horn* and *Athelston* as evidence of pre-Conquest cultural identity. He describes a tradition of poetic language and theme that "was once a living tradition" in performance, where "(re)composition" occurred along with "expression through the pens of authors engaged in very different, private moments of composition" (xv). Amodio's general belief is that Middle English poets and scribes were not reading Old English poetry for imitation sake, but rather participating in a continued oral poetic tradition where words and phrases not only carried "freighted" meaning but provided methods of poetic construction (130). It is therefore fitting to ask questions

[18] According to Foley's account, Milman Parry became interested in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in the 1920s, claiming that the poems were based on a long tradition of storytelling for a particular purpose. He found formulas in the poems and "theorized that [they] were the collective creations of many generations of bards working not individually but within a poetic tradition. [Formulas] enabled a poet to make his verses extemporaneously without having to depend on rote memorization" (*Oral Tradition in Literature* 3). Parry's work was the beginning of oral-tradition studies. Albert Bates Lord opened the door wider in his early work on oral tales discovering a connection to myth, a matter "of the persistence, in traditions of people contiguous to one another of meaningful elements and sequences of elements over long periods of time, persistence of significant items even through change because they were meaningful and deemed essential to the societies that fostered them (7). Lord found that epic stories were meaningful to the peasant classes to sustain identity, and were part of daily life. Even though the study was conducted in the early twentieth century when print culture was dominant, it had not affected the village in Montenegro. Like many listeners of romance in the Midlands, these villagers were illiterate, but their songs were filled with local lore and history.

like: how could these two Middle English romances be read differently given a continued cultural and literary Old English afterlife? How can they be read through an earlier, pre-Conquest cultural lens given the continued influence? What tropes and themes carry over? To do so is to read in a complex way with the possibility for creative oral poetics happening at the same cultural moment as manuscript transmission, acknowledging multiple perspectives. Striking the right hermeneutic balance, then, is to also be mindful that, as Amodio has noted, we should not polarize oral and written "culture" or elevate "the text" in a way that subordinates the tradition and set of performances that produced it. It goes further in that "orally composed and transmitted epic poetry serves as a tribal encyclopedia through which the culture's practices and mores are passed along to successive generations" (Amodio 4). Through this lens we can discover Old English elements in *King Horn* and *Athelston* as passing down of various aspects of pre-Conquest society, drawing upon oral tradition in multiple ways. Foley and Ramey write that "some harness the tradition quite directly, while others explore, exploit, and critique it in a sophisticated and self-conscious manner" (88). *King Horn* and *Athelston* are read with consideration of the confluence of cultures producing them along with concomitant linguistic and historical changes that might have affected the texts.

We read these romances differently in light of the Old English elements. *King Horn* and *Athelston* in particular have expressed various pre-Conquest ideals, themes, and situations in their respective ambient oral traditions. They particularly engage in what Corrinne Saunders has explained as a "kind of complex process of cultural encounter … occurring with regard to all aspects of romance: language, sources, story matter, literary form, conventions, motifs, and thematic emphasis" (6). Some new discoveries emerged for me given the Old English qualities in romance tropes. This included unexpected points of contact between the English and Arabs in both the pre and post-Conquest periods by studying the etymology of Saracen diction in *King Horn*. I have done this in chapter five, examining the invasion scene early in the romance which merited study for the actions and dialogue of a Saracen commander who cannot kill the young Prince Horn. Comparisons with the dreamer in *The Dream of the Rood* and an examination of the Old English verb "þencan" used by the Saracen reveal a complicated characterization, which goes deeper than what we might expect for the stock pagan enemy in Middle English romance. Further, in chapter five, thinking in comparative terms with Old English female characters, as Anne Klinck and others have done, strong aspects of women characters in romance are reinforced under the *comitatus* code even while transposed into the feudal settings of the two romances. Also of interest is the discovery that

the romancier seems to embue these features with a spiritual component which can convey something of the metaphysical awe in the Old English elegiac. Moreover, in chapter seven, I have raised the possibility that the title of *Athelston* actually refers to the Viking Guthram which opens up questions about what complex associations late medieval English culture might have had to its Viking/Anglo-Saxon past. Finally, looking at *Athelston* through the lens of the Anglo-Saxon natural world reveals a very Old English sense of kenotic love connected to hagiography in the same way Prince Horn is associated with the holy in the early chapters. This is manifested in the promise of grace at the outset of *Athelston*, one that not only oversees a chain of events leading to King Athelston's final submission and repentance, but protects the innocent and checks the power of the king through Edmund, an Anglo-Saxon saint. A connection is made between the king in *Athelston* and St. Paul, who set forth the concept of kenosis and underwent the same radical experience of grace. These discoveries made partly through the metaphysical sense of nature, i.e. the trees, and the way grace is made manifest through them. That the king requires grace and the messenger does not causes the romance to identify with lower classes in the later part of the period and therefore with the status of Anglo-Saxon culture immediately after the Conquest, as Albert I. Dickerson and others have already pointed out. That St. Edmund brings it all about provides the connection between *Athelston* and kenotic heroism in *King Horn* for the way divine providence and the holy hero brings justice.

Situating these ideas in the Norman Conquest, Higham and Ryan point out that ethnicity in the early Middle Ages remains a subject of scholarly debate, but the idea of an "Anglo-Saxon" society that existed and shaped much of what remains is evident (7). They say that the pre-1066 period in England is responsible for the "sense of social cohesion and belonging centered on a shared history and perspective on the world" that seems to have started with Anglo-Saxon culture (4). Historians like Richard N. Bailey and Diarmaid MacCulloch establish connections between St. Augustine of Hippo and Anglo-Saxon culture, so I am working with the idea that the body of Anglo-Saxon literature reflects elements of St. Augustine of Hippo's *communitas*. I do acknowledge that the literature we have is what pleased West Saxon kings', clergy, or religious authorities to preserve. Had there been endowments elsewhere, the "body" of Old English literature would no doubt have a more heterogenous feel, but I was not able to investigate in that direction due the limited scope of this project.[19] And yet,

---

[19] See Seth Lerer's *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* which discusses how texts brought out Anglo Saxon culture especially in terms of authority and

that monasteries were the centres of literacy is part of the culture itself in the time it was shaped and maintained. In *Cultural Difference and Material Culture in Middle English Romance*, Dominique Battles explains that the process of assimilation between Normans and Anglo-Saxons was well underway within a couple of generations by intermarriage and exchange in all aspects of culture (4). However, she also describes wholesale catastrophe after the Norman Conquest of 1066 in England at every level of Anglo-Saxon society. According to her account, the Normans obtained wealth, land, and power by any means, leaving the former inhabitants a "colonial society," deprived of their church leadership and homes, and even food.[20] Meanwhile, their French-speaking conquerors sat in "castle-plantations that controlled all of the wealth and power" (1). Battles explores how Anglo-Saxon and Norman societal values are expressed as distinct in medieval romance centuries after the Conquest (3). Her reminder, so well phrased, is that, "Poets could still conjure up an essentially Anglo-Saxon hero over two hundred years after the Conquest and draw moral distinctions based on that cultural memory" (3). This is an especially useful way of foregrounding work on *King Horn* and *Athelston*; This project arose from my enthusiasm for Old English poetry and a desire to explore its afterlife.[21] I began in the Midlands region based on Elaine Treharne's work, *Living Through Conquest: the Politics of Early English,* identifying it as particularly tenacious and having a long cultural memory (xvii). This exploration of Normans usurping and oppressing Anglo-Saxons is always tempered by royal family trees, however. William the Conqueror's claim to the English throne was based on his being the "acknowledged heir of the [last] Anglo-Saxon ruler Edward the Confessor" (Higham and Ryan 11). So, the Norman invasion can be justified by lineage as much as force. Treharne has also pointed to the "first" conquest from Scandinavia in 1013 (*Living through Conquest* 9), which is a good reminder that there was much assimilation and conquest prior to what we think of as "The Conquest" of 1066 that ushered in "The Middle English period" including the 5th century invasions of Angles and Saxons (themselves) alongside the Jutes. Nevertheless since *King Horn* and *Athelston* were both composed in the Midlands region of England, my

---

power. Also see Kathryn Lowe's "Reading the Unreadable: Lay Literacy and Negotiation of Text in Anglo-Saxon England."

[20] For a discussion on how it has been difficult to support arguments sympathizing with "Anglo-Saxon" cultural legacies see Battles's introduction (4),

[21] For a description of how the Conquest subordinated the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition for the Normans' own language and poetic heritage and the explanation of it as a kind of eventual "partnership," albeit unbalanced in favour of the non-native, see Amodio's *Writing the Oral Tradition* (132–3).

interest grew in the claims of the region's tenacity after the Norman Conquest, so chapter nine investigates how romance production occurred here shortly after the Conquest[22] and how it continued to be of interest to J. R. R. Tolkien and others doing work on Old and Middle English. It also gives reasons to believe the Midlands remained less affected by the Norman invasion and therefore fertile ground for romances such as *King Horn* and *Athelston*. Treharne's *Living Through Conquest* provides much insight into the tenacious desire to preserve and transmit Old English literature and culture among the conquered people after 1066 by the reading of cultural signs as well as texts. The explanations about Anglo-Saxon cultural elements in medieval romance from Robert Rouse and others are also useful in chapter nine, as it can be more fitting to think of the remembering, reviving, and refashioning of cultural elements even while examining the conundrum of the region's remaining "tenacious."

The chapters on *King Horn* and *Athelston* discuss Old Englishness in romance with special attention to: the development of the elegiac; treatment of the heroic code in both male and female characterization; focus on Divine Providence and metaphysical understanding especially in attitudes toward the natural world; and exploration of early intercultural contact. The first few chapters discuss Old English literature, isolating the above qualities and showing a sense of the literate tradition on which Old English poets drew, and these chapters also touch on the oral tradition underlying this body of literature, fleshing out tropes and elements to be discussed in the romance chapters. Much in the early chapters is little more than a reminder of defining features and well-known, key moments in the Old English corpus, but they layout the fertile source of metonymical summoning of inherited meaning, indeed what Amodio calls a "deterministic system," throughout the body of Old English poetry where cultural ideals are expressed (129). The first few chapters allow an experience of the Old English elegiac tone

---

[22] In *Old and Middle English: an Anthology*, Treharne describes how quickly continental influence changed the literary landscape of England after William I became king. English ceased to be used for writing about national matters, and the literature produced in England was in Latin or French. Old English chronicle writing occurred and older religious prose texts were recopied using Old English up to 1170 (xvii). However, after 1170 English made a comeback: "In the last quarter of the twelfth century, English was used for the composition of important, original texts such as the *Poema Morale, the Trinity Homilies* and the *Orrmulum*, and by the beginning of the thirteenth century, English was used for many writings originating in the West Midlands region, a region that had retained a nationalistic pride, and had continued the prose literary traditions of the Anglo-Saxon past [in works such as Layamon's *Brut* and *Ancrene Wisse*]" (xvii).

and thematics that romanciers carry forth, either because they heard it via oral transmission or because they read Old English works or the works that inspired Old English poets in an actual text. Chapter one is a discussion of contemplative voice and tone in *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Wanderer* and establishes the beliefs and concepts that inform the elegiac in Old English poetry, which will be explored in the romances in later chapters. This first chapter also explains possible sources for the elegiac in literature before the Conquest and delves into the hopeful nature of contemplation in Old English texts. There is a tendency towards the spiritual and the contemplative, along with themes about kenotic relationships to their natural surroundings and each other. Chapter two establishes the presence of *communitas* and self-donation in *The Battle of Maldon*, *Beowulf*, and *The Wife's Lament*, highlighting Christian and pre-Christian influences, the main purpose of which is to provide further evidence that the ideas and tropes are pervasive in the poetic tradition. Chapter three works with passages from *Beowulf* to set forth a certain profound sense of the connection between human and nature found in Old English poetry, namely the sense of the hero being pushed forward by Providence, in hagiographical fashion, via the natural and the revered cultural attitude towards nature that emerges from Old English texts. These first three chapters working with poems in the body of Old English poetry drew much upon the translations of Elaine Treharne, Burton Raffel, Seamus Heaney and others. I have done my own translations of these texts, but I chose to keep them mostly separate from this study. My interpretations of the Old English texts, herein, have been based on and in dialogue with existing published translations, ones well-known to readers, or those with necessary poetic import, and I sometimes compare and contrast ways the lines have been translated and understood, as well as, how the Bosworth-Toller definitions of words provide insight via literal meaning, and at times, therefore, alternative critical angles. There is no translation provided for the Middle English in this book, the analysis of which begins in chapter four, but I examine etymology (with the OED) and existing interpretations of formal features, words, and lines in *King Horn* and *Athelston* in dialogue with editors of the manuscripts (such as Rosamund Allen, Ronald Herzman, and Allen Trounce). Chapter four looks at *King Horn* based on the features of the pre-Conquest elegiac established in chapter one. The opening episodes of the romance, including setting and characterization, are imbued with a tone similar to that found in Old English poetry. Since the opening episode is the first appearance of Saracens, this chapter discusses the ways the romance sets forth a nuanced understanding Arab-English contact. Chapter five segues into how *King Horn* employs elements of the comitatus code. This

chapter also explores the sorrowing woman trope with regards to Rymenhild's characterization in comparison with the comitatus and Prince Horn, connecting Old English kenotic love with hagiographic characteristics of the Prince. Chapter six considers Prince Horn in light of the similar profound connections between human and nature that were explored in Old English texts in chapter three. Chapter seven delves into *Athelston*. This chapter explains how the romance, written later in the Middle English period, looks back to Viking-English relations in pre-Conquest times, and like *King Horn* links the natural and the heroic with hagiography, Aelfric's *Life of St. Edmund* in particular. Chapter eight takes a broader view of *Athelston*, revealing a sense of the elegiac along with themes of brotherhood linked to *communitas*,[23] kenosis, and comitatus. Finally, as already mentioned, chapter nine discusses cultural ideals as they seem to converge in the study of Midlands texts before and after the Conquest.

The introductions to *King Horn* and *Athelston* set forth extant manuscript information only, with no manuscript work done beyond physical examination to see from myself evidence for performance, but only in terms of the manner in which they were written down which seemed to be done hastily in quarto form for performance in some cases, and carefully prepared in folio versions alongside other genres as "collections". However, details about romance production, the origin of manuscripts, and also individual reception is often lacking in this period. Collette Moore describes the uncertainty with which medieval scholars must become comfortable. Of local linguistic texts in the MEG-C collection, she writes: "The examination of everyday Middle English, then, involves significant hand-wringing and apologizing for our evidence. Of course, too many disclaimers, stipulations, and caveats can leave readers wondering whether there is anything to look at" (206). Indeed, studying the post-Conquest period, in particular, especially leaves one vulnerable to this feeling. Machan writes that "medieval English speakers do not seem to have been interested in many of the things that interest modern linguists and literary scholars …" (7). He reminds us that "we have virtually no contemporary comments about any linguistic changes associated with [the Norman Conquest]" (7). Care has been taken to find *their* meaning in *King Horn*, and by looking for similar beliefs in *Athelston* which came later, we begin to balance what we would consider "literary" with what perspective the culture that produced the text might have had on it as literary production (Galloway 218). What Old English beliefs endured? What contemporary social issues coince with the choices? To what effect?

[23] For more on *communitas* and friendship see St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions,* Book VIII and Book IV, where he writes about self and other, "For I thought that my soul and his were but one soul in two bodies" (4.6.11).

These questions represent the investigations in this book, ones that treat the texts as historical and cultural expression across what we have come to regard as two distinct eras and reveal a few ways early and late romances convey continuity.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ELEGIAC TONE IN OLD ENGLISH TEXTS

> The surviving remains of Old English literature are the flotsam and jetsam of a vanished world, manuscripts and fragments of texts divorced from their original context, most them second- or third-hand copies of unknown originals, many of them saved from oblivion only by chance or neglect … we have no biographical information about most authors, and only a very rough idea when many of the works are written … (R. M. Luizza)

Futile as it seems to treat fragments as "the body of Old English literature" or try to characterize the nature of them, there is much aesthetic and philosophical value in these "ideologically charged" scraps produced by the Anglo-Saxons mostly in the West Saxon dialect after the death of King Alfred (Luizza xii).[24] The anonymous speakers of Old English poetry seem to have endured almost continual warfare. The texts draw upon Germanic and Christian traditions with no standardized language, but curiously a standardized poetic language, stable and homogenous in terms of the lexicon, syntax, and metrics (Amodio 34–5).[25] Anne L. Klinck establishes how, "Many scholars see a background of Christian belief and doctrine behind the elegies [and] the problem of loss and change is solved in an explicitly religious way …" (*The Old English* 231). We often encounter the voice – *en medias res*, as it were – when we pick up an Old English poem. Blood feud, battle fury, the loss of one's lord, exile, and various other aspects of Anglo-Saxon life constitute a springboard to metaphysical contemplation. Alcuin's well-known letter to Bishop Higbald (MGH Epist. 4, Espitolae Karolini Aevi II, 124) comparing Ingeld and

---

[24] Oliver M. Traxel writes that, "The language of that time is generally referred to as Old English whereas the term Anglo-Saxon is used in historical and cultural contexts" (2). See Traxel's "Exploring the Linguistic Past through the works of J. R. R. Tolkien" for a description of Old English dialects.

[25] See Amodio (*Writing the Oral* 38) for details about Old English poems regarding how they conform to a four-stress alliterative line and are written in *scriptura continua.*

Christ demonstrates the monastic environment from which these texts arose.[26]

> Verba Dei Legantur in sacerdotali convivo. Ibi decet lectorem audiri, non citharistam; sermons partum, non carmina gentilium. Quid Hinieldus cum Christo? Angusta est domus: Utrosque tenere non poterit. (Alcuin, 183, lines 22–3)
>
> [Let the word of God be heard at the meals of the brethren. There it is proper to hear a reader, not a harper, the sermons of the Fathers, not the songs of pagans. What has Ingeld to do with Christ? The house is narrow; it cannot hold both of them.] (D.W. Robertson, Jr., trans. 98)[27]

From this letter, it has become common to assume that Higbald had indulged, letting the monks hear heroic literature at table. Alcuin points out that it is transgressive to do so because the values conveyed in the stories conflicted with Christian teaching. And yet, for the way Old English poetry reveals the entwining of faith with pagan heroics as a concern of the culture, Ingeld's values had quite a lot to do with Christ. The *Dream of the Rood* and *Beowulf* manuscripts demonstrate how the heroic story could be adapted to Christian spirituality – the rood and Christ Himself in the former, and another divinely-inspired version of Ingeld in the latter. The elegiac tone of Old English poetry reveals an intense ache for something lost or desired. This can be associated with the experience of the "Word" as something primordial and intellectual.[28] The poetry is a vehicle, allowing access. Sarah Foot bases her discussion of English identity during this time on the premise that "language is more than an important reflection of the thought of an age; it is essentially constitutive of that thought. Such ideas are only open to a people as they have the language available to express them … ideas are conditioned by the language in which they can be thought" ("Making of

---

[26] According to D. H. Green, Old English poets tended towards the serious because they knew a rather Platonic poetic sensibility. His study suggests that, throughout the Old English period, stories could be considered dangerous because of Plato's caution about poetry/fiction, and they can lure us into error by "appearances and transgressive plausibility" (2).

[27] Translated by Robertson, D.W., Jr. in *The Literature of Medieval England* (New York: MacGraw-Hill. 1970). For further discussion of the intended audience for this letter (and an alternate translation) see Donald A. Bullough's "What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?" in *Anglo Saxon England.* 22 (1993): 93-125.

[28] Genesis begins "the Word was with God" in the creation of the universe and the "Word was God," i.e. the *logos,* a concept going back as far as the pre-Socrates meaning the reason/force behind all life.

Angelcynn" in *Old English Literature* 51). Had he been able to see the integration of faith with heroic narrative to come in the body of Old English poetry, Alcuin might have approved of the way it could empower hearers to contemplate metaphysical realities.

Much of the literature in this period is thought to have been written down or composed by those in monasteries who had access to libraries housing copies of classical works. Christianity had taken hold after 597 in England.[29] Benedictine reform around the time of Alfred the Great's reign in the late 800's was successful and quickly adopted throughout England. David Knowles's *The Monastic Order* describes the renewal of monastic life and the general increase in enthusiasm for religious instruction during this period. It caused a concentration of wealth in the monasteries and churches and brought desire for renewed faith, the aesthetic expression of faith, and stronger devotion to Christian intellectual life (Bailey 117–18). These common cultural practices bound people together.[30] James H. Wilson, in his study of Old English poetry as theological allegory, explains that Old English poetry was influenced by classical elegy (56), and the *peregrini* had an important role: "[A *peregrinus* was a] solitary monk who made his lonely way into the new and, in many instances, hostile lands in order to preach the new religion" (15). Wilson refers to monastic figures during this time: Columba, Aidan, Eata, Colman, Cuthbert, Willibrord, Boniface, Sturm, Leoba, Lebuin, and Willibald (16). These men and women "represented much of the great missionary strength of the new Church [in pre-664 England]" (16) and served as inspiration for Old English poetry (9). In addition, Alfred the Great fostered literacy by translating texts into the vernacular, and, according to Foot, he had political reasons for doing so ("Making of *Angelcynn*" in *Old English Literature* 66), but in the literary tradition begun in monasteries. When he commissioned the translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, (Bodeleian, Hatton 20) he wrote:

> For ðy me ðyncð betre, gif iow swæ ðyncð, ðæt we eac sumæ bec, ða ðe niedbeðearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne, ðæt we ða on ðæt geðiode wenden ðe we ealle gecnawen mægen, ond gedon, swæ we swiðe eaðe magon mid Godes fultume, gif we ða stilnesse habbað, ðætte eall sio gioguð ðe nu is on Angelcynne friora monna, ðara ðe ða speda hæbben ðæ hie ðæm

[29] Ten thousand baptisms were recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the first year after the arrival of Augustine to Kent in 597 (Bailey 108).

[30] Foot explains that "racial differences were generally considered less relevant in the formation of concepts of nationhood … than cultural qualities such as customs, language, and law … linguistic bonds forg[ed] collective identity …" ("Making of *Angelcynn*" in *Old English Literature* 53).

> befeolan/ mægan, sien to liornunga oðfæste… (Treharne *Old and Middle* 14, 42-47)
>
> [Therefore it seems better to me, if it seems so to you, that we also should translate certain books which are most necessary for all men to know into the language that we can all understand, and also arrange it as with God's help we very easily can if we have peace, so that all the freeborn men now among the English people, who have the means to be able to devote themselves to it may be set to study …] (Treharne *Old and Middle* 15, 42-47) [31]

We can imagine Old English lyric poetry, the elegy in particular, being inspired by this kind of self-discipline with theology. Since he also commissioned translations of Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* and St. Augustine of Hippo's *Soliloquies* (the Old English translations) into the vernacular, he encouraged laypersons to devote themselves to Boethian detachment and metaphysical contemplation. In an early edition of the *Soliloquies*, the Old English translations, Henry Lee Hargrove characterises this text as "thoughts that … pertain to the world-old subjects of immortality of the soul and the search after God … [which] spring from the yearning soul" (39). This would have worked together with what they may have already known of hagiographic texts,[32] arising from the *peregrinus* tradition. Foot explains that "it has long been recognized [that Alfred's texts] were not chosen randomly, but together constituted a programme of study which if mastered would serve to restore Christianity among the aristocracy …" ("Making of *Angelcynn*" in *Old English Literature* 54). Alfred crafted an identity of Englishness in the Christian faith (58), even going so far as to conflate the English with Israel as though they were the

---

[31] With the exception of *Beowulf*, in the Old English chapters (1-3), Old English quotations, and their translations, are from Elaine Treharne's *Old and Middle English c. 890–c. 1450: an Anthology*. Third Edition. This is a bilingual, (recto/verso OE/ModE) text. The translations of Old English are Treharne's, quoted from this same anthology, and hereafter cited together with the Old English, both recto and verso page numbering thusly cited in one parenthetical: (120-1, 54) with the line numbers and placed after the bracketed translation. Alternative translations are offered in the prose discussion which are informed by both the online and hard copy Bosworth-Toller. Other translations like Burton Raffel's poetic rendering of Bryhtnoth's taunt in *The Battle of Maldon,* are sometimes given in addition to Treharne's.

[32] For an overview of how saints' lives captured the popular imagination see Peter Brown's *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*.