

The View *sub specie aeternitatis* and Consolation: Parallel Themes in the Old English  
*Boethius* and Selected Medieval English Literature

By

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## ABSTRACT

The ninth-century Old English *Boethius*, commissioned by Alfred the Great, is an adaptation of Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*. The appearance of new scholarly editions in recent years has helped medieval scholars better understand Anglo-Saxon educational interests and the primary concerns of Alfred's kingdom of Wessex as a land besieged by Viking invasions and tremendous loss. Focusing on the themes of consolation and the view *sub specie aeternitatis* (from the aspect of eternity) addressed in the Old English *Boethius* through a dialogue between Wisdom and the fictional narrator, Boethius, this dissertation treats the text as a stand-alone literary work comprised of concepts that resonate in Old and Middle English literature. Exploring thematic parallels in the Old English *Boethius*, the Old English poems "The Seafarer," "The Wanderer," "The Dream of the Rood," *Beowulf*, and other literary works, this study illustrates that the universal themes found in *Boethius* are reflected in the selected literature. As does the fictional Boethius, the kings, warriors, and other literary characters throughout these works remember through memory, dreams, and reason the source of divine goodness, the value of wise choices for the greater good, and the need for equanimity as they navigate earthly suffering and loss. The themes of consolation and the view *sub specie aeternitatis* are also present in the later Middle English poem *Pearl* as a grieving father comes terms with his daughter's death, further demonstrating that the Boethian themes are echoed in selected Old and Middle English literature throughout the Middle Ages and illustrate the universality of human suffering and the need for consolation.

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## Introduction

*The Consolation of Philosophy* was written in the early sixth century by Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, a Roman statesman and philosopher, who was imprisoned and set for execution as ordered by the Ostrogothic emperor Theodoric. The Latin text was written in the *consolatio* tradition and composed of a dialogue between Boethius and Lady Philosophy. Their dialogue explores fate and free will, false and true happiness, and good and evil to help the prisoner recall his capacity to exercise reason and to find spiritual consolation. Although Boethius was executed in AD 524, the manuscript of his work “was preserved for several hundred years, entering more general circulation in Europe only in the early Carolingian era.”<sup>1</sup> The Latin *Consolation* was commissioned for an Old English adaptation by the king of the Anglo-Saxons, Alfred the Great, in the ninth century. His adaptation was the first of several early and late medieval English translations, such as the translations of John Walton, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth I, that substantiate the enduring relevance of Boethius’s *Consolation* well into the early Modern period.<sup>2</sup> My interest in Boethius’s *Consolation* originated many years ago as a master’s student in a Geoffrey Chaucer seminar where I learned while studying *Troilus and Criseyde* that Troilus’s angst derived from his clinging too tightly to his temporal love for Criseyde is disastrous as the loss of her presence in his life and his

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Donaghey, Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., Philip Edward Phillips, and Paul E. Szarmach, *Remaking Boethius: The English Language Translation Tradition of The Consolation of Philosophy*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 505, and Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and Renaissance 40 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in collaboration with Brepols Publishers, n.v., Turnout, Belgium, 2019), 6.

<sup>2</sup> See Donaghey, et al., *Remaking Boethius*, for a comprehensive list and discussion of complete English translations of the Latin text.

subsequent suffering destroy him spiritually and physically. When the warrior throws himself into a final battle where he is mortally wounded and dies, he experiences a view *sub specie aeternitatis* (from the aspect of eternity). Chaucer writes,

And ther he saugh with ful avysement  
The erratic sterres, herkenyng armony  
With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie.  
And down from thennes faste he gan avyse  
This litel spot of erthe that with the se  
Embraced is, and fully gan despise  
This wretched world, and held al vanite  
To respect of the pleyn felicite  
That is in heven above [. . .].<sup>3</sup>

Troilus sees the falseness of his felicity on earth, even as it relates to his devotion and love of Criseyde; it is only after death that he understands the eternal joy that transcends this world and is untethered from his clinging to that which cannot be held forever.<sup>4</sup>

Audiences are made aware of a critical change in his perspective when he recognizes his love for Criseyde on earth was nothing but a temporal delight.

Chaucer's interest in the themes of human suffering, loss, the view *sub specie aeternitatis*, and consolation in the Roman statesman Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* is evident not only by his literary canon well beyond *Troilus and Criseyde*, including but not limited to *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowles*, but most significantly by his fourteenth-century, Middle English prose translation of *Consolation* entitled *Boece*. My ongoing interest in the works of the Roman Boethius and the scholarly debates in medieval, current, and speculative thought about the divine

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 473-585 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), V.1811-1819.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, V.1821-34.

nature of God as it is reflected in the human soul has remained a significant part of my life as an educator. I remain inspired to explore the themes of the Boethian worldview in Old and Middle English literature that establishes the possibility of finding consolation during times of loss and suffering. I assert the literature illustrates that by utilizing the capacity for reason and making choices that reflect goodness and virtue, humans can move toward the view *sub specie aeternitatis* and find spiritual consolation. I exclude Chaucer's exploration of Boethian themes in his work in this study, simply due to the robust, extant scholarship already available on the topic, and chose the Alfredian Old English vernacular adaptation as a source of the more spiritual aspects of the original Latin text that made the teachings of Boethius available to educated medieval laypersons.

Erica Weaver and A. Joseph McMullen trace the tradition of *Consolation* translations and adaptations in medieval England, and while the sixteenth-century translation by Queen Elizabeth I continued to influence "English literary culture well into the eighteenth century and beyond,"<sup>5</sup> the Alfredian adaptation and Chaucer's translation "have served as the lodestones for each period's assessments of Boethius's impact on English arts and letters."<sup>6</sup> Weaver and McMullen also note that "the Old English *Boethius* has itself only been available in a representative edition since 2009, while the sources

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<sup>5</sup> Erica Weaver and A. Joseph McMullen, "Reading Boethius in Medieval England: *The Consolation of Philosophy* from Alfred to Ashby," in *The Legacy of Boethius in Medieval England*, eds. A Joseph McMullen and Erica Weaver (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018), x. Further details about Elizabeth's translation are available in Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr. and Philip Edward Phillips, eds., *The Consolation of Queen Elizabeth I: The Queen's Translation of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae (Public Record Office Manuscript SP 12/289)* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), and in Brian Donaghey, et al. *Remaking Boethius*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Chaucer consulted in translating his *Boece* have been recently edited for the first time.”<sup>7</sup>

Because a resurgence of interest in the Alfredian Old English text did not begin until the twenty-first century, scholarship drawing comparisons between the Latin *Consolation* and the Old English translation, for example, such as in the work of Nicole Guenther Discenza, and scholarship examining how the Old English *Boethius* provides a historical narrative that encourages the imprisoned statesman’s self-examination, developed by Hilary Fox, are putting forth new ideas about how the wisdom found in Alfred’s *Boethius*, in particular, was received by later audiences.<sup>8</sup>

Concentrating on Susan Irvine and Malcom R. Godden’s 2012 Modern English translation of the Alfredian Old English *Boethius* and the didactic and consolatory characteristics of Alfred’s adaptation, I establish the enduring value of the fictional *Boethius*’s tragic story as a fallen leader and human in search of an eternal truth that surpasses his present circumstances. The Old English adaptation contains a prose preface and an opening chapter on Theodoric’s invasion and the conspiracy surrounding *Boethius*

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, xi. See Malcom Godden and Susan Irvine, eds. *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius’s De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Tim William Machan, ed., *Sources of the Boece* (Athens,: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion, see Nicole G. Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach, *A Companion to Alfred the Great* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); see also Discenza’s “Knowledge and Rebellion in the Old English *Boethius*” and Hilary Fox’s “An Ethical History for the Self: The *Liberius Exemplum* in the Old English *Boethius*,” in McMullen and Weaver, *The Legacy of Boethius in Medieval England*, 19-34, 71-88. Discenza and Fox discuss the questions concerning human suffering, true goodness, and the forces that shape earthly events. Discenza’s approach to finding these answers is to draw some comparisons between the Old English and Latin texts, concluding that the Old English *Boethius* cannot fully answer the questions in relation to the human’s place in God’s order. Fox explores these questions by reading *Boethius* as a text that invites self-examination and contemplation to remember the human relationship with divine goodness.

just as the background is outlined in the Roman statesman's Latin *Consolation*. To better understand the Alfredian Boethius's circumstances as told in the opening chapter of the Old English *Boethius*, the Roman history surrounding the changes in leadership and the statesman's civic roles provide some context for the nature of his loss and suffering at the hands of Theodoric.

Near the end of the fifth century, the last of the Roman emperors, Romulus Augustus, was defeated soundly by the Goth Odoacer. Odoacer led his troops to Ravenna; they defeated Romulus Augustus's father and forced the sixteen-year-old emperor to abdicate and leave the city to live with relatives. The Goths' invasion and occupation of Ravenna resulted in Odoacer's becoming the king of Italy, thus ending, at least temporarily, imperium rule and imposing a more decentralized authority that encouraged conflict among factions. Unfortunately, Odoacer's reign ended after he was defeated by the Ostrogothic leader Theodoric.<sup>9</sup> His seizure of the throne in Ravenna was vicious, for the opposing armies clashed repeatedly. After an eventual stalemate and a tentative peace agreement between the leaders was reached, Theodoric ambushed and killed Odoacer during a celebratory feast, had his men hunt and kill Odoacer's family, and became the king of Italy.<sup>10</sup> After becoming king, Theodoric resisted further violence and appeared for a time to work diligently to become accepted by the Roman empire.

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<sup>9</sup> Dan Jones, *Power and Thrones: A New History of the Middle Ages* (New York: Viking, 2021), 65, 68. Jones's text provides a more detailed account of King Odoacer who ruled the Roman west for over a decade, maintained an uneasy relationship with the eastern empire and its emperor Zeno, and ultimately fell at the hands of the Ostrogoth Theodoric.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

Though King Theodoric did maintain an Ostrogothic military presence, he adopted Roman law, employed many of the Italian aristocrats of Ravenna, such as Boethius, in his government, built magnificent monuments, and adapted to the Roman way of life. In fact, Theodoric is described as a just and virtuous leader early in the Alfredian *Boethius*:

Wæs se here-tema  
 Criste gecnoden; cyning selfa onfeng  
 fulluht-þeawum. Fægnodon ealle  
 Rom-wara bearn and him recene to  
 friðes wilnedon. He him fæste gehet  
 þæt hy eald-rihta. ælces mosten  
 wyrðe gewunigen. on þære welegan byrig,  
 ðenden God wuolde þæt he Gotena geweald  
 agan moste.<sup>11</sup>

[That ruler was dedicated to Christ; the king himself received the rite of baptism. All the children of the Roman people rejoiced and readily agreed to peace with him. He firmly promised them that they would be allowed to retain their ancient rights in that wealthy city, if God wished that he might have dominion over the Goths.]

Theodoric seemed to be tolerant of his newly acquired Roman citizens, yet eventually he reverted to more cruel, unjust acts and ordered the beheading of Pope John,<sup>12</sup> thus ending the king's false attempts, however small, to gain favor among the people.

Henry Chadwick notes that during Theodoric's long reign, the Roman Boethius, as a statesman and established member of the Italian elite in Ravenna, was appointed to the Master of the Offices in the king's household, where he held power and close political affiliation with the senate. Accounts of the statesman's ultimate fall from power and his

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<sup>11</sup>Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden, eds. and trans., *The Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 19 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1.m.1.31b-39a. All subsequent Old English passages from *Boethius* are from this text, and all translations are mine.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.m.1.42-43.

imprisonment vary among scholars, but the most accurate account of the statesman Boethius's imprisonment, due to Theodoric's accusations that he conspired against the king and Gothic domination,<sup>13</sup> are detailed in the pages of the Latin *Consolation*. The statesman learned that Theodoric was not tolerant of any suspected form of usurpation, and the king chose to imprison and execute him. In *Consolation*, Boethius begins to process this profound loss of glory and status. He questions his future at the hands of an unjust king in pursuit of his own desires and struggles to reconcile the conflicting earthly conditions in which goodness and virtue are not always rewarded with a delightful earthly existence.

Richard Green best summarizes the ethical and moral philosophy within *Consolation* and notes that little of the philosophical arguments are original, for when the statesman wrote the work, most educated men of the fifth and sixth century were familiar with “the classic works of Greek and Roman philosophy, most notably from Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and from the Neoplatonists, and adapted during the patristic period to the theology of Christian revelation.”<sup>14</sup> Victor E. Watts also affirms “that in spite of [Boethius's] dependence on doctrines borrowed from Stoicism, from Plato and Aristotle and from Neoplatonism, there is little in the *Consolation* that is openly contrary to the tenets of Christianity.”<sup>15</sup> Much of what Boethius suggests “can be found in the work of St. Augustine,” who “had honored the Platonists” and the belief in the supreme good, or

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Consolation of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (1981; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1092), 48-49.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Green, *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. with introduction and notes by Richard Green (New York; Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), xv-xvi.

<sup>15</sup> Victor E. Watts, introduction to *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor E. Watts (rev. ed.; New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 28.

God.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, because the stateman “belonged to an age in which the ancient classical culture had become assimilated to Christianity, but not absorbed by it,”<sup>17</sup> he relies on all he has learned from his classical and privileged education to come to terms with the unfortunate events in his life.

As discussed in later chapters, Alfred’s adaptation follows the tradition of the classic works that inspired Boethius as he wrote *Consolation* and responds to the despair that consumes the Alfredian character as he appeals to Wisdom, the counterpart to Lady Philosophy, for a greater understanding of why the unfortunate events in his life occurred and for consolation to ease his suffering. Paul Szarmach asserts that one could call the Old English *Boethius* as being one of the first medieval “‘interactive texts,’ given the liberties taken in the rendition,” that allowed the few Anglo-Saxons who were still quite shaky on “the relationship between fate and Providence”<sup>18</sup> to use the text as a reference point. Moreover, within the extant scholarship surrounding Alfred’s adaptation, Szarmach concludes, “The Boethian connection has tended to form a source connection, not a broader or wider cultural connection. As a result, there is no specifically Boethian interpretation of vernacular literature, though there have been Christian or exegetical ‘schools.’ A poem such as *Beowulf* would seem to be ready for such a Boethian interpretation.”<sup>19</sup> In part due to Szarmach’s observations as well as my lifelong interest in

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<sup>16</sup> Green, *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy*, xv-xvi.

<sup>17</sup> Watts, introduction to *Boethius*, 30.

<sup>18</sup> Paul E. Szarmach, “Boethius’s Influence in Anglo-Saxon England: The Vernacular and the *De consolatione philosophiae*,” in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, eds. Noel Harold Kaylor and Philip Edward Phillips (Boston: Brill Academic Publications, 2012), 253-54.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 254.

the themes found in *Consolation* and the Old English *Boethius*, in this dissertation I will analyze the themes associated with the view *sub specie aeternitatis* in Old and Middle English literature, including Alfred's commissioned adaptation of the work, Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, *Beowulf*, "The Dream of the Rood," "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," and *Pearl*.

The depiction of the Alfredian Boethian view *sub specie aeternitatis* in medieval literature suggests that life is most meaningful when what is learned through a limited view from eternity invites individuals to see beyond their personal lives and acknowledge how their actions can positively or negatively affect the lives of others and the outcomes of earthly events. This self-knowledge, gained by a different perspective of the world, encourages kings, warriors, and other individuals in the literature to act with intention. They must remain mindful of the divine, eternal, and true good by using memory and dreams so that they can find consolation that will help them navigate earthly challenges with equanimity. The Alfredian *Boethius* suggests God's eternal knowledge comprises both a timeless and temporal perspective, and through reason, humans may aspire to attain a different perspective of earthly matters. This perspective encourages humans to envision and seek virtue and an awareness of the effects of human decisions and actions.

To clarify the nature of God within this study, I have developed a simple definition that begins with Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* and the words of Wisdom in the Old English *Boethius*. William Harris Stahl's translation of Cicero's work best explains that the universe, formed and ordered by a divine Maker, contains and confines nine celestial

spheres, the outmost of which is the eternal and supreme good while “[i]n it are fixed the eternally revolving movements of the stars.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Wisdom describes God’s actions in this way:

Eala ðu scippend scirra tungla,  
 hefones and eorðan, ðu on heah-setle  
 ecum ricsast, and ðu ealne hræðe  
 hefon ymbhwearfest, and ðurh ðine halige miht  
 tunglu genedest þæt hi ðe herað.<sup>21</sup>

[Creator, you formed the stars of heaven and earth; you rule upon an eternal throne and quickly spin heaven around. Through your sacred power, you compel the heavenly stars to obey you.]

Wisdom’s description moves beyond the Platonic concept of a celestial power and supreme good that controls and contains the heavens when he states, “Hwæt, ge þonne þeah hwæthwega godcundlices on eowerre saule habbað”<sup>22</sup> (Truly, you have something that is godlike in your soul). To define God as the divine goodness that not only moves the celestial spheres but also as the source of goodness that can be reflected in humanity as they navigate earthly matters, I use the Aristotelean idea of a natural order that inhabits all of creation and encourages the human soul to obey the eternal, supreme good and the Neo-Platonic idea that virtue is reflected in the human soul. Working from these Platonic, Aristotelean, and Neo-Platonic beliefs as represented by the words of Wisdom, I analyze

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<sup>20</sup> William Harris Stahl, trans., *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius*, with introduction and notes by William Harris Stahl, *Records of Western Civilization* (1952; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), IV.I.

<sup>21</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 1.m.4.1-5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.pr.7.par.14.

the literature's examples of human interaction and accountability as they pertain to the natural movement of earthly events and the Alfredian reflection of divine goodness that exists within human souls.

An understanding of my interchangeable use of the terms *God* and *divine goodness* is necessary for the readers of this study, and the best explanation available of the concept of God I use here comes from Green's translation of the Latin text in the passage of the *Consolation* when Boethius affirms for Lady Philosophy that "this world could never have achieved its unity of form from such different and contrary parts unless there were One who could bring together such diverse things . . . and sustain what He has made." Boethius continues by stating that "[t]his power, whatever it may be, by which created things are sustained and kept in motion, I call by the name which all men use, God."<sup>23</sup> Boethius's conception of God is not limited to a Christian interpretation and can be interpreted within a pagan context to suggest a human awareness of a divine order within the natural world. Working in part from Green's translation of the passage and with the Alfredian Boethian view *sub specie aeternitatis*, I have also taken into consideration the inclination philosophers and theologians have to demarcate the terms *sub specie aeternitatis* and *sub specie durationis* (under the aspect of time) to establish the divine view from eternity and the limited view of humanity as mutually exclusive. I argue that the Alfredian *Boethius* suggests that humanity, though constrained and ordered by a temporal world, and a finite capacity for reason, can have a limited understanding of

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<sup>23</sup> Green, *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy*, III.pr.12.par.7.

the divine goodness found within the power described by Boethius's words and can, through the perspective of this power's view *sub specie aeternitatis*, endure earthly challenges with patience.

In "Chapter One: Boethian Kings in Old English Literature," I begin with the emergence in the late ninth century of the Old English *Boethius* in England that indicated an interest in Alfredian Boethian thought. Alfred's commissioned vernacular translation of *Consolation* became a valuable text that contributed philosophical ideas for educated people, such as those in the aristocracy, clergy, and monastic educational centers. Chapter One establishes that the Old English *Boethius* is an adaptation created for an audience in need of spiritual instruction because of their suffering and experience of great loss during the Viking invasions. Utilizing the words of Wisdom and Mod (Mind) who is Boethius, I establish how Alfred's didactic and spiritual text encourages readers within the throes of spiritual blindness to attain a vision of divine goodness so that their earthly suffering and loss become bearable. Taking into consideration the definitions of the term *wyrd* put forth by Arthur E. DuBois and James W. Earl,<sup>24</sup> this chapter explores how earthly good acts and virtue may influence the effects of *wyrd*, or simply what happens in the world. Death, adversity, and suffering are often associated with the term in the Alfredian *Boethius*, establishing that *wyrd* is a part of the divine order that manifests only in earthly events. Kings, who remain aware of their moral responsibilities to their

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<sup>24</sup> For further discussion of the definition of *wyrd*, see Arthur E. DuBois, "The Unity of *Beowulf*," *PMLA* 49, no. 2 (June 1934): 374-405, accessed April 7, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/458166>, and James W. Earl, "Transformation of Chaos: Immanence and Transcendence in *Beowulf* and Other Old English Poetry," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 10, no. 3 (repr., *UTP Journals*, 1987): 164-85, accessed April 7, 2019, <http://www.utpjournals.press/doi/pdf/10.3138/uram.10.3.164>.

people and exercise reason, have an opportunity to experience the connection between worldly existence and divine goodness and move toward a view *sub specie aeternitatis*. Chapter One explores the actions and words of King Alfred through the language in the Old English *Boethius*, of King Edmund as his courage and bravery are recorded in Ælfric's "Passio Sancti Eadmundi Regis et Martyris," and of the Danish King Hrothgar and Geatish King Beowulf who navigate the devastating effects of monsters in *Beowulf*.

I establish the presence of certain Christian and Germanic values in the works as a means by which kings can navigate the limits of their own knowledge, use their capacity to reason, and move toward a view *sub specie aeternitatis* as they make good choices that benefit their people. I also suggest the presence of a Christian authorial voice that serves as a means by which the values of two cultures are expressed, particularly in *Beowulf*. Frederick Klaeber's explores the *Beowulf* poet's "strong interest in depicting a version of the pagan past that, with its high deeds and sententious speeches, has its own narrative consistency and could have had ethical value for the members of his Christian community."<sup>25</sup> Margaret E. Goldsmith, who analyzes the Christian perspective in *Beowulf*, suggests that the Christian poet "was writing about human tragedy as he understood it," and asserts that the "poet was concerned with the minds and hearts of men *sub specie aeternitatis* and only secondarily with wars and banquets and feats of

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<sup>25</sup>R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., with introduction, commentary, appendices, glossary, and bibliography by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles. (Buffalo, New York: University of Toronto Press, 2008), lxix.

swimming.”<sup>26</sup> Mary C. Wilson Tietjen establishes that beginning with Klaeber’s examination of the Christian elements in the poem, a product of a single Christian poet, has “opened the door to a host of overzealous critics who have proceeded to throw out the baby with the bathwater”<sup>27</sup> and dismissed the pagan values of the poem that cannot be ignored. Considering these scholarly interpretations, I suggest that the Christian authors of the literature in this study assert significant voices that allow certain Christian and Germanic warrior values to merge and provide a broader, wiser perspective of the world for the living and fictional kings.

“Chapter Two: The Evolution of the Anglo-Saxon Warrior” centers on the interplay of cultures of the Anglo-Saxon warriors and Christianity found in the Old English literary works about warriors who are suffering because of the losses caused by the ravages of war. Possessing less knowledge and experience than the kings discussed in Chapter One, the warriors reveal through their dreams their spiritual struggles in light of earthly challenges. Using Gregory the Great’s dream theory as outlined in *Morals on the Book of Job* to explain the significance of dream visions,<sup>28</sup> the chapter explores the significance of the aftermath of the dream as it offers guidance and consolation that can be applied to earthly circumstances upon awakening.

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret E. Goldsmith, “The Christian Perspective in *Beowulf*,” *Comparative Literature* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1962): 72, accessed June 21, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1768634>.

<sup>27</sup>Mary C. Wilson Tietjen, “God, Fate, and the Hero in *Beowulf*,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 74, no. 2 (April 1975): 159, accessed June 21, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable.27707876>.

<sup>28</sup> See Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job or Morals on the Book of Job*, 3 vols., a Library of Father of the Holy Catholic Church Anterior to the Division of the East and West, trans. James Bliss and Charles Marriot (Jackson, Mississippi: Ex Fontibus Company, 2012), vol.I.part.II.VIII.xxiv-xxix, and vol.III.part.V.xxiii.

Andrew Galloway proposes that the medieval dream theory, based on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* in which the aftermath of the dream is not explored after Scipio awakens, was probably less known to the poets of the Anglo-Saxon period,<sup>29</sup> yet as validated in this study, characteristics of Gregory's dream theory are utilized in the poems "The Seafarer," "The Wanderer," and "The Dream of the Rood." *Beowulf* illustrates how the warrior navigates *wyrd*, a term that David Pratt and Susan Weil<sup>30</sup> believe serves as a clear indicator of the Anglo-Saxon audiences' need to comprehend the value of human actions in earthly matters. In the "The Dream of the Rood," the warrior's progression toward enlightenment and consolation can be characterized through the juxtaposition of earthly delights and eternal joy, polarities that create a venue for an exploration of the interactions of the temporal and eternal, the human and the divine, and the earthly and the heavenly.

"Chapter Three: *Pearl* and the Personal Journey" juxtaposes the human and the divine and shifts the focus of this dissertation to an analysis of the Middle English text, *Pearl*. Although the *Pearl*-poet was most likely familiar with the Roman Boethius's Latin *Consolation*, I have found no indication, nor do I claim, that the *Pearl*-poet read the Old English *Boethius*. I chose *Pearl* as a strong representative of a later medieval text exploring themes that parallel the ideas found in the words of Wisdom and

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<sup>29</sup> See Andrew Galloway, "Dream-theory in 'The Dream of the Rood' and 'The Wanderer,'" *The Review of English Studies* 45, no. 180 (November 1994), 475-85, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/517806>.

<sup>30</sup> See David Pratt, "The Search for Satisfactory Consolation," in *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 264-307, and Susanne Weil, "Grace under Pressure: 'Hand-Words,' 'Wyrd,' and Free Will in *Beowulf*," *Pacific Coast Philology* 24, no. 1-2 (November 1, 1989), 94-104, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1316605>.

Mod/Boethius. Chaucer and Walton's Middle English translations of the *Consolation* are considered logical texts for a study of *Pearl* and Boethian thought since they were written in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, yet I intend to explore the common themes of texts that emerged from different centuries and evolving cultures.

Chapter Three revisits Gregorian dream theory through the voice of a grieving father whose daughter is deceased and who has forgotten his Christian values and hope for salvation after death that will provide comfort for his suffering. The steady progression of the father's rational mind as he seeks spiritual awakening leads him through his memories and vision of his deceased daughter to a view *sub specie aeternitatis*, through which he can capture a glimpse of the eternal bliss waiting for him after death. By comparing the words of the Alfredian Wisdom and the language of the poem, I assert that the father returns to his life after awakening from his dream prepared to remain mindful of divine goodness in his remaining days.

The final chapter, "Conclusion: Eternal Perspective and the Power to Endure," addresses the value of the literary theme of humanity's search for a means by which they may withstand difficult circumstances and find consolation. Returning to the more current studies of Alfred's text, I explore the gaps in the scholarship that address the value of the timeless wisdom the Old English *Boethius* offers for those who are suffering. Simply by recognizing the differences between the just, divinely inspired actions and unjust, self-serving actions as portrayed by the medieval kings, warriors, and other individuals in medieval literature, contemporary audiences can recognize their responsibility in this world to make virtuous choices and to work toward a self-knowledge that will console them during troubling times. This final chapter draws from

the actions of kings and leaders discussed within this study who are called to teach their people how to remain mindful of divine goodness through reason, even in times of incredible hardship, and to remember that unjust or evil acts committed by others are as much of a necessary part of divine goodness as the just or good acts that shine forth through the souls of those who are inspired by the view *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Through the warriors in “The Dream of the Rood,” “The Seafarer,” and “The Wanderer,” audiences may experience the mutability of earthly things and learn that the transitory delights found on earth are incomparable to the eternal joy found in the contemplation of divine goodness. Lastly, and perhaps the more difficult to see, is the consolation found at the end of *Pearl* that, with careful consideration, can also provide consolation for audiences who are just discovering the Old English *Boethius* and its resonances in medieval English literature. The elegiac lines explore the emotional depths of a grieving father searching for the eternal truth that is available to all humans, regardless of their station in life, and elucidate the power of the mind and the imagination to help us remember divine goodness. The concern for the father that readers feel at the end of the poem is powerful, for no one can be certain that he will take all he has learned from his precious *Pearl* and a view *sub specie aeternitatis* and apply the lessons after he awakens from his dream. For contemporary readers, however, the ability find consolation so that they can manage life’s hardships with equanimity is possible as the lines of *Pearl* and the other literature in this study reawaken the mind, through proper reason, to an understanding of a view *sub specie aeternitatis*.

By exploring the Old English adaptation of Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy* in this dissertation, I intend to establish the influence of the philosophical

ideas about the nature of good and evil as fundamental elements of the divine order evident in worldly events that humans must bear with composure. Drawing comparisons between the themes of the view *sub specie aeternitatis* and consolation in the Old English *Boethius* and the literature in this study, I suggest that the Old English *Boethius* is a stand-alone work that can make meaningful contributions to the study of Old and Middle English literature. The value of seeing the world's events from a broader perspective and with understanding that may well have resonated with Anglo-Saxon and medieval audiences can also resonate with later generations of individuals who question their role in the world and the nature of God's providence, fate, and free will.

## Chapter One: Boethian Kings in Old English Literature

Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden ascertain the first prosimetrical adaptation of the prose Old English *Boethius*, attributed to Alfred the Great, was compiled by an undetermined author who was “clearly a skilled and experienced poet.” The poet worked from the original prose version to create verses that are “substantially longer than the equivalent prose . . . largely due to the need to introduce words or phrases to support the meter or alliteration.”<sup>1</sup> One substantial difference in the prosimetrical version is the poet’s “tendency to invoke the name of Christ and the Christian God more frequently than in the original prose.”<sup>2</sup> However, the poet was “obliged to follow [the] general sense” of the existing prose version, described by Irvine and Godden as an “updated and modernized version of [the Roman] Boethius’s text for a different community of readers and scholars, who might often take a different view of the world from Boethius himself.”<sup>3</sup> Karmen Lenz agrees that the prosimetrical Alfredian “*Froferboc* differs from Boethius’[s] *De Consolatione Philosophiae* in its blatant educational and spiritual purpose for Anglo-Saxon England” and states that the Alfredian adaptation “suggests that a good king must share his knowledge with the populace and, as a Christian king, guide his subject in spiritual instruction.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, “[t]he imagery of natural order in Boethius’s poetry provides Alfred with the exemplar of divine rule” so that his “didactic poetry [may] lift the mind beyond its self-absorption and bring delight to men.”<sup>5</sup> The harmonious

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<sup>1</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, xiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv, xii.

<sup>4</sup> Karmen Lenz, *Ræd and Frofer: Christian Poetics in the Old English Froferboc Meters*, Costerus New Series 195 (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi B. V., 1012), 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

contemplation of divine goodness provides a means by which earthly hardships become far more bearable. Similarly, through a dialogue between the figure of Wisdom and the *Froferboc*'s Mod/Boethius, audiences can identify multiple examples of instructive visions and explanations that encourage recollection and memory of divine goodness and joy as a means by which they may learn to overcome human suffering and loss. These themes render the Old English adaptation as an enduring, didactic work whose themes are echoed by authors of early English literature that celebrates kingship and inspires all people, not just the saints and sovereigns, to align their will with the vision of divine goodness as they act on behalf of the common good.

The Alfredian text suggests Christian ideas that encourage an intellectual and spiritual path for humans as they develop a relationship with God and as they acknowledge the significance of virtuous actions that bring goodness to the world. The king's commissioned translations of other spiritual and philosophical works throughout which the king interspersed "reflections of his own on matters secular, religious, and philosophic; they are accordingly of the greatest historical value, and provide a unique insight into the character and outlook of an early medieval king."<sup>6</sup> Alfred wrote verse prologues and epilogues for several Old English texts: Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* and *Pastoral Care*, and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. An Old English translation of Bishop of Hippo Saint Augustine's *Soliloquies* is also attributed to Alfred. The king's knowledge of these works, along with his leadership of the West Saxons

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<sup>6</sup> Simon Keynes, and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. with introduction and notes by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (1983; repr. New York: Penguin, 2004), 10.

during the Viking invasions, encouraged a national identity, encouraged learning, and ultimately inspired a military following that defeated the persistent Vikings. The Anglo-Saxon king made great strides in the military, spiritual, and cultural domains in England that ultimately led to England's political unification after his death.<sup>7</sup> Leading his people through positive example, Alfred encouraged medieval leaders and the general populace, regardless of class and wealth, to make virtuous choices that exemplify and mirror divine goodness in everyday life.

A spiritual wisdom emerges for humans who remain aware of their ability to reason, and in the Old English *Boethius*, Wisdom criticizes the ignorant man's spiritual forgetfulness when he "mistakes his elevated social status for true nobility"<sup>8</sup> and does not exercise his ability to reason and act with virtue. True nobility comes not from temporal wealth, class, or positions of power but arises from virtuous acts as exemplified by Alfred's military competence and success during times of war. Alfred is aware of his responsibilities to lead with wisdom and, as the Old English *Boethius* suggests, to "reflect on the life of the soul and its participation in the divine order" and to comprehend the soul's potential to, "[b]y divine grace, fulfill its destiny and proper role by conducting its life according to God's will, and return to the divine."<sup>9</sup> Alfred's audiences can learn that through good acts, they may move toward a view *sub specie aeternitatis* and gain a better, more cosmic, perspective of the world. This perspective places earthly suffering and loss in their proper place as an integral part of the divine order that must be endured

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Lenz, *Ræd and Frofer*, 61.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

with equanimity. The poet uses specific images, including dreams, visions of flight or floating under or above the heavens, memory, as described by Augustine in this chapter, and a recognition of *wyrd* as a part of the divine plan that transpires only in worldly events. As a result, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* emerges as a motif in Anglo-Saxon literature that offers encouragement to the audience, including kings, warriors, and other individuals often characterized in the texts, who, through contemplation, can become aware of divine goodness and find consolation. This consolation encourages patient endurance of life's challenges and good acts that can bring consolation to others.

Using the rational mind, humans can utilize memory, understanding, and will as they contemplate the relationship between the earthly and the divine order and experience a broader perspective of the world. The Alfredian text encourages this relationship between God and humanity and the value of utilizing worldly goods to create a greater good. Wisdom encourages human responsibility but also an understanding of the transience of life on earth. The mind's capacity to create images allows individuals to utilize worldly goods in the imagination to make decisions that benefit a greater good, to move beyond the immediacy of the loss of earthly goods, and to endure suffering with equanimity. The consequences of clinging too tightly to the delights found in an earthly existence are best described when the Alfredian Boethius sings sorrowfully as he recognizes that "woruld-sælða welhwæs blindne / on ðis dimme hol dysine forlæddon, / and me þa berypton rædes and frofre"<sup>10</sup> (worldly goods misled me, foolish and blind, into this dark hole and robbed me of advice and consolation). Recognizing the fictional

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<sup>10</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 1.m.2.10-12.

statesman's despair, Wisdom reminds him that a distressed mind "his agen leoht anforlæteð, / and mid uua forgit þone ecan gefean"<sup>11</sup> (forsakes its own light and desolately forgets eternal joy). With Wisdom's encouragement, Mod/Boethius must find consolation by remembering that joy through memory. Saint Augustine in *Confessions*<sup>12</sup> describes the mind as a "power by which . . . I endow with senses the flesh that God has fashioned for me . . . [The senses'] functions are diverse, but I, the one mind, act through them all."<sup>13</sup> Augustine continues that the sensory perceptions create images that become a part of a "huge repository of the memory," where he is "simply passing them in review before [his] mind by remembering them."<sup>14</sup> It is in the storehouse of memory that Augustine encounters himself:

I recall myself, what I did, when and where I acted in a certain way, and how I felt about so acting. Everything is there which I remember having experienced for myself or believed on the assertion of others. Moreover, I can draw on this abundant store to form imaginary pictures which resemble the things I have myself experienced, or believed because my own experience confirmed them, and weave these together with images from the past, and so evoke future actions, occurrences, or hopes; and on all these as well I can meditate as though they were present to me. In that same enormous recess of my mind, thronging with so many great images, I say to myself, "That's what I will do!"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.m.3.5-6.

<sup>12</sup> For further information concerning the knowledge of Augustine's *Confessions* up to Alfred's reign in Anglo-Saxon England, see note 171 in Rhonda McDaniel, *The Third Gender and Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, Richard Rawlinson Center Series (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2018), 64. Whether or not Alfred knew the text directly cannot be determined, but scholars recruited to his court were likely familiar with the text.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, vol. 1, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1997), X.11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, X.13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, X.14.

Through the power of memory, Augustine asserts, the soul “mount[s] by stages toward [God] who made me.”<sup>16</sup> Augustine’s belief that all the images that pass before the mind come from the faculty of memory is a concept that could serve the Alfredian Mod/Boethius well as he remembers the delight he experienced as he engaged in good works as a statesman and integral part of Theodoric’s courts but also accepts the transience of all earthly events and the loss of his previous life.

In her study of memory, Mary Carruthers states that Augustine, in the creative process of composition in his writing, understood quite well that the “result of bringing together the variously stored bits of memory is new knowledge,”<sup>17</sup> and the Alfredian Boethius does begin to create a new knowledge and better understanding of his current circumstances as he awakens from his forgetful and ignorant state with Wisdom’s guidance. In Meter 24 of the Old English *Boethius*, where Wisdom invites Mod/Boethius to envision flight above the earth as if in a dream, the guide encourages the prisoner to look down with compassion upon humankind so that when he returns to earth he will remember the once familiar view from the heavens. Wisdom sings: “Ic hæbbe fiðru fugle swiftran, / mid ðæm ic fleogan mæg feor fram eorðan / ofer heane hrof heofones þisses.”<sup>18</sup> (I have wings swifter than a bird’s with which I can fly far from earth over the high roof of this heaven.) This view is “ufan ofer ealle”<sup>19</sup> (from above over everything). Wisdom describes the characteristics of just kings who rule from this heavenly view to

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, X.12.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 246.

<sup>18</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 4.m.24.1-3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.m.24.11a.

understand that “unrihtwise eorðan cyningas” (unjust earthly kings) and powerful, unjust men have no authority on earth.<sup>20</sup> The wise kings, Wisdom continues, are those who, through contemplation, may have their share of the “soðes leohtes”<sup>21</sup> (true light) so that they may emulate on earth the one wise king God, who reigns and “mid his bridle ymbbæted hæfð / ymbhwyrft ealne eorðan and heofones”<sup>22</sup> (with his bridle has restrained the entire circuit of earth and heaven). Although a just king could only keep in check his own province, a just king, as described by Wisdom, utilizes his authority to keep his empire on the right path at the best pace. This quality of character best points out to Boethius that an unjust king can be easily seen as one of the

Ða ofer-modan oðre rican  
 ðe þis werige folc wyrst tuciað,  
 þæt hi symle bioð swiðe earne,  
 unmehtige ælces ðinges,  
 emne ða ilcan þe þis earne folc  
 sume hwile nu swiðost ondrædæð<sup>23</sup>

[other over-proud, powerful men who torment these weary folk worst, they (powerful men) are always very miserable and powerless in every respect, the same (powerful men) whom these wretched folk for a while now greatly fear].

Wisdom’s words suggest that unjust kings cannot rule with firmness and fairness, for they are powerless to do good and only instill fear in their people. In their present state of excessive pride and misery, unjust kings do not engage their rational minds or remember the true light within them. Even in times of great suffering at the hands of an unjust king,

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<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.m.24.58.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.m.24.30b.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.m.24.37-38.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.m.24.59-64.

such as Theodoric, the Alfredian Boethius can remember that ruthless people have no power to do good, yet the suffering and great personal losses caused by their ruthless acts must be endured with equanimity.

To illustrate the value of Boethius's remaining unaffected by his uncompromisingly painful circumstances, as opposed to being antagonized and galvanized by loss and suffering, Wisdom uses the metaphor of the wagon wheel, one of the innovations upon the original Latin *Consolation* found in the Old English *Boethius*, that provides a view from which, Lenz states, "the [human] intellect can approach the divine to a certain degree."<sup>24</sup> People who are closest to the wheel rim are the most affected by powers beyond their control. Lenz explains that in the Alfredian *Boethius*, Wisdom draws a "comparison between spiritual levels of being with levels of intelligence [and] describes the divine intellect as a still point and imperfect human thought as a moving circle."<sup>25</sup> Individuals, or the middle-most people,<sup>26</sup> on the spokes of the wheel become less affected as they move toward the hub. While Wisdom offers a detailed explanation of the trials experienced by those who remain fixed to the wheel rims and the limited benefits of persons clinging to the middle of the spokes where they may hold both earthly matters and the divine in their minds, it is the individuals who cling to the hub who are the best people. Wisdom states: "Swa hi hiora lufe near Gode lætað and swiðor þas eorðlicon þing forsioð, swa hi beoð orsorgan and læs reccað hu sio wyrd wandrige oððe hwæt hio brenge."<sup>27</sup> (As men place their love closer to God and forsake more these

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<sup>24</sup> Lenz, *Ræd and Frofer*, 41.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 4.pr.29.par.9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.pr.29.par.10.

earthly things, so they are freer from care and less bothered by *wyrd* changes or what it brings.) The Old English word *wyrd* is significant in this passage, and Roy M. Liuzza explains in the introduction to his *Beowulf* translation that *wyrd* is a “practically untranslatable [Old English] word for “fate”;<sup>28</sup> therefore, he does not translate the word throughout the poem. As an archaic term, *wyrd* may very well serve as a reminder of not only that death is the certain outcome for all humans but that misfortune strikes all humans at some point and must be endured. Both good and evil co-exist, and humans are charged with navigating the opposing forces. Wisdom identifies *wyrd* in this way:

Pios wandriende *wyrd* þe we *wyrd* hatað færð æfter his foreþonce and æfter his geþeahhte, swa swa he tiohhað þæt hit sie. Þeah hit us manigfaldlic ðince, sum good sum yfel, hit is ðeah him anfeald good, forðæm he hit eall to godum ende brengð and for goode deð eall þæt þæt he deð. Siððan we hit hatað *wyrd*, siððan hit geworht bið; ær hit wæs Godes foreþonc and his foretiohhung.<sup>29</sup>

[This mutable fate that we call *wyrd* acts according to his providence and according to his design, just as he determines that it should be. Though it seems to us manifold, some good, some evil, it is to him a single good, since he brings it all to a good end and does for good all that he does. We call it fate after it is done; before, it was God’s providence and his pre-ordaining.]

As described in Wisdom’s words, the concept of *wyrd* questions the tautology of “mutable fate,” for fate is most seen as an unfolding of events as determined by a

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<sup>28</sup> Roy M. Liuzza, Introduction to *Beowulf*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. and trans. Roy M. Liuzza (Buffalo, New York: Broadview Press, 2013), 43. Liuzza asserts his decision not to translate the term *wyrd* is because the term defined as “fate” must have appealed to the listener as an archaic or poetic term, and his leaving this term untranslated maintains a degree of sharpness and difficulty that represent the effect of *Beowulf*, particularly on an Old English audience.

<sup>29</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 4.pr.29.par.6.

supernatural (i.e., Godlike) power, and while what happens is God's doing, the unfolding of events appears to form and reform according to humankind's deeds, both good and evil, which are somehow still woven into the fabric of the divine order.

DuBois is one of several critics who explains that “[w]yrd, the lesser fate, is the destiny of man, partly as a consequence of his humanity perhaps, partly as a consequence of his own misdeeds.”<sup>30</sup> He concludes that *wyrd* is only escapable by God or by man through good deeds.<sup>31</sup> James W. Earl echoes DuBois's explanation when he describes *wyrd* as a word with a “vaguely divine aspect, which shows itself in the character of the hero, whose virtue is that he always does . . . what is right and necessary.”<sup>32</sup> Pratt observes that while the term *wyrd* is “often identified as a relic of paganism,” the term “is only known from its use within Christian poetry, often in gnomic or elegiac contexts.”<sup>33</sup> The term's scope of usage, Pratt continues, “tells against any straightforward notion of ‘fatalism,’ with varied responses of coping and control.”<sup>34</sup> The range of interpretations of the concept of *wyrd* allows Anglo-Saxon audiences a means by which they can explore and better understand the outcomes and consequences of good and wicked deeds cataloged by authors and performed by the heroes, villains, kings, and all humans. Good deeds bring earthly joy while wicked deeds bring darkness and suffering, and the Alfredian Boethius remains quite concerned with the evil deeds of rulers that cause sorrow yet are not punished for their acts in life, or so he believes. Mod/Boethius sings:

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<sup>30</sup> DuBois, “The Unity of *Beowulf*,” 395.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Earl, “Transformation of Chaos,” 181.

<sup>33</sup> Pratt, “The Search for Satisfactory Consolation,” 297.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Hwi ðu, ece God, æfre wolde  
 þæt sio wyrd on gewill wendan sceolde  
 yflum monnum ealles swa swiðe?  
 Hio ful oft dereð unscyldegum.  
 Sittað yfele men giond eorð-ricu  
 on heah-setlum, halige þriccað  
 under heora fotum; firum uncuð  
 hwi sio wyrd swa wo wendan sceolde.<sup>35</sup>

[Why, eternal God, would you ever want *wyrd* to proceed so completely at the will of the wicked? It most often hurts the innocent. Throughout earthly kingdoms evil men sit on high thrones, trample the virtuous under their feet; people do not know why *wyrd* turns so wrongly.]

Returning to the words of Wisdom cited in an earlier passage, it is only by soaring in the mind in contemplation to the heavens and perceiving a view *sub specie aeternitatis* that wretched people may recognize that the unjust kings have no power, for, though their acts quite often cause anguish for innocent individuals, evil remains an integral part of the greater goodness. Wisdom explains further: “þu scealt ærest ongitan þæt ða goodan habbað symle anweald, and þa yfelan næfre nanne ne nænne cræft, forðæm hiora nan ne ongit þætte good and yfel bioð symle gewinnan.”<sup>36</sup> (You must first perceive that the good always have power, and the evil never have any power or virtue; for that reason, none of them understands that good and evil are always rivals.) The Alfredian text reminds readers that Mod/Boethius now understands the relationship between the power of good and the powerlessness of evil that are oppositional yet a necessary part of the divine order. He learns from Wisdom’s words that good and evil kings are not always aware that

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<sup>35</sup>Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, I.m.4.33-40.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.pr.25.par.1.

their power works in opposition to one another on earth, thus individuals who are subjected to evil acts may remain unaware of how they may endure the hardships, find consolation, and continue to work for the greater good on earth.

Mod/Boethius still struggles with the idea that evil kings are always powerless when he questions how the unjust may hold contempt for the wise and just and conceal false deceit that takes time to be revealed.<sup>37</sup> The contempt and deception are no more than attempts by unjust people to wield power that has no merit in the divine plan, and Wisdom and Reason respond to Mod/Boethius's concerns by stating that because of his grief, his mind has forgotten that *wyrd* does not move by its own will but is affected by God's design, divine will, and "monna gewyrhtum"<sup>38</sup> (human merits). The fictional prisoner's own circumstances also remind him of the futility of pursuing enduring power and wealth, as represented by his former, elevated status in Roman culture and government, that bring only temporary delight. Wisdom encourages Mod/Boethius to abandon "idle ofer-sælða" (vain indulgences) and "unnytne gefean" (pointless pleasure) to see the true light that illuminates the will of the highest good as emulated in the will of humans.<sup>39</sup> By remembering the value of virtue while engaging in earthly concerns, humans may understand the highest good.

Boethius has much to learn from his current circumstances, and Lenz asserts that Wisdom's "duty is to guide Mod in the reconstruction of divine knowledge in human terms understandable to the populace, so that Mod, in turn, will instruct others."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.m.4.43-47

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.pr.4.par.1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.m.5.25,27.

<sup>40</sup> Lenz, *Ræd and Frofer*, 26.

Similarly, the history of Alfred's sovereignty establishes a means by which he as a memorable exemplar and leader who ended the Viking invasions, inspired a sense of nationalism, and promoted reforms in education and literacy. While Alfred's life is not illuminated in the Old English *Boethius*, his ideas of good kingship are promulgated by Wisdom who has an astute understanding of the ways, however intangible, in which the earthly and the divine merge in the lives of humans. In the same way, the tenth-century monk and priest Ælfric's Old English translation of "Passio Sancti Eadmundi Regis et Martyris," earlier recorded by Abbo of Fleury, presents another example of good kingship. As a Christian king, Edmund aligns his will to the will of divine goodness during a time of great loss at the hands of the Viking invaders. Working from the culmination of Alfred's educational agenda a century after the king's reign, Ælfric's translation shares a similar purpose found in the Alfredian *Boethius* that includes the desire to provide vernacular texts to educational and monastic centers of learning. Similarly, the *passio* of Edmund exemplifies the values of Christian kingship to include virtuous, prudent actions that kings must take for the safety and future of their people.

Liuzza considers the contemporaneous manuscripts of Ælfric's translations and *Beowulf* to be filled with similar values, despite the fact that the *passio* of St. Edmund's values appear "entirely antithetical to those of the poem [*Beowulf*]." <sup>41</sup> The differences among the two works are clear, Liuzza continues, between the "Christian idea of heroic martyrdom" in Ælfric's work and the "heroism of Beowulf's death," and between Ælfric's "work [that] encourages praise of God and His saints, while the other [work,

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<sup>41</sup> Liuzza, Introduction to *Beowulf*, 35.

*Beowulf*, offers] praise of secular deeds, heroic integrity, and a hero's sad but noble courage in the face of inevitable defeat."<sup>42</sup> The *passio* and poem, Liuzza concludes, both "present a hero who is at the same time exemplary—available for emulation and contemporary appropriation—and historically rooted."<sup>43</sup> Saint Edmund of East Anglia is a king who "wæs snotor and wurðfull . and wurðode symble / mid æþelum þeawum þone ælmihtigan god"<sup>44</sup> (was wise and prudent and always glorified by his virtuous conduct, Almighty God). The king devotes much of his life to providing guidance and defense his people, and as the *passio* unfolds, the king is challenged, just as Alfred was, by the Viking invasions and devastating loss of land and people.

As Edmund is faced with the death of his thanes and the prudence of continuing to fight the Vikings who are demanding he renounce his faith, an unknown bishop advises Edmund to save his own life and surrender to the Viking forces. As the king listens intently to the bishop's advice, he exhibits the behavior of a king who knows the importance of meditating in the moment and remaining at that still point near the hub of the Alfredian wagon wheel so that he may move toward a view *sub specie aeternitatis*. After looking to the ground and observing a period of silence, he responds to the bishop as a king who "connects his love for his thanes with his love for God."<sup>45</sup> He must defend

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Ælfric, "Passio Santi Eadmundi Regis et Martyris," in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saint's Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, vol. 3. 1881-1900, ed. Walter W. Skeat (*Internet Archive*), XXXII.14-15.

<sup>45</sup> McDaniel, *The Third Gender*, 215. McDaniel's chapter "Material and Spiritual Rulership" offers a study of two Anglo-Saxon rulers, who look to their Christian faith for guidance during times of war, suffering, and death, as Edmund suffers and dies at the hands of Hingwar and his army.

his thanes, yet they are all dead. In that still moment of silence, in which his love of mortal people and love of the eternal God are connected, Edmund's mind reaches, as Augustine believes, upward when what it loves also loves God.<sup>46</sup> As the result of Edmund's unmoved perspective, he chooses prudently to lay down his weapons and fight the Vikings with his faith alone.

Like Alfred's adaptations of important Latin texts, Ælfric's vernacular works, such as Saint Edmund's *passio*, represent his desire to make available to his people the literature of the church in their own language and to provide an opportunity to learn Latin.<sup>47</sup> The life of Edmund may have resonated with Christian audiences, for Edmund is willing to die for his people but not by fighting; rather, as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne writes, he refuses to fight and dies "in a manner conformed by Ælfric to Christ's passion rather than to any secular heroic agon."<sup>48</sup> Wogan-Browne continues by stating that "[i]n tenth and eleventh-century social structures there is . . . a version of the lord and retainer bond central to heroic verse, but it is a Christian society's system of obligation, and its terms of loyalty are common to legal and doctrinal discourses and to social history, rather than a prerogative of heroic poetry."<sup>49</sup> Edmund's royal obligation to his people requires that he defend his homeland from the Vikings, and refusal to surrender his true faith even as he is pierced by the javelins of Hingwar's army characterizes both his loyalty to death for his

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<sup>46</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, X.11.

<sup>47</sup> G. I. Needham, *Ælfric: Lives of Three Saints*, with introduction by G. I. Needham, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies (1976; repr., Chicago: Edwards Brothers, 1992), 15.

<sup>48</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "The Hero in Christian Reception: Ælfric and Heroic Poetry," in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. Roy M. Liuzza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 218.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

people and his deep desire to honor the greater good on earth. As Wogan-Browne establishes, “For both the ecclesiastical poet and his noble lay patron, theories of civil structure, military obligation[,] and kingship are formed within a Christian framework seen both as enduring and of specific informing relevance to contemporary dilemmas and experiences.”<sup>50</sup> Edmund’s conduct is notable for individuals who may struggle to determine if they should try to initiate change for a greater good or accept the inevitable with composure and resolve. Because the king’s people and his land are decimated and his death will not leave his kingdom to be overtaken and defeated, Edmund honors his faith and accepts with composure what God has determined.

In his translation of “Nativitas Domini Nostri Iesu Christi,” Ælfric explains, “Gescead is ðære sawle forgifen to gewyssienne and tō styrene hire agen lif . and ealle hire dæds”<sup>51</sup> (Reason is given to the soul to guide and command its own life and all its deeds), and mortals must know God to know their soul. Edmund’s faith is guided by his awareness of the true light of God, a knowledge gained through his capacity to reason, yet he cannot escape his death at the hands of the Vikings who cruelly torture him in an attempt to conquer and break his faith. The heinous acts of the Vikings reveal their pursuit of worldly goods and selfish gain and their unjust leaders, and a certain madness overtakes the Vikings who attempt to force Edmund to reject his faith. As the scene in which he is killed erupts into a stabbing frenzy, evil, as represented by the Vikings who

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Ælfric, “Nativitas Domini Nostri Iesu Christi,” in *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saint’s Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, vol. 2, 1881-1900, ed. Walter W. Skeat (repr.; London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 107-08.

are determined to destroy the Christian king, and good, as represented by Edmund's awareness of divine goodness, clash, as they are necessarily bound to do within the divine order.

A similar example of evil confronting good can also be found within the *passio* in the story of Leofstan:

On þam lande wæs sum man . leofstan gehaten .  
 rice for worulde . and unwittig for gode .  
 se rád to þam halgan mid riccetera swiðe  
 and het him æt-eowian orhlice swiðe .  
 þone halgan sanct hwæþer he gesund wære.  
 ac swa hraðe swa he geseah þæs sanctes lichaman .  
 þa awedde he sona . and wæl-hreowlice grymetede .  
 and earmlice geendode yfelum deaðe.<sup>52</sup>

[In that land was a certain man, Leofstan was his name, rich in this world but without understanding of God. He rode to the saint with arrogance and ordered them to show him, the holy saint to see if he was whole, but as soon as he saw the saint's body, he went mad and raged horribly and ended wretchedly in an evil death.]

When confronted with the Edmund's incorruptible body, Leofstan's pride and ignorance of God's goodness destroys him. His madness, anger, and ultimate death when confronted with Edmund's saintly remains suggest the triumph of good over evil. Leofstan's character also illustrates the Alfredian Boethian Wisdom's depiction of unjust, prideful, and unnecessarily adversarial kings:

Þonne hi gebolgene weorðað, him wyrð on breostum inne  
 beswungen sefa on hraðre mid ðæm swiðan welme  
 hat-heortnesse, and hreðre siððan  
 unrotnesse eac geræped,  
 hearde gehæfted.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ælfric, "Passio," 231-38.

<sup>53</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 4.m.25.45-49a.

[When they are angry, the heart begins to beat fiercely and develops a fury within the heart, feverish in the chest, but is soon fettered firmly, bound by sadness.]

There is no escape from this kind of spiritual imprisonment, Wisdom tells Boethius, for “[u]nrihtwise eorðan cyningas / ne magon æfre þurhtion awuht goodes”<sup>54</sup> (unjust earthly kings cannot ever accomplish anything good). The description of Leofstan’s death is telling, and audiences can only conclude that he does not or cannot change his perspective so that he may seek a greater understanding of goodness or his responsibility to act with virtue.

The juxtaposition of Edmund and Leofstan, the Alfredian Theodoric and Boethius, and the just and unjust leaders characterized in the Old English *Boethius*, is similarly illustrated throughout *Beowulf* with the Danish king Hrothgar and the Geatish King Beowulf’s being compared to unwise kings, such as Heremod. As outlined in the Introduction, quite likely an unknown Christian poet wrote a pagan tale that includes some Christian concepts. Tietjen believes that the

critical discussions that undertake to make the poem’s pagan elements compatible with Christian thought (citing as they do, an abundance of reference to Boethius, the Church fathers, the liturgy, and the Seven Deadly Sins) impoverish our approach to *Beowulf* in that we are reduced to dealing with a poem of considerable complexity in terms of what amounts to a narrow Christian didacticism.<sup>55</sup>

Tietjen continues by stating that the story “by the *Beowulf*-poet is undeniably both Christian and pagan in attitude and tone.”<sup>56</sup> In Andy Orchard’s discussion of the Christian background in *Beowulf*, he states, “

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<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.m.25.58-59.

<sup>55</sup> Tietjen, “God, Fate, and the Hero,” 160.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

[T]here seems no getting rid of the poet's clear references to the biblical tales of Cain and Abel (lines 107-10 and 1261b-1265a) and the subsequent story of the Flood (lines 1260-1b and 1688b-1693) without doing irreparable damage to the transmitted text, and the debate has instead shifted to a consideration of the precise extent to which *Beowulf* has not simply been shaped by a Christian worldview, but informed by the imported, literate, and Latinate learning that the Conversion brought to Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>57</sup>

Some of the Christian values and the pagan values of the Germanic warrior culture can be accommodated effectively in the poem, and there are some instances in which readers can find parallels with other works known to a literate audience, such as the Old English *Boethius* and the works of Augustine and Alcuin. In the paragraphs to follow, Christian ideas will be presented not to diminish the meaning of the poem for those who choose to focus on the pagan values. Instead, *Beowulf* will be identified as a poem that instructs an educated, literate Anglo-Saxon audience so that they find spiritual and intellectual guidance as they navigate life's hardships and continue to recognize the value of human responsibility to the lord and land in the Christian heroic ideal.

Suffering is inevitable in the dynamic clashes of good and evil; in fact, Goldsmith suggests that suffering saved Hrothgar.<sup>58</sup> The Danish king affirms that he has found consolation for his suffering, and he is able to offer sound advice to Beowulf. Hrothgar tells the warrior that if he remains humble, and uses his strength wisely and with moderation, he “scealt to frofre weorþan / eal langtwidig leodum þinum, / hæleðum to

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<sup>57</sup> Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, (Rochester, New York: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 131. See Orchard's footnotes on 131 that provide a comprehensive list of book-length studies about the Christian themes and their influence in the poem and overviews of the challenges in making direct connections to the texts that informed medieval learning after the Conversion.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

helpe”<sup>59</sup> (shall become everlasting consolation to your people and succor to heroes).

Hrothgar continues by reminding Beowulf that he must be different from the legendary king Heremod, whose heart harbored greed: “[N]allas beagas geaf / Denum æfter dome; dreamleas gebad / þæt he þæs gewinnes weorc þrowade, / leodbealo longsum.”<sup>60</sup> (He gave no rings to the Danes according to honor; joyless he endured that he was conflicted and suffered from that troublesome work, a long-lasting harm to his people.) Hrothgar reminds Beowulf to learn from Heremod and to remember to “[b]ebeorh þe ðone bealonið, Beowulf leofa, / secg betsta, ond þe þæt selre geceos, / ece rædas; oferhyda ne gym, / mære cempa!”<sup>61</sup> (protect yourself from wickedness, dear Beowulf, the best of men, and choose better, eternal salvation; do not dwell in pride, great warrior!). Beowulf must not place too much value on material wealth and goods, for he is just on earth for a little while.

By drawing comparisons between just and unjust kings in the poem, Hrothgar’s words help illustrate his awareness of knowing exactly what a king must do to bring consolation to the people he serves. Beowulf is not yet a king, but a king in the making, and his actions as a heroic warrior illustrate the stark contrast between corruption of evil kings and the goodness he emulates---and he does appear to emulate the kind of goodness illustrated in the lives of Alfred and Edmund highlighted throughout this study. Beowulf is a skillful warrior in a heroic society, and Leyerle observes that the “hero follows a code that exalts indomitable will and valour in the individual, but society requires a king who

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<sup>59</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, XXIII.1707b-09a. All *Beowulf* quotes are from this text, and the translations are mine.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIII.1719b-22a.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, XXV.1758-61.

acts for the common good, not for his own glory.”<sup>62</sup> Leyerle’s assertion certainly pegs the difficulty in discussing Beowulf’s character. His choices to engage in the battles with Grendel and Grendel’s mother could be deemed appropriate for a warrior seeking wealth, fame, and glory, yet the battle with the dragon is not the best choice that a king might make, particularly when his death could leave his people without leadership and protection. As Leyerle suggests, “[T]he greater the hero, the more likely his tendency to imprudent action as a king.”<sup>63</sup> While not speaking directly about *Beowulf*, the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin of York also addresses the question that arises in the poem about what it takes to make the best choices:

How many people think themselves to be wise, and glory in their knowledge of the way of the truth? But they are not truly wise because they do not have the fortitude of soul to perfect that which they know they should do. True wisdom is therefore to know what one ought to do and carefully to bring it to perfection.<sup>64</sup>

Alcuin distinguishes between people who are not truly wise and those with the awareness of what needs to be done to guide the soul toward wisdom and an understanding of the true good that may be enacted by humans. His description of truly wise individuals best elucidates Beowulf early in the poem as a heroic character in Anglo-Saxon literature who can make wise choices and endure the consequences of *wyrd*. Grendel, a descendent of Cain who attacks the Danes celebrating the newly erected hall Heorot, for example, is seen as “evil incarnate, and his destruction by Beowulf is a triumph of heroic goodness over devilish evil.”<sup>65</sup> Beowulf’s success in defeating Grendel, his single promised task on

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<sup>62</sup> John Leyerle, “Beowulf the Hero and the King,” *Medium Ævum* 34, no. 2 (1965), 89.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Douglas Dales, trans., *A Mind Intent on God, The Prayers and Spiritual Writings of Alcuin: An Anthology* (Norwich, Norfolk: Canterbury Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>65</sup> Leyerle, “Beowulf the Hero and the King,” 90.

behalf of the Danes, would lead one to believe that his work is done, yet he does not possess the true wisdom as described by Alcuin or a broader perspective of the realities of the world to be a king who knows when to stop fighting. After he defeats Grendel, he defeats the monster's mother. Ultimately, as discussed later in this chapter, as a king, he chooses to try to slay the dragon. His pride, rather than wisdom, dictates his actions when prudence might remind him that there is a time when he must endure suffering with patience and exemplify wisdom and understanding for his people. As the *Beowulf*-poet states,

Metod eallum weold  
 gumena cynnes, swa he nu git deð.  
 Forþan bið andgit æghwær selest,  
 ferhðes foreþanc: fela sceal gebidan  
 leofes ond laþes se þe longe her  
 on ðysson windagum worolde bruceð.<sup>66</sup>

[The Creator ruled all of humankind, as he continues to do. Therefore, understanding is always best, a forethought of mind. He must endure much of love and hate, who long here endures the days of strife in this world.]

Having the forethought of mind to gain a better perspective of worldly events, to endure good and evil is a concept Beowulf does, in fact, address in his first speech to Hrothgar after his arrival among the Danes when he declares, “[Ð]ær gelyfan sceal / dryhtnes dome se þe hine deað nimeð”<sup>67</sup> (There, a person must believe in the Lord's judgment, he whom death takes.) The warrior's words suggest a mindful knowledge of a divine order that manifests in the world and an acceptance of outcomes that must be endured.

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<sup>66</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, XVI.1057b-62.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.440b-41.

Beowulf must also be willing to die, as *wyrd* determines, regardless of his motivation, and his ability to stand steady in the face of adversity exemplifies, from one perspective, the virtuous nobility of a future king who acts with discretion and, from another perspective, with the arrogance and selfishness of a heroic warrior seeking glory. Not surprisingly, Beowulf's decision to engage with Grendel could be understood as necessary as he seeks to save Hrothgar's people from continual despair of the loss of loved ones in the wake of the monster's attacks and, in Hrothgar's mind, to repay Hrothgar's kindness extended to Beowulf's family in the past. His choice to fight Grendel and then Grendel's mother are also a factor in his desire to achieve fame and glory. Beowulf's speech to Hrothgar indicates that he accepts the Lord's judgment concerning death in his battle with Grendel, though one may very well doubt that hero expects to die at all. The warrior exudes confidence, and as a result, Hrothgar speaks as a mentor and a king after the death of Grendel's mother. Leyerle ascertains that Hrothgar "sees in Beowulf's behavior in Denmark a tendency to unreflective confidence in his own strength, to impetuosity in acting, and to excessive concern for praise, causing the king to caution Beowulf in his moment of triumph in Heorot."<sup>68</sup> Hrothgar's words are cautionary and suggest that he may well see qualities of a leader in the warrior, and because Hrothgar feels a need for a successor, his advice suggests a motive.

Readers might question what else Hrothgar recognizes in the hero to make him seem like a future king, for as Hrothgar states, pride, arrogance, and the desire for fame are not ideal qualities for a king. Goldsmith asserts that the *Beowulf*-poet "is more

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<sup>68</sup> Leyerle, "Beowulf the Hero and the King," 93.

intensely aware than other men of human weakness and destitution,” and, “writing of strength and riches, is synchronously aware, not only that strength and riches are transient, but that the greatest human strength is inadequate, and the greatest human wealth valueless, when the soul is in jeopardy.”<sup>69</sup> Although Goldsmith continues by stating that self-sufficiency and a love of worldly goods are indicative of a rejection of service to God,<sup>70</sup> which is divergent from the premise of this dissertation, her point about a soul in jeopardy is certainly meaningful, for an awareness of the value of serving God, a greater good, is a significant quality of good kingship. To understand why Hrothgar could see Beowulf as a person who has a broader, more worldly perspective, returning to the hero’s early speech to Hrothgar and other thanes is worthwhile. Beowulf ends with these knowing words: “Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel.”<sup>71</sup> (*Wyrd* always goes as it must.) Beowulf’s words suggest a certain wisdom and knowledge of the force that plays out in the world as an integral part of a divine order. His comprehensive perspective of the workings of *wyrd* is also indicative of his ability to persist despite the transience of earthly existence. Readers cannot determine with any certainty that Beowulf knows human actions may influence *wyrd*, for instance, averting immediate death for innocent people or easing suffering and loss for those who are affected by evil acts. It is this lack of self-knowledge concerning the effects of his own behavior that is missing in Beowulf’s character, that leaves some audiences wondering if he is fit to be king.

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<sup>69</sup> Goldsmith, “The Christian Perspective in *Beowulf*,” 72.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, VI.455b.

Wisdom in the Old English *Boethius* describes the qualities of kings, just and unjust, and striking similarities emerge to the king Beowulf's character as he engages in both self-serving and selfless deeds as he prepares and enters into his final battle with the dragon. Encouraging the Alfredian Boethius to view worldly events from above the heavens, as described in Meter 24, Wisdom imagines flight over the heavens with Boethius. Just as this imagined flight illuminates for audiences the qualities of a good king who remembers to act upon the goodness within him and the powerlessness of evil kings, Beowulf can be identified with the qualities of both. Beowulf's fight against Grendel further promotes his glory and potential as a leader. According to the *Beowulf* poet, leaders and old and young retainers travel across the land to celebrate the warrior's success and claim him a ruler more worthy than Hrothgar.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, the final battle with the dragon best illustrates the importance of knowing, as Mod/Boethius learns from Wisdom and Reason, that greed eventually corrupts the mind of every human, that fame is transitory, and that humans cannot take their treasures from this world.<sup>73</sup> Making good choices for their people is of utmost importance for effective kings, and Beowulf's ending leaves some audiences wondering if he did any good at all for his people.

After Beowulf has ruled peacefully for fifty years, the king's land and hall are attacked by a dragon who has guarded his treasure for three hundred years although "ne byð him wihte ðy sel"<sup>74</sup> (he is not a whit better for it). The poet describes a "secg

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<sup>72</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, XIII.837-60.

<sup>73</sup> These three points are made in Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*: II.m.8.42-45; II.pr.9. par.11; and III.m.14. 9-11.

<sup>74</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, XXXII.2277b.

syn(by)sig”<sup>75</sup> (a man tormented by sin) who enters the dragon’s barrow and steals a jeweled cup that he presents to his lord, causing the dragon to become enraged when it wakes and becomes aware of the theft.<sup>76</sup> The tale of the sinful man is juxtaposed to the unknown man in the origin story of the barrow that begins with a lonely warrior who is the sole survivor of his people, “weard winegeomor”<sup>77</sup> (a sentinel grieving his friends), and who hides his people’s rich treasures so that he may continue to enjoy them a little while longer.<sup>78</sup> He determines that without the songs and swift horses within a community and without warriors to wear the battle-gear and to travel alongside him, he is grief-stricken and cannot be consoled. The lonely warrior, who guards the hoard and foregoes the act of living, suffers and weakens as he is unable to sustain a life that put all too much value on the treasure:

Swa giomormod gιοhđo mænde  
an æfter eallum, unbliđe hwear(f)  
dæges ond nihtes, ođ đæt deaðes wylm  
hran æt heortan.<sup>79</sup>

[So sad of mind he mourned his sorrows alone after all, unhappy turned the days and nights, until the surge of death struck his heart.]

The sentinel dies clinging to a past represented by the ancient treasures that are a fleeting delight. Once the dragon comes upon the abandoned barrow, it assumes the task of guarding the hoard in isolation. The allure of the hoard parallels the allure of the false felicities Wisdom warns against as he counsels the Alfredian prisoner Mod/Boethius. The

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXII.2226a.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXII. 2281-2311.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXII.2239a.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXII.2239b-2241a.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXII.2267-70a.

concept of the middle-most-men of the wagon wheel analogy might have served Beowulf well, for if the king could remain spiritually aware of the goodness of God while navigating earthly events, audiences may be assured that Beowulf would use reason and his awareness of the treasure to be used on earth for a greater good.

A fundamental understanding of his ability to make wise choices to benefit his people is lost on Beowulf, who, according to Leyerle, “kills a dragon, not as a young champion, but as a mature king and loses his life; his people, left without mature leadership, suffer terrible affliction from their enemies.”<sup>80</sup> The effects of *wyrd* are evidenced in Beowulf’s death, and though his desire to gain the treasure for his people is well-intended, the end result has a far greater negative impact. Goldsmith, in her discussion of Hrothgar’s advice to the young warrior, suggests that Hrothgar, with “his understanding of divine truth, is used to reveal to Beowulf the danger of accepting this world’s values. Because Beowulf has not heeded the warning, he is not prepared for death”<sup>81</sup> as he engages with the dragon. Leyerle believes the tale ends as

[a]ll turns on the figure of Beowulf, a man of magnificence, whose understandable, almost inevitable pride commits him to individual, heroic action and leads to a national calamity by leaving his race without mature leadership at a time of extreme crisis, facing human enemies much more destructive than the dragon.<sup>82</sup>

Beowulf fails his people, and his end is poignant, for the tales of just and unjust kings in the poem can be offered as a means by which audiences may comprehend and internalize the lesson of Beowulf’s failure and better endure adversity in life. The heroes and monsters in *Beowulf* offer a perspective that invites readers to awaken from their desire

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<sup>80</sup> Leyerle, “Beowulf the Hero and the King,” 93.

<sup>81</sup> Goldsmith, “The Christian Perspective in *Beowulf*,” 86.

<sup>82</sup> Leyerle, “Beowulf the Hero and the King,” 101-02.

for earthly delights and remember that *wyrd* is determined by the interaction of good—selfless and courageous deeds for a community of people—and evil—selfish and wicked deeds for personal gain that serve only an individual.

As Hrothgar recounts the tales of Heremod’s evil actions, the king reminds Beowulf that he must “*Ðu þe lær be þon, / gumcyste ongit; ic þis gid be þe / awræc wintrum frod*”<sup>83</sup> (You must learn from him, comprehend virtue. I made this speech for you from the wisdom of my winters). These words suggest that Beowulf, like all individuals, has the capacity to grow intellectually and to comprehend the machinations of a divine order in which good and evil are interdependent upon one another. He remains ignorant of this knowledge and the capacity for reason that serve as a guardian of his soul. Hrothgar describes the inherent danger of the evil slayer who consistently appears when the soul’s guardian “sleeps” as he extends this warning:

oð þæt him on innan oferhygda dæl  
weaxeð ond wridað; þonne se weard swefeð,  
saweale hyrde; bið se slæp to fæst,  
bisgum gebunden, bona swiðe neah,  
se þe of flanbogan fyrenum sceoteð.<sup>84</sup>

[Until within him his share of pride grows and flourishes; while the guardian sleeps, the soul’s shepherd; that sleep is too sound, with troubles bound, the slayer very near, he who from his arrow-bow wickedly shoots.]

This guardian of the human soul or reason, when awake, is connected to the divine order and acquires a perspective that sees the world with impartiality, utilizes the forethought to perceive and respond to impending evil acts, and does not fall prey to their own vices that

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<sup>83</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, XXIII.1722b-1724a.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, XXV.1740-44.

incite evil. The struggles between the good and evil are inevitable in the world for, as Wisdom discloses,

Swa hæfð geheaðærod hefon-rices weard  
mid his anwealde ealle gesceafta,  
þæt hiora æghwīlc wið oðer winð,  
and ðeah winnende wreðiað fæste,  
æghwīlc oðer utan ymbclyppeð,  
þy læs hi toswifen. Forðæm hi symle sculon  
ðone ilcan rýne eft gecyrran  
þe æt frymðe fæder getiode,  
and swa edniwe eft gewiroðan.<sup>85</sup>

[Hence, the guardian of the heavenly kingdom controls all of creation with his power, so that each of them strains against the other, and yet in struggling, securely uphold one another, each clasps the other so they cannot move apart. Therefore they must always return to the course the father appointed in the beginning and so be renewed again.]

In this passage, Wisdom explains that humans cannot escape the strife that binds and renews life for all creation, for as the heavenly guardian decrees, not one of the opposing elements can fulfill its purpose without its counterpart. Awareness of the design of conflict in creation and the workings of *wyrd* raises human souls above the despair, loss, and suffering that befalls them because of hardships and their consequences.

The audience has limited knowledge of the details of Beowulf's fifty years as king, but his good deeds are noted as he is identified by the poet as a "frod cyning"<sup>86</sup> (wise king) and guardian of the land and as his deeds are celebrated in the final lines of the poem. The poet's choices about what to bring to the final lines of the poem offer insight into Beowulf's legacy, and in these lines, the audience is reminded "þæt mon his winedryhten wordum herge"<sup>87</sup> (that a man should praise his friendly lord with words) and

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<sup>85</sup>Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 2.m.11.31-39.

<sup>86</sup>Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, XXXI.2209.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, XLIII.3175.

love him. Beowulf the king was the “leodum liðost ond lofgeornost”<sup>88</sup> (most kind to his people and most eager for fame), and in the end, Beowulf has succeeded, in part, as he has emulated the qualities of character found in the Germanic warrior culture who acts as an individual for that fame and glory. It is much more difficult to ascertain his success as a king, for he leaves his successor Wiglaf and his people without protection and the ability to profit from the treasure he has attained. Hrothgar, audiences might argue, changes as the poem progresses, and is able to offer guidance to the warrior Beowulf so that the warrior may learn to become a king. Though the pagan king Beowulf’s qualities may never match the qualities found in the Christian kings Alfred and Edmund (who recognize the value of the worldly gifts of goodness and act on behalf of their people), *Beowulf* is didactic in that it is a cautionary tale that offers a broader perspective, much like the view *sub specie aeternitatis* in the Old English *Boethius*, through which audiences may see the importance of acting for the greater good and the value of enduring *wyrd* with patience when events beyond their control befall them. *Beowulf* is a literary representation of the divine order as manifested in the world of humans: acts for the greater good clash with evil actions, and sometimes, as audiences see in the character of Beowulf, the lines between good and evil are not quite so clear, thus making him foremost a human. By seeing the narrative from the poet’s perspective, audiences can understand that certain values of the Germanic warrior culture and early Christian thought may very well work together to create the image of Beowulf as a misguided soul.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, XLIII.3182.

## Chapter Two: The Evolution of the Anglo-Saxon Warrior

In the *Morals on the Book of Job*, Gregory the Great asks, “How can [angels] either always be in presence, or always behold the face of the Father, of they are sent upon external ministration for our salvation?”<sup>1</sup> This question is significant in a study of Anglo-Saxon warriors depicted in Old English literature and their capacity to contemplate and to act upon the goodness of God at all times because Gregory writes that angels are

sent from [God], and stand by Him too, since both in that they are circumscribed, they go forth, and in this, that they are also entirely present, they never go away. Thus, they at the same time always behold the Father’s face, and yet come to us; because they both go forth to us in a spiritual presence, and yet keep themselves there, whence they had gone out, by virtue of interior contemplation.<sup>2</sup>

Gregory’s response to his own question in *Morals* about how angels may be sent out yet simultaneously remain in God’s presence brings to light a distinction between the angels’ ability to maintain a mental presence before God by continually contemplating the divine as they minister to humans and the human inability to maintain a consistent contemplation of the divine because of blindness to their own ignorance. Gregory concludes,

Herein then is the nature of Angels distinguished from the present condition of our own [human] nature, that we are both circumscribed by space, and straitened by the blindness of ignorance; but the spirits of Angels are indeed bounded by space, yet their knowledge extends far above us beyond comparison; for they expand by external and internal knowing, since they contemplate the very source of knowledge itself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, vol.I.part I.II.iii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Although angels and humans share the limitation of space, the human mind is incapable of sharing the same kind of spiritual presence before God with the angels and needs guidance, much as is offered in the Old English *Boethius*, to be led out of darkness by the true light. Gregory's words must have resonated with King Alfred the Great who knew the works of Gregory the Great, as evident in the Old English translations and the verse prologues and epilogues that accompany the Old English texts generally associated with Alfred. These additions, according to Irvine and Godden, aim to "bestow authority on the vernacular works they accompany."<sup>4</sup> The authors indicate that "[o]ne of the methods of achieving this was by explicit reference to the Latin source authors such as Gregory . . . whose authority could be taken for granted."<sup>5</sup> In other adaptations, such as the prosimetrical Old English *Boethius*, Alfred's name implied royal authority within the verse prologue.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the themes elucidated in the Alfredian *Boethius* began to emerge in other Old English works, as suffering and experiencing tremendous loss at the hands of the Vikings during their ninth century invasions became a daily occurrence in the lives of the Anglo-Saxon people.

Because disillusionment and doubt brought about by war are not uncommon, as all humanity has learned throughout generations of unrest and conflict, Alfred's recognition that war may also help reestablish a connection to religious, national, and communal structures becomes even more relevant. As a result, Alfred's commissioned adaptation of Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* emerged as a potential guide not

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<sup>4</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, xix.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

only to kings and noble patrons, as discussed in Chapter One, but also to other educated individuals as they navigated the forces of *wyrd* inevitably present not only as they played out in Alfred's kingdom during the Viking invasions, but also within the daily challenges of earthly existence.<sup>7</sup> The Christian and philosophical ideas put forth in the Alfredian adaptation parallel many of the themes put forth by the poets who composed the Old English elegies and epic poems "The Seafarer," "The Wanderer," "The Dream of the Rood," and *Beowulf*. The poems illustrate the human capacity to reason, to contemplate divine goodness, and to benefit from seeing the world from an eternal perspective. This view *sub specie aeternitatis* consoles humans as they navigate *wyrd*, teaches them how to use earthly goods for the greater good, and strengthens them to persevere through earthly trials. Through memory and dreams that lead to a transcendent perspective, the warriors find consolation as they come to terms with their current circumstances.

The value of the warrior figure cannot be underestimated in the study of Old English poetry, for certain beliefs of the Germanic warrior culture and the Christian church may coexist effectively in the poetry in large part due to the presentation of the warrior and his contemplation of his losses. Because of the presence of the two cultures in the poems, poets are able to illustrate a progression or "shift from one world-view to another, to achieve reconciliation."<sup>8</sup> As László Iliásics notes, "There are numerous

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<sup>7</sup> For a full discussion of the term *wyrd*, see Chapter One and the discussion below.

<sup>8</sup> László Iliásics, "The Paradox of Context: *Wyrd*, God, and Progression Presented through 'The Wanderer' and 'The Seafarer,'" *The AnaChronisT* 13 (2007-08): 2, accessed 5 April 2022, [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A225938520/AONE?u=tel\\_oweb&sid=googleScholar&xid=32026667](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A225938520/AONE?u=tel_oweb&sid=googleScholar&xid=32026667).

parallels that can be drawn between Germanic and Christian mythology,” and the early Anglo-Saxons were able to accommodate Christianity to their Germanic worldview.<sup>9</sup> The possible meanings that develop as the result of this integration are reflected in texts such as “The Dream of the Rood,” in which Christ is identified as a heroic warrior and *Beowulf*, in which a non-Christian warrior speaks wisely and with some deliberation about his role in the propensity for his battles to be in the hands of the holy God.<sup>10</sup> “The Seafarer” and “The Wanderer” from the Exeter Book, MS 3501, held by the Exeter Cathedral library, add to the discussion of the warriors’ roles by addressing, as Robert E. Bjork believes, some “Boethian philosophical musings in a poem such as [“The Wanderer”] about the ephemerality and unreliability of all earthly things” that make the Anglo-Saxon poems therapy for the audience.<sup>11</sup> Anglo-Saxon poets explore the human struggle to accept the uncertainty of earthly existence, particularly in light of the suffering and loss that are as much a part of life as are the delights and gains. To move beyond the oscillatory events that keep humans in a state of despair and fear, the poets remind readers of the importance of utilizing reason to seek out and to contemplate a divine perspective, and as illustrated in the poems in this study, the limits of earthly existence and a more comprehensive divine perspective are frequently juxtaposed by poets to encourage audiences to look to the heavens for consolation. Audiences are not always pressed to believe that relying on the Christian God is the only solace; rather, they are

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, X.685b-687.

<sup>11</sup> Robert E. Bjork, ed. and trans. *Old English Shorter Poem: Wisdom and Lyric*, vol. II, *Old English Shorter Poems*, with introduction by Robert E. Bjork, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 32 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), vii.

also encouraged to observe the value of virtuous actions and appreciate the capacity to reason, and to use the goods of this world for a greater good so that *wyrð* can be endured.

The juxtaposition of the limitations of earthly existence and a more informed (but still limited) perspective of the divine is apparent in “The Seafarer,” although many readers may find their initial reading of “The Seafarer” leaving them quite confused for several reasons. To begin, readers cannot ascertain with certainty if the Seafarer is a warrior or a person who has chosen to spend his life at sea. However, the Seafarer is worthy of discussion in this study because of his desire for the solitude of the sea that encourages contemplation of the divine. He states, “cnyssaþ nu / heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean streamas, / sealt-yða gelac self cunnie”<sup>12</sup> (the thoughts of my heart now urged that I explore the high streams of salt-waves myself). The Seafarer always has a longing to travel on the sea where his mind continually seeks a foreign land.<sup>13</sup> “The Seafarer” is also confusing to readers for the poem seems to be split into two parts, the first of which describes the seafarer’s song of his harsh circumstances in exile, away from “[þæt se mann [. . .] / þe him on foldan fægrost limpeþ”<sup>14</sup> (the man whose fortune is fairest on earth) while the second part of the poem discusses his rejection of life on land and his willing return to the sea in search of the Lord.<sup>15</sup> Early in the poem, the Seafarer concludes

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<sup>12</sup> “The Seafarer,” in John C. Pope, ed. *Eight Old English Poems*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., prepared by R. D. Fulk with commentaries by John C. Pope (New York: Norton, 2001), 33b-35. All quoted lines are from Pope’s *Eight Old English Poems*, and the translations are mine.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12b-13.

<sup>15</sup> Pope’s commentary on “The Seafarer” on page 99 establishes that the unity of the poem has long been questioned by critics, including Max Rieger, who believed that because the sea is not mentioned after line 64, the poem contains two speakers. The line division suggested in this passage is from Pope’s text, 1-64a and 64b-125.

that earthbound men do not know what he endures in exile and without companionship.<sup>16</sup>

The speaker's time on the sea has been a hardship, for not only does he experience long periods of isolation away from land and cities, he also is subjected to the brutality of the elements that he describes as

atol yða gewealc, þær mec oft begeat  
 nearu niht- wacu æt nacan stefnan,  
 þonne he be clifum cnossaþ. Cealde geþrunge  
 fruron mine fet, forste gebunden,  
 cealdum clammum, þær þa ceara seofodon  
 hat ymb heortan; hungor innan slat  
 mere-serges mod.<sup>17</sup>

[terrible, tossing waves where the night-watch often held me to the ship's prow when the ship dashed along the cliffs. My feet were frozen, burdened by the cold, bound by frost and by cold chains, where those cares sighed, hot around my heart, hunger from within clawed at the spirit of the sea-weary one.]

The Seafarer does not expect that he will ever return to land, and he forsakes his landbound existence because his conviction lies in the life at sea which will test him and bring him closer to a far greater and heavenly joy. Unlike the Wanderer, discussed later in this chapter, who experiences a sorrowful vision of the past that is no longer with him, the Seafarer states, "Ic geliefe na / þæt him eorð-welan ece standað"<sup>18</sup> (I do not believe that worldly goods last forever). He accepts the inevitable transience of material pleasures by rejecting them outright:

Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge ne to hring-þege---  
 ne to wife wynn ne to weorolde hyht---  
 ne ymbe awiht ells nefne ymb yða gewealc;  
 ac a hafað langunge se-þe on lagu fundað.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "The Seafarer," in Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 13-16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-12a.

<sup>18</sup> "The Seafarer," in Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 66b-67.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-47.

[His thought was not for the harp nor the receiving of rings---nor the pleasure of a woman nor for delight in the world---nor for anything else except the power of the waves; but the one who goes to sea always has a longing.]

The last line in this passage does not serve as a reminder of his desire for the temporal life and delights his weary heart can find on earth but as a reminder of his longing for the sea. Further on, he elaborates, “For-þon me hatran sind / dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif, / læne on lande”<sup>20</sup> (for me, more promising are the joys of the Lord than this dead life, transitory on land). Through his awareness of the joys of the Lord, the Seafarer gains a greater understanding of the transitory nature of his current circumstances. He returns to the sea and accepts the anxiety and sorrow that such a life may bring:

For-þon nis þæs mod-wlanc mann ofer eorðan,  
ne his giefena þæs god, ne on geoguþe to þæs hwæt,  
ne on his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten to þæs hold,  
þæt he a his sæ-fore sorge næbbe,  
to hwon hine dryhten gedon wille.<sup>21</sup>

[For there is no one on earth so proud in mind, nor so prosperous in gifts, nor so vigorous in youth, nor in his deeds so brave, nor so devoted to his lord that he does not experience some anxiety at sea as to what end his lord will bring about for him.]

The Seafarer asserts that no one on earth has gained enough power, wealth, and fame to escape the anxiety associated with life events, including death, yet he recognizes the sorrow and fear associated with the unknown and still chooses his life at sea and solitude.

The Seafarer speaks with certainty about the necessity of death for all humans and concludes that “wyrð biþ swiþre, / metod mihtigra, þonne ægnes mannes gehygd”<sup>22</sup> (*wyrð* is stronger, the creator mightier than the mind of any human). These lines indicate that

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 64b-66a.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 115a-16. The definition of *wyrð* is discussed in Chapter One.

the manifestation of the creator's divine will as played out on earth is far greater than the will of any human who desires to escape death. Though humans cannot avoid the workings of *wyrd*, the Seafarer offers some comfort to be found in the value of a nobleman's good deeds:

For-þon þæt biþ eorla gehwæm æfter-cweðendra  
 lof libbendra, last-worda betst,  
 þæt he gewyrce, ær he on-weg scyle,  
 fremum on foldan wiþ feonda niþ,  
 deorum dædum deofle togeanes,  
 þæt hine ielda bearn æfter herien,  
 and his lof siþþan libbe mid englum  
 awa to ealdre, ecan lifes blæd,  
 dream mid duguþum.<sup>23</sup>

[Therefore, that is for the nobleman that the words left behind him will be the best praise of everyone remaining after him that, before he departed, he performed good deeds on earth against the unjustness of enemies, brave deeds against the devil, so that humanity's children may praise them afterward, and his praise may live among the angels always and forever, the glory of eternal life, joy among the troops.]

The Seafarer's words reflect his understanding of the importance of virtuous, courageous acts in life for noblemen especially, but reminds his readers that men must live humbly so that "[m]eotod him þæt mod gestapad forþon he on his meahte geliefep"<sup>24</sup> (the creator forms in him that mind because he believes in his [God's] power). The Seafarer notes that those with strengthened minds must remain "gewis werum, wisum clæne"<sup>25</sup> (a certainty to men, pure in [one's] way [of life]) so that they may also exercise moderation in the "wiþ leofne lufan and wiþ laðne bealu"<sup>26</sup> (love of a friend and spite for an enemy), and as he suggests,

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-80a.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Wuton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,  
 and þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen;  
 and we þonne eac tilien þæt we to moten  
 in þa ecan eadignesse  
 þær is lif gelang on lufan dryhtnes,  
 hyht on heofonum.<sup>27</sup>

[Let us consider where we should have our home and then think how we may come there, and then let us also strive so that we may come to that eternal blessedness, where life remains in the love of the Lord, hope in the heavens.]

The Seafarer encourages the contemplation of the true home of virtuous people so that they may find consolation as they strive toward the eternal joy found in the love of God.

The theme of consolation in “The Seafarer” is readily available to audiences in part due to the juxtaposition of a limited earthly existence and the promise of eternal joy found through striving for virtue while on earth and contemplating the true home with God. Consolation is not as easily expressed, however, to the audience of “The Wanderer.” In his brief preface to the exiled warrior’s lament, the narrator states, “*Wyrð biþ full arædd*”<sup>28</sup> (*Wyrð* is fully determined). The wanderer does not yet seem to recognize that two worlds exist for him as a warrior who honors his Germanic customs and an individual who comes to value Christian ideas that celebrate reason and never depart from his mind. The wanderer’s dreams that come through “*sorg and slæp*”<sup>29</sup> (sorrow and sleep) remind the warrior of the earthly delights experienced because of his lord’s affection and his place among his fellow thanes. His dream does not bring him comfort, though, for he grieves for the nobles who have died too soon. The warrior also recognizes

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-22a.

<sup>28</sup> “The Wanderer,” in Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 5a. All quoted lines are from this text, and the translations are mine.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 39a.

the swift downfall of “þes middan-geard”<sup>30</sup> (this middle earth) that keeps individuals from living long enough to become wise concerning the fleeting nature of earthly delights. Humans cannot become wise until they have spent many years on earth,<sup>31</sup> yet, he cannot imagine his heart without sadness as he remembers the fleeting lives and sudden death of many young nobles<sup>32</sup> as the middle-earth decays.

The warrior’s dream vision<sup>33</sup> exemplifies dream theories that circulated in the early medieval monastic and palace schools. Andrew Galloway argues that the dream theory developed in Macrobius’s *Commentary on the “Dream of Scipio,”* written early in the fifth century, is less known to the early medieval period than previously believed.<sup>34</sup> Galloway asserts that the “Gregorian’ taxonomy of dreams is more common throughout the Middle Ages than has generally been recognized.”<sup>35</sup> Although Macrobius’s theory of dreams is one of several early medieval sources available, Gregory the Great’s *Morals on the Book of Job* includes “a far more influential discussion of dreams.”<sup>36</sup> In his text, Gregory writes that dreams may be informed by an evil spirit who will “work upon the incautious soul . . . and either by elevating it with hope or sinking it with dread, may disturb its balance.”<sup>37</sup> While the warrior in “The Wanderer” is not possessed by a devilish figure determined to ruin his life through nefarious acts upon his soul, he is seized by his loss and suffering that are a part of the human condition. In the case of the warrior, his

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 62b.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-62a.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-44.

<sup>34</sup> Galloway, “Dream-theory,” 475.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, vol. I, part II.VIII.xxiv.

sorrowful and longing spirit is either filled with the desire for a return of the happiness that earthly delights bring or consumed with sadness that fills his mind as he envisions the earthly delights he has lost forever.

The dream for the wanderer leaves him despondent, for the memories of his kinsmen renew his sorrow. In *Morals on the Book of Job*, Gregory continues by stating that an illusory dream in the darkness of night can be alleviated at dawn “when the darkness of our erring state is illuminated by knowledge of the Truth.”<sup>38</sup> “The Wanderer” sets up the possibility of this movement when the Wanderer reminds himself early in the elegy “þæt biþ in eorle indryhten þæw / þæt he his ferð-locan fæste binde, / healde his hord-cofan, hycge swa he wille”<sup>39</sup> (that it is an excellent custom in a warrior that he securely bind his life-enclosure, govern his hoard-chamber, and think as he will). In these words, the warrior acknowledges the value of holding his emotions, avoiding the pursuit of excessive wealth, and contemplating before acting. The Wanderer later echoes the Seafarer’s words that encourage self-control and self-knowledge that may lead the mind to seek true goodness through virtue:

Wita sceal gepýldig,  
 ne sceal na to hat-heort ne to hræd-wyrde  
 ne to wac wiga ne to wanhygdig  
 ne to forht ne to fægen ne to feoh-gifre  
 ne næfre gielpes to georn ær he geare cunne.  
 Beorn sceal gebidan, þonne he beot spriceþ,  
 oþ-þæt collen-ferhþ cunne gearwe  
 hwider hreðra gehygd hweorfan wille.<sup>40</sup>

[The wise person must be patient, not be too hot-hearted, nor too quick to speak, nor too timid a warrior, nor too foolish, nor too fearful, nor too happy, nor too greedy for wealth,

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, part II.VIII.xxix.

<sup>39</sup> “The Wanderer,” in Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 12-14.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 65b-72.

nor too eager to boast when he speaks a boast before he knows with certainty. A man must wait to speak until, bold of spirit, he knows whether the thought of his heart will turn.]

Through patience and temperance, the Wanderer learns the value of clear intentions so that he may protect himself from the workings of *wyrd*. As he considers the inevitable end to all worldly wealth, he asks, “Hwær com mearh? Hwær com magu? Hwær com maððum-giefa? / Hwær com symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon sele-dreamas?”<sup>41</sup> (Where is the horse? Where is the warrior? Where is the giver of treasure? Where is the seat at the feasts? Where are the hall delights?) The warrior knows his lord is dead, and the false felicities of his warrior existence are gone. His exiled state is not unlike the state of many warriors find themselves at the end of a war or the end of their allegiance to their lord or king. The warrior has no loyalties or communal ties left, and he concludes,

Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice,  
onwendeþ wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.  
Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,  
her bið mann læne, her biþ mæg læne.  
Eall þis eorðan gesteall idel weorðeþ!<sup>42</sup>

[All is a hardship in the earthly kingdom, *wyrd* changes the created world under the heavens. Here treasure is fleeting, here a friend is fleeting, here a man is fleeting, here a kinsman is fleeting, all the stability of this earth becomes nothing!]

The Wanderer grasps the transience of the earth and its delights, and as he holds the force of *wyrd* accountable for the important losses that have and will come to pass, his thoughts in this passage impart a greater wisdom and a more comprehensive perspective of the world’s transience. The narrator then indicates the end of the warrior’s thoughts with

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-10.

these words: “Swa cwæþ snottor on mode, gesæt him sundor æt rune.”<sup>43</sup> (Thus spoke the wise one in mind, sat himself apart in deliberation.) The warrior grasps fully the transitory nature of earthly felicities reflected in the second half of the poem. Just as the Seafarer instructs his audience, the narrator at the end of “The Wanderer” also offers words that not only encourage a humble life that longs for mercy from God, but also discourages the Wanderer from speaking of the suffering in his heart<sup>44</sup> so that warriors and others may act with courage granted in self-knowledge and wisdom. The narrator expresses a knowledge of what he must do to find spiritual consolation, and his recognition of the unchanging and eternal divinity guides the audience toward the source of stability that strengthens the ability to endure the fleeting, empty world with equanimity.

Just as the warrior learns to turn away from the transitory earthly matters and to find consolation through meditation upon the divine, Wisdom, in the Old English *Boethius*, shares a similar lesson with Mod/Boethius by explaining that the human soul “[s]criðende færð / hweole gelicost, hwærfð ymb hi selfe”<sup>45</sup> (moving, fares most like a wheel, turns about itself). At one time, Wisdom continues, “[p]onne hio ymb hire scyppend mid gescead smeað, / hio bið up ahæfen ofer hi selfe”<sup>46</sup> (when the soul thinks about its creator with understanding, it is raised above itself), yet at another time the soul “bið swiðe fior hire selfre beneoðan, / þonne hio þæs lænan lufað and wundrað / eorðlicu

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 113a.

<sup>45</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 3.m.20.216-17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.m.20.218-19.

þing ofer ecne ræd”<sup>47</sup> (is very far beneath itself when it loves and wonders at these transitory, earthly things over eternal counsel). Wisdom’s words resonate with the dream of the Wanderer as he envisions the transient worldly goods that lower the soul and increase its sorrow. Upon waking, he then contemplates wisdom that leads to the eternal good that would raise his intellectual and spiritual consciousness. Wisdom’s presence in Mod/Boethius’s mind encourages the sorrowful statesman to meet his suffering with equanimity; the Wanderer is similarly encouraged not to succumb to his earthly pain, but to contemplate the goodness of God.

Similar themes can also be found in the “The Dream of the Rood,” a dream-vision poem recorded in a manuscript in tenth-century England and left in the Italian town of Vercelli sometime in the eleventh century. The poem’s exact date of composition cannot be determined with certainty, but the earliest surviving lines of the poem are inscribed in runic characters on the Ruthwell Cross, dated around the eighth century. Blending certain characteristics of the Germanic warrior culture with Christian themes, the poem retells the story of Christ’s crucifixion from the point of view of the Cross, who serves as a loyal retainer to the heroic warrior Christ and appears to the speaker in a dream. The poem begins with “Hwæt, ic swefna cyst secgan wille”<sup>48</sup> (Listen! I will speak of a sweet dream) in which “[þ]uhte me þæt ic gesawe seldlicre treo”<sup>49</sup> ([i]t appeared to me that I saw a more wonderful tree) that was elevated and circled in the brightest lights, adorned with gold and jewels, and looked upon by all the angels. As the unnamed narrator gazes upon

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.m.20.222-24.

<sup>48</sup> “The Dream of the Rood,” in Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 1. All quoted lines are from this text, and the translations are mine.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

what is eventually revealed to be the cross, he continues to describe “earma ær-gewinn” (an ancient, miserable struggle)<sup>50</sup> of Christ’s crucifixion visible below the adornment of the cross that increases his sorrow. After the speaker contemplates his sorrow for a long time, his gaze falls upon the tree that served as the savior’s cross as it begins to speak and to remember the beginnings of his own suffering at the hands of enemies. The cross states,

þæt wæs geara geo---ic þæt gieta geman---  
 þæt ic wæs aheawen holtes on ende,  
 astyred of stefne minum. Genamon me þær strange feondas,  
 geworhton him þær to wæfer-siene, heton me hira weargas hebban.  
 Bæron me þær beornas on eaxlum, oþ-þæt hie me on beorg asetton;  
 gefæstnodon me þær feondas genoge.<sup>51</sup>

[It was years ago---I remember it still---that I was felled from the edge of a grove, torn from my roots. Strong enemies took me there, made me their spectacle, commanded me to bear their criminals. The warriors carried me on their shoulders until they placed me on a hill. Enemies enough secured me.]

The dreamer experiences through the rood’s narration the significant sorrow the tree experienced as a cross as Christ died and was removed from its beams.<sup>52</sup> The cross laments, “Fela ic on þam beorge gebiden hæbbe / wraðra wyrda.”<sup>53</sup> (Many I have endured of grievous *wyrds* on that hill.) Here the term *wyrd* is used to describe events that cannot be altered by the tree’s own volition, unlike the *wyrd* identified in *Beowulf* that may be influenced by human actions, for the tree (a mindless creature) stands in contrast to humans with a rational mind. After transformation into the Christian symbol of the cross, the rood states that both he and the heroic warrior Christ “bealwa weorc gebiden hæbbe, /

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<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 19a.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-33a.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51a.

sarra sorga”<sup>54</sup> (have endured the work of evil, harsh sorrows). In his personification as a sentient, thinking being, the cross describes how he is raised “under heofonum, and ic hælæn mæg / æghwelcne anra, þara-þe him biþ egesa to me”<sup>55</sup> (under the heavens, so I am able to heal every one of those who are in awe toward me) and attains the view *sub specie aeternitatis*, then offers consolation to all who look to him. From a heavenly perspective, he can offer wisdom and spiritual healing for the speaker who is only beginning to contemplate the divine goodness that could be an integral part of such an atrocious event.

The cross gives the speaker a vision of the elevation of an earthly tree to a heavenly glory, a vision in which humanity may find consolation while suffering and experiencing great loss and hope that endurance of hardship may be rewarded. The speaker is heartened when he focuses on the image of the cross, a reminder that he will “wunian on wuldre, wel mid þam halgum / dreames brucan”<sup>56</sup> (live in glory [and] unite fully with the saints in joy). After the warrior awakens from his dream, he states, “Gebæd ic me þa to þam beame bliðe mode”<sup>57</sup> (Then I prayed to the tree with a blissful heart), in hopes that he will find “dream on heofonum”<sup>58</sup> (joy in heaven), thus illustrating that understanding of the divine truth begins to come to those who awaken from the darkness of ignorance found within earthly sorrow and guilt. Because of his dream, the speaker begins to awaken spiritually and with a changed perspective.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80a.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-44a.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 140a.

In his commentary on “The Dream of the Rood,” Pope expands upon Galloway’s discussion of the Gregorian dream theory that contrasts with later dream theories and defines a distinction between Anglo-Saxon and Middle English medieval dream visions. He states that while “The Dream of the Rood” can be classified as a dream vision, it is an early vernacular example of the genre that “has little in common with medieval dream visions of the later Middle Ages.”<sup>59</sup> In fact, Pope continues, the elegy is unlike late medieval dream visions in part due to “its emphasis on the aftermath of the dream,”<sup>60</sup> for audiences will ask what the dreamer in “The Dream of the Rood” takes away from the dream and utilizes in earthly matters. The speaker, as Pope points out, experiences “a significant progression” that develops from beginning to end of the poem.<sup>61</sup> Like the Wanderer who bears the profound sorrow of his suffering brings as he remembers his comrades, lord, and the comforts of wealth, the dreamer must begin to accept the transience of earthly life. The speaker in the poem also progresses as he witnesses the crucifixion and learns firsthand from the cross how Christ and the cross suffered at the hands of evildoers. His soul, just as the soul of the Wanderer, is alone, turns about itself, and needs to rise above guilt and sorrow to contemplate the eternal God.

According to Carol Braun Pasternack, this progression becomes evident as the Rood-poet delivers “several distinct poetic experiences or strategies which give insight into the idea of the cross. He presents the dreamer’s vision, the cross’s narrative, the

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<sup>59</sup> Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 65.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

cross' sermon, the dreamer's personal response, and the final magnification of Christ."<sup>62</sup> Pasternack also asserts, "[T]he poem is not about what happened to an Anglo-Saxon one night or about the historical crucifixion *per se* but is about the idea of the cross, presented according to several different perspectives."<sup>63</sup> Pasternack concludes that all of the perspectives are necessary companions that merge into the abstract idea of the cross.<sup>64</sup> In the rood's narrative, the tree serves as a depiction of two of the ideals of the Germanic warrior culture that require the tree as an obedient and loyal thane to endure the painfully paradoxical challenge of having to remain standing and kill its lord in order to remain obedient to its lord. As Anglo-Saxon audiences heard or read this passage, they could follow the progression not only of the tree but also of a warrior as he responds to unfolding cruel and painful events that would test his endurance through an agonizing conflict of values. The chosen tree accepts being cut down to serve as Christ's cross and is glorified for those who seek the kingdom of God<sup>65</sup> and for the speaker who eagerly longs to begin his journey that moves his mind away from earthly existence and toward the Lord<sup>66</sup> so that he may honor the tree and dwell in glory.

The dream vision that comes to the speaker in "The Dream of the Rood" conveys the point made by Gregory the Great that, "a man is awake to little good purpose, when the turmoil of worldly business gives him unusual disturbance. For the crowd of earthly

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<sup>62</sup> Carol Braun Pasternack, "Stylistic Distinctions in 'The Dream of the Rood,'" in *Old English Literature*, ed. Roy M. Liuzza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 407.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 407-08.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>65</sup> "The Dream of the Rood," in Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 118-20.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-25.

thoughts, when it clamours around, closes the ear of the mind.”<sup>67</sup> Gregory regards the silence of the mind found in solitude instrumental for listening to the voice of God. He also implores readers to listen carefully when he asks rhetorically, “What is meant by the word of God being made known to us in a dream, except that we do not learn the secret things of God, if we are kept awake by worldly desires?”<sup>68</sup> He continues by stating, “The Voice of God, in truth, is heard as if in dreams, when with minds at ease, we rest from the bustle of this world, and the Divine precepts are pondered by us in the deep silence of the mind.”<sup>69</sup> The Rood-poet similarly appeals to the audience to listen closely to the warrior’s story of the dream vision and the tree’s speech that encourages them to look to the cross to see the kingdom of God. This appeal leads the readers away from their distractions so that they may find eternal truth and remember that when earthly suffering and loss come, they are to be endured with patience. As the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin writes, “[A]ccording to the measure of the gift of God, so it is that angels and the souls of saints come to know God. In so far as human nature will advance after the resurrection to become equal to the angels, it will arise in glory to the contemplation of God.”<sup>70</sup> The dreamer looks forward to his time when he returns to his rightful home in the heavens, though for now he is made eager through contemplation of the glorified cross and through a revelation that is the result of the vision and the testimony of the cross. The rood reminds the dreamer that no one needs to fear death as long as they carry the light of the truth within them, “[a]c þurh þa rode sceal rice gesecan / of eorð-wege æghwelc

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<sup>67</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, vol. III, part V.XXIII.xx.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Dales, *A Mind Intent on God*, 43.

sawol”<sup>71</sup> (but through the cross shall strive for the kingdom, each soul from the earthly way) and hope to dwell with the divine ruler. Through their pursuit of the true good and the divine through contemplation, souls may draw closer to the eternal and divine good. The tenth-century Anglo-Saxon monk Ælfric writes in his Old English translation of the sermon *Nativitas Domini Nostri Iesu Christi* that human souls, along with angels, are eternal, for they have a beginning yet no end, just as the almighty God eternal “þæt næfð naðor ne ordfruman ne ende” (that has neither beginning nor end) is the divine we must honor through good works.<sup>72</sup> After reading “The Dream of the Rood,” audiences may recall the divine order that they may honor by commitment to good works while engaging fully in worldly events. It is in this final thought that the ideals of the Germanic lord-thane relationship and the heroic desire for fame and glory bring some goodness to the world and are partially reconciled to the hope for Christian salvation that offers consolation.

The ability to recognize a hope for specifically Christian salvation in *Beowulf* is tenuous, at best, and as discussed in Chapter One, Beowulf is a hero with Germanic warrior values and is in search of wealth, fame, and glory. Audiences can see that Beowulf’s actions early in the poem also illustrate his taking personal responsibility to come to the aid of Hrothgar whose kingdom is besieged by the monster Grendel. As a warrior “mægenes strengest” (strongest in might), “æpele ond eacen”<sup>73</sup> (noble and powerful), Beowulf does not hesitate to act when he hears of the raging Grendel,

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<sup>71</sup> “The Dream of the Rood,” in Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 119-20.

<sup>72</sup> Ælfric, “Nativitas,” I.29-39.

<sup>73</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, III.196b,198a.

commanding a ship to be readied and choosing the best of men to accompany him.<sup>74</sup> His goals are to seek out Hrothgar as a “*heorðgeneatas*”<sup>75</sup> (hearth-comrade), to offer advice for defeating Grendel, and to ease Hrothgar’s suffering that comes from his own and his thanes’ inability to defeat the monster as well as Hrothgar’s perceived helplessness when faced with the *wyrd* that unfolds on earth.

In Pratt’s discussion of *wyrd* in Old English poetry, he asserts that in *Beowulf*, “*wyrd* is rarely far from God, as a source of judgement or guiding restraint; though it seizes many warriors, it can also be enticed by the martial virtue of *ellen* (‘courage’).<sup>76</sup> Similarly, the Alfredian Wisdom states that *wyrd* acts according to God’s providence “*swa swa he tiohhað þæt hit sie*” (as he determines that it is to be).<sup>77</sup> The actions that unfold from the limited human perspective seem to be “*sum good, sum yfel*”<sup>78</sup> (some good and some evil), of which God “*hit eall to godum ende brengð and for goode deð eall þæt þæt he deð*”<sup>79</sup> (brings it all to a good ending and works for the good in all that he does). This passage indicates that while Mod/Boethius may perceive many separate things happening, some good and some evil, they are all one thing to God in his view because he makes all things work for the ultimate good. Wisdom’s words resonate in *Beowulf*, particularly when the poet reminds audiences after the death of Grendel that both the wisdom of the Creator and the courage of man kept Grendel from killing more and that the Creator rules all of humankind who must endure both love and hate in this

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, III.198a-204.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, III.261b.

<sup>76</sup> Pratt, “The Search for Satisfactory Consolation,” 297.

<sup>77</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 4.pr.29.par.6.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

world of strife.<sup>80</sup> Susanne Weil asserts that the *Beowulf* narrator does not attempt to prove the almighty power of God, but instead argues that humans can count on forethought, which for the Anglo-Saxon warrior is not only indicative of the ability to endure, as Weil states, but also of the individual's ability to choose whether to take "that arrow [of *wyrd*] in the back or head-on," and that choice would determine a person's reputation as a hero or as a villain.<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, choices the warrior makes, with forethought of mind and courage, or without thought for material gain, influence how he faces *wyrd*.

Warriors who eventually become just kings illustrate best the value of their courage and virtuous choices to face *wyrd*. In the first lines of *Beowulf*, audiences meet an early Danish king Scyld Scefing, who often

monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah,  
 egsode eorl[as], syððan ærest wearð  
 feasceaft funden. He þæs frofre gebad;  
 weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,  
 oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra  
 ofer hronrade hyran scolde,  
 gomban gyldan. Þæt wæs god cyning.<sup>82</sup>

[seized mead benches from many tribes, instilled fear into earls, after he was found destitute. He waited for consolation; he grew under heaven and prospered honorably until every one of the nations on all sides and over the seas had to follow him, grant him tribute. That was a good king.]

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<sup>80</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, XVI.1055-62. Lines XVI.1057b-62 are discussed in Chapter One in relation to Alcuin's distinction between people who are truly wise and know what they need to do to guide their souls toward a greater understanding of God and people who do not have that insight.

<sup>81</sup> Weil, "Grace Under Pressure," 96.

<sup>82</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, I.5-11.

This passage describing a king is particularly relevant in a chapter about medieval warriors, for Scyld spends much of his early life in a state of poverty. He waits for consolation while he matures in reason and honor, as audiences learn in this powerful passage. As a king, Scyld provides for his people who are loyal to him and is a leader whose actions reflect his understanding of the suffering he experienced early in life. He later has a son Beow, a gift “folce to frofre”<sup>83</sup> (to the people as consolation). The narrator aptly concludes,

Swa sceal ge(ong) guma gode gewyrcean,  
 fromum feohgiftum on fæder (bea)rme,  
 þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen  
 wilgesipas, þonne wig cume,  
 leode gelæsten; lofdædum sceal  
 in mægþa gehwære man geþeon.<sup>84</sup>

[Thus, young men should act for the good with splendid presents from his father’s costly treasures, so that after, in old age, his comrades will stay with him when conflict comes, the people will endure. With praiseworthy deeds a man will prosper among the nations.]

Within these lines, the poet describes two characteristics of Germanic warrior culture, including the importance of gift-giving to ensure fealty among companions. He also implies the Christian value of commitment to virtuous acts that reflect a greater good because they are done on behalf of the people. Warriors can achieve glory among men as they act for the good, and it is these acts that serve him well in old age and as a king.

The brief but important tales of Beow and Scyld set the tone and theme for the whole poem, for Beowulf is characterized “as a man of courage and indomitable will.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, I.14.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, I.20-25.

<sup>85</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lxxviii.

While some audiences may see the warrior as a Germanic hero and have high hopes for his success as a warrior and later as a king, he is portrayed as courageous early in the narrative when he acts immediately to sail to Heorot and defeats the monstrous Grendel. He is also a young warrior eager to achieve fame and glory, so he disregards his uncle Hygelac's advice against making the journey and suggestion that the south-Danes take care of their own problems with Grendel.<sup>86</sup> Even though his uncle warned against the journey, the warrior destroys the source of the Scyldings' suffering and proclaims, "[I]c ðæt eall gewræc!"<sup>87</sup> (I avenged all of that!) Heroic society requires that Beowulf be strong and fearless, and true to his proven courage, he leaps again into action in response to Hrothgar's grief when Grendel's mother attacks or in response to his own need for fame and glory. His belief in his own courage serves him well as a hero whose actions benefit others, but as discussed in Chapter One, similar actions do not serve him or his kingdom well in old age. Beowulf may very well be remembered as a great warrior, but a bad king. Still, audiences may find some hope, for in his heroic slaughter of evil monsters, his influence as a warrior among men encourages change and hope for Hrothgar and his people.

Once Beowulf and his thanes arrive in Hrothgar's kingdom to aid the Danes, the hero addresses the Scylding watchman and explains that he desires to counsel Hrothgar on how he may overcome the suffering he experiences because of Grendel's repeated attacks. Beowulf states that he knows how the king "feond oferswyðeþ--- / gyf him

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<sup>86</sup> See Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, XXVIII.1987-1997a, for Hygelac's questions about the adventure after Beowulf returns to his homeland. His mistrust of the endeavor is made clear.

<sup>87</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, XXVIII.2005b.

edwenden æfre scolde / bealuwa bisigu, bot eft cumin--- / ond þa cearwylmas colran wurðap”<sup>88</sup> (may overcome the fiend, if change is ever to come to him, remedy after the affliction of his distress, and his surging sorrows will cool). A change in perspective is what Beowulf offers to Hrothgar for consolation so that the king can endure his trouble with patience. Hrothgar must look at earthly matters with some detachment and without fear, “oððe a syþðan earfoðþrage, / þreanyd þolað þenden þær wunað / on heahstede husa selest”<sup>89</sup> (or ever after will [have] a time of tribulation, suffer sad necessity, as long as the best of houses endures in its high stead). Heorot, the best of houses, is a magnificent tribute to the success of Hrothgar as a king, for he built the mead hall to celebrate and reward the successes of his thanes. Audiences may wonder about the quality of success the thanes demonstrated, for they cannot defeat Grendel. With Hrothgar’s leadership, they have seemingly resigned themselves to the defeat and the suffering Grendel leaves in his wake. Nonetheless, the king remains tormented by Grendel’s attacks and his thane’s inability to slay the monster, and he cannot enjoy the transitory pleasure the hall used to offer.

Just as Beowulf encourages Hrothgar, so in the *Froferboc* Wisdom reminds the Alfredian Boethius: “þu scealt eac yfelne ege anforlætan / woruld-earfoða”<sup>90</sup> (You must also forget your wretched fear of worldly difficulties). The statesman must forget his fear of difficulties to clear away the darkness in his mind so that the light of divine perspective can shine through,<sup>91</sup> and Hrothgar also forget his despair after Beowulf

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<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.* IV.279a-82.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, IV.283-85.

<sup>90</sup>Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 1.m.5.28-29.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.m.5.44-45.

defeats Grendel for the king and his people. Beowulf does provide consolation for Hrothgar in part because he uses his worldly goods, his strength and his will, and acts on behalf of others to ease suffering and influence the outcomes of *wyrd*. He also reminds Hrothgar that if the outcomes cannot be changed, regardless of human actions, then negative earthly events must be endured without fear and with patience.

Courage and strong will are a necessity for warriors discussed in this chapter, and Beowulf is certainly not lacking in these heroic qualities. Beowulf's awareness of *wyrd* as it plays out in the world again suggests that he also has an awareness of a divine order, even if he can never understand fully how his actions may influence *wyrd* and bring comfort for others. When Hrothgar appoints Beowulf to dispense with the monster Grendel, Beowulf decides that he and Grendel would engage in “wig ofer wæpen, ond siþðan witig God / on swa hwæpere hond, halig dryhten / mærdō deme, swa him gemet þince”<sup>92</sup> (a war without weapons, and then let wise God, the holy Lord, grant judgment to whichever hand as seems proper to him). Beowulf turns to a divine authority and accepts its judgment, making his understanding of *wyrd* in this instance to be nothing more than the event of death. As a Germanic warrior, he intends to honor his vow to put an end to the source of suffering for Hrothgar's people, and he expects to be victorious. Beowulf does not think in terms of the moral struggles of Christian soldiers as outlined by Gregory the Great, yet there are some striking similarities between the Germanic

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<sup>92</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, X.685-87.

warrior and hero and the soldiers of Christ. These similarities resonate with audiences who are looking for a hero in *Beowulf* who could conduct himself like Beowulf in his youth and gain honor and loyalty among his thanes in his old age.

Carole Straw's exploration of Gregory the Great's theology of divine and human responsibility best illustrates the warrior's moral struggle inherent in the face of adversity. Gregory's theology was developed and refined as Rome was besieged and as he saw firsthand that life is a struggle "between good and evil, a relentless trial of one's strength and resourcefulness."<sup>93</sup> From Gregory's perspective, Christian soldiers are trained to remain level-headed when facing a "terrible combination of sorrows, wounds, and gifts."<sup>94</sup> Much as in the teachings of Aristotle and Plato and the sagacity of the Stoics, Gregory's soldiers guard their thoughts and moderate "their behavior to mark the virtuous mean between extremes."<sup>95</sup> Within the context of *Beowulf*, the significance of making wise choices is paramount, for as darkness surrounds Hrothgar's kingdom, the poet reports that many of his warriors resort to praying to false gods, for "[s]wylc wæs þeaw hyra, / hæþenra hyht; helle gemundon / in modsefan, metod hie ne cuþon, / dæda demend, ne wiston hie drihten God"<sup>96</sup> ([s]uch was their custom, the hope for heathens; they thought about hell in their minds, and did not understand the Creator, the judge of deeds, and did not know the Lord God). In this darkness, the troubles are never ending

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<sup>93</sup> Carol Straw, "Gregory's Moral Theology: Divine Providence and Human Responsibility," in *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, eds. Bronwen Neil and Matthew J. Dal Santo, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, vol. 27 (Brill, 2013), 177, *EBSCOhost*.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>96</sup> Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, II.178-81.

for Hrothgar's warriors as the attacks of Grendel continue. They do not know that levelheadedness and an understanding of a higher power, the divine order that disperses the workings of *wyrd*, encourages good choices and alleviates fear so that they may accept their current grief and devastating losses. The poet's juxtaposition of the darkness within the minds of warriors who ignorantly resort to prayer to false gods and the light brought forth by Beowulf's heroic actions reveals for the audience the importance of a broader human perspective that will allow them to exercise courage in the face of adversity and to focus on good acts as they seek consolation.

The question of whether the warriors in *Beowulf* understand God at all is not puzzling, for if the ideas put forth by Wisdom in the Old English *Boethius* state that the darkness clouding the image of goodness and an understanding of the divine order comes from the warrior's inability to forget the fear of the earthly troubles that plague them. The text does not support the Danes' understanding of God or the view from the heavens, so it is possible that nothing changes for one "þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan / in fyres fæþm, frofre ne wenan, / wihte gewendan"<sup>97</sup> (who shoves his soul through terrible force into the fire's fold; expects no consolation, no change at all). From an enlightened perspective, virtuous actions can potentially change the outcomes on earth. Beowulf as a Germanic warrior slays Grendel and Grendel's mother in the pursuit of wealth, fame, and glory, but he is also committed to actions that benefit others. Nonetheless, he liberates Hrothgar

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, II.184-86.

from his woe and brings a change in the king's perception through his bold heroic choices that do work for a greater good. Hrothgar, at least, can move beyond his sorrows and celebrate life with his family and people without further fear.

The tales of warriors who became kings, specifically the life and death of Beowulf, are grandly recorded in the poem, and the story is not particularly straightforward, for the tale is filled with memories of past warriors, kings who ruled wisely and those who did not, and the past experiences of Beowulf. The audience learns that Beowulf was not always a revered warrior; he had to earn this place in his life and among his peers. He boasts of his feats, as would any Germanic warrior who understands that glory, fame, and wealth will guarantee his place in the annals of history. He also recognizes that these transitory gifts are fleeting, for they are earned and taken away, as God determines. Using worldly goods for the betterment of life on earth for others is an evident path for greatness in youth that serves throughout a lifetime, as the poet reminds us in his words about Beowulf. The idea of using worldly goods for good purposes is put forth by the Christian poets and scribes not only in *Beowulf*, but also in "The Seafarer," "The Wanderer," "The Dream of the Rood," and the Old English *Boethius*. This idea explains that a virtuous life is less about individual progression to the seat of the heavens after death and more about individual evolution through a commitment to making wise choices according to a broader perspective, akin to a view *sub specie aeternitatis*, that benefit the greater good. While the themes present in the Alfredian *Boethius* resonate within the lines of *Beowulf*, the recognition of an understanding of the specifically Christian God is missing in the poem. However, as the heroic warriors in *Beowulf* and the

other works seem to yearn and at times learn how to expand their earthly perspective and pursue that which is good in the world, they will continue to be sources of consolation for their audiences.

### Chapter Three: *Pearl* and the Personal Journey

The Middle English poem *Pearl* is one of several works found within the folios of the late fourteenth-century manuscript Cotton MS Nero A X, held by the British Library in London. The poems found within this manuscript, *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, cannot be attributed to one named poet, although scholars have devoted much time and thought to the process of developing a list of possible candidates. Though the poems do share similar characteristics that have sustained the hearty debate for quite some time, little can be definitively determined about the identity of the poet and *Pearl's* date of origin. Nonetheless, the work is worth discussion within the context of this dissertation because it explores similar themes of suffering and loss demonstrated in other literature of the medieval period. Significantly, *Pearl* shares a striking similarity to the Old English *Boethius* translation commissioned by King Alfred because the poet incorporates analogous Christian and philosophical ideas in common with the Boethian view *sub specie aeternitatis* as a means by which the father in *Pearl* progresses gradually to a greater perception of the goodness of God and consolation, much like the consolation Wisdom delivers to the imprisoned Boethius. The narrator in *Pearl* is a grieving father whose daughter has died; he is also an educated person, much like the intended audience for the Alfredian *Boethius*. He is inconsolable and has forgotten the understanding of divine goodness that will help him endure the loss of his child. While the father is not a noble king or warrior and is not armed for physical battle, he is nonetheless in need of preparation for a spiritual battle to help him defeat his great sorrow so that his earthly existence may be lived in pursuit of eternal joy.

Although the poem lacks the characteristics of the Germanic warrior culture found in the Old English literature discussed in earlier chapters, the *Pearl*-poet utilizes the themes of the earlier works that explore kings and warriors who are faced with harsh circumstances from which they cannot seem to escape without a profound change in perspective. Not surprisingly, *Pearl* features multiple references to Christianity, and as John Conley writes,

As the educated person of the Middle Ages would surely have been expected to perceive, *Pearl* is, in brief, a Christian *consolatio*. Although the specific coloring of each is not identical, in theme, situation, roles, and treatment[,] *Pearl* is analogous to Boethius's then-revered *Consolation of Philosophy*.<sup>1</sup>

Conley also suggests the poem addresses the “sovereign theme of the Christian tradition, as of life itself: the nature of happiness, specifically false and true happiness,”<sup>2</sup> and concludes that the narrator of *Pearl*, “[l]ike the Boethius of *The Consolation*, as well as like St. Augustine in *The Confessions* and Troilus of *Troilus and Criseyde*, . . . [has] “mistaken false for true happiness.”<sup>3</sup> Conley does not refer to the Alfredian *Boethius* in his comparison of the poem to the Roman statesman's philosophical treatise *The Consolation of Philosophy*, for at the time of *Pearl*'s composition, people would likely not have read the Old English adaptation but instead a French or Middle English translation, if not the original Latin work.

Within *Pearl*, the themes concerning the human desire to cling too tightly to false felicities become more apparent when Conley asserts that the narrator is a natural human

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<sup>1</sup> John Conley, “*Pearl* and a Lost Tradition,” in *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays*, ed. John Conley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 61-62.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

whose sin consists of his preference for mutable goods rather than immutable goods.<sup>4</sup> The themes of consolation and a view *sub specie aeternitatis* addressed in the Latin *Consolation* and in the Old English *Boethius* are also influential in late Middle English literature, such as the works of the *Pearl*-poet. The Old English work reflects a significant historical period in Old English literature when human loss of nation, land, faith, and people struck during the Viking invasions in Britain. Adapted to address the Anglo-Saxon perspective that promotes the values of courage and wise choices in life, the text also incorporates Christian values and divine perspective that offer consolation during times of sorrow. Although the prosimetrical version of Alfred's work was still known into the thirteenth century,<sup>5</sup> scholars cannot ascertain that the *Pearl*-poet knew the text, and while the circumstances between the father in *Pearl* and Boethius in the Old English text differ, the father's desire for much needed consolation echoes the Alfredian statesman's need for comfort.

Like Conley, Watts also believes "*Pearl* is best to be understood as a Christian *consolatio*" and establishes that changes to the pagan *consolatio* genre of literature were developed before the fourteenth century through the "large-scale replacement of the *loci communes* of the pagan authors by specifically Christian *solacia*, the greatest of which was naturally the promise of eternal life after death."<sup>6</sup> These changes to the original form of the *consolatio* were inspired by the "deep sense of responsibility which these Christian

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>5</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Victor E. Watts, "*Pearl* as *Consolatio*," *Medium Ævum* 32, no. 1 (1963): 34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43627014>. Of interest to this study is the note Watts adds that extends gratitude to his professor, C. S. Lewis, who suggested in a lecture that *Pearl* is a Christian *consolatio*.

writers felt to instruct the faithful,”<sup>7</sup> and, by working from similar themes found within the *consolatio* tradition, the *Pearl*-poet illustrates within the poem a process of coming to terms with Christian grief. Christian themes and biblical references resonate throughout the work and serve as a framework for the poet’s tale, but, even with the presence of Christian ideals, audiences of *Pearl* may not see a neat resolution to the overwhelming grief the father feels over the loss of his daughter early in the poem.

Because themes in *Pearl* parallel themes found within the tradition of the Christian *consolatio*, the poem has long challenged literary critics who have differing opinions about the genre of the poem and who tend to fall into two camps that identify the poem as either an allegory or an elegy. Yet, studies of *Pearl*’s complexity that address aspects of the poem’s characteristics that could be classified as both an allegory and an elegy, and more significantly as a Christian *consolatio*, are gaining traction. More recent scholars acknowledge the presence of Christian faith, the promise of eternal life after death, and a grieving father’s search for consolation within the poem. Jane Beal summarizes the spirited debate among scholars but determines the poem should be read within the context of the fourfold approach used in medieval preaching: literally as an elegy; allegorically for spiritual salvation, morally for consolation, and anagogically for revelation.<sup>8</sup> Casey Finch summarizes his conclusions about the debate surrounding the dream vision poem, acknowledging that “[r]ecent critics have come to understand the

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Beal, *The Signifying Power of Pearl: Medieval Literary and Cultural Contexts for the Transformation of Genre*, Routledge Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2017), 20-106. Beal’s Chapter’s 1-4 address each level of meaning and the genres in detail.

coexistence of these dimensions, along with several others, within the poem.”<sup>9</sup> He suggests that in the image of the pearl, “[readers] confront a supreme mixture of physical and spiritual meaning, of physical *as* spiritual meaning; and it is consequently detrimental to our sense of the poem’s richness to discount either the elegiac or the allegorical dimension.”<sup>10</sup> This acceptance of the poem’s complex structure and themes allows audiences the opportunity to understand from multiple perspectives the father’s personal struggle to be spiritually reawakened and lifted from his grief on earth.

Like the father in *Pearl*, all humans can be spiritually blinded by a greediness for material possessions, including temporal love if the beloved is held as a possession, and consequently do not remember the vision of God that encourages detachment from the transience of earthly life and provides consolation during times of loss. In the first stanza of the poem, the father describes his attachment to his beloved daughter:

Perle pleasaunte, to prynces paye  
 To clanly clos in golde so clere:  
 Oute of oryent, I hardyly saye,  
 Ne proued I neuer her precios pere.  
 So rounde, so reken in vche araye,  
 So smal, so smoþe her sydez were;  
 Queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye  
 I sette hyr sengeley in synglure.  
 Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;  
 þurȝ gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.  
 I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere  
 Of þat pryuy perle withouten spot.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Casey Finch, ed. and trans., *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, with facing page Middle English texts edited by Malcolm Andrew, Ronald Waldron, and Clifford Peterson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, I.1-12. All quoted passages come from this text, and the translations are mine.

[Lovely Pearl, pleasure for a prince purely to enclose in gold so clear, out of the orient, I hardly proclaim, I never proved a more precious in peer. So round, so rich in every array, so small, so smooth her sides were. Wheresoever I judged lovely gems, I set her singly in uniqueness. Alas! I lost her in the garden; through grass to ground she from me fell away. I was grievously wounded, deprived by distance of that special pearl without a spot.]

Because the father has clung too tightly to his precious treasure, a child he compares to the most precious gems he has ever assayed as a jeweler and whom he has deemed pure and perfect, his tone is wistful and disbelieving as he describes the loss. His tone defines his despair and spiritual conflict, and audiences can only hope that they will eventually bear witness to his progression toward acceptance as the poem unfolds. Addressing the father's ability to learn and work through the grief process, the poet develops *Pearl* as a celebration of the resiliency of the human soul which can learn to endure suffering with equanimity and rediscover eternal joy. By utilizing the motifs of memory, dreams, and a view *sub specie aeternitatis*, the poet illuminates the importance of the father remembering the presence of God in his life and finding consolation.

Just as readers see in the Old English *Boethius* and the Old English poems discussed in earlier chapters, a glimpse of a divine, more comprehensive perspective of worldly events is made evident in *Pearl* through a powerful, earthbound narrative, and the separation of the divine and earthly circumstances becomes more apparent as the father struggles to break free of his suffering. He professes in the second stanza: "Syþen in þat spote hit fro me sprange, / Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande þat wele / Pat wont watz whyle deuoyde my wrange / And heuen my happe and al my hele---."<sup>12</sup> (After in that spot where it sprang from me, often I have waited, longing for happiness that was accustomed

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I.13-16.

formerly to dispel my wrongs and to raise my fortune and all my well-being). The father longs for his daughter and seems certain that if he waits long enough, she will return and restore his happiness, fortune, and well-being. He explains that his longing for his daughter's return "dotz bot þrych my hert þränge, / My breste in bale bot bolne and bele"<sup>13</sup> (does but oppress my heart grievously; my breast in sorrow but swells and burns), and within the first few lines, the *Pearl*-poet creates circumstances in which the father's "grief is made universal and thus meaningful"<sup>14</sup> by directing the audiences' attention "not toward the figure of the deceased, but toward the poet's own struggle to accept his loss, and more importantly, toward his struggle to understand in universal terms the final meaning of death and the conditions under which death may be meaningful to him."<sup>15</sup> Just before the father falls asleep and begins to dream of his beloved pearl, he addresses his heartfelt grief in these terms:

Þaʒ resoun sette myseluen saʒt.  
 I playned my perle þat þer watz penned,  
 Wyth fyrce skyllez þat faste faʒt.  
 Þaʒ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned.<sup>16</sup>

[Though reason would have reconciled myself, I contended that my pearl was imprisoned there and with fierce arguments insistently fought. Though the nature of Christ taught me of comfort.]

The father's rational mind has not helped him work through his grief, an important step in his journey. His heart cannot heal, for the consolation revealed by Christ mentioned in the above lines lends itself essentially to the idea that such grief is but an erring state that can

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I.17-18.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Moorman, "The Role of the Narrator in *Pearl*," in Conley, *The Middle English Pearl*, 108.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, I.52-55.

be revealed through true knowledge of the nature of Christ. He has yet to recognize that loss is a part of the divine order that must unfold on earth and consolation can only be experienced when he accepts worldly circumstances with understanding. In the Alfredian adaptation of the *Consolation*, Boethius addresses his despair and the divine truth that eludes him, as well. He sings:

Hwæt, ic lioða fela lustlice geo  
 sanc on sælum; nu sceal siofigende,  
 woþe gewæged, wreccea giomor,  
 singan sar-cwidas. Me þios siccetung hafað  
 agæled, ðes geocsa, þæt ic þa ged ne mæg  
 gefegean swa fægre, þeah ic fela gio þa  
 sette soð-cwida þonne ic on sælum wæs.<sup>17</sup>

[I who sang many songs gladly once during happy times; now, weary from weeping, troubled, a sorrowful outcast, must sing laments. This sighing and sobbing have impeded me so that I am not able to compose those songs so eloquently, though I once created many a true discourse in happier times.]

The prisoner's words, just as the words of the father, establish his own struggles and his desire to return to his former self and happier times. His grief inhibits his ability to find the temporal happiness he experienced in his former life and spiritually blinds him from seeing a vision of a greater good and the true source of eternal joy that cannot be found in earthly delights. Boethius's admission that he has lost sight of the truth that will ease his despair beckons the vision of heavenly Wisdom, who appears as Boethius sings of his despair.

Similarly, the grieving father in *Pearl* remembers his daughter as he stands in the garden where his precious Pearl is buried and acknowledges that even as the earth holds his daughter's body in a place of rot and ruin, the earth also procures colorful blooms and

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<sup>17</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 1.m.2.1-7.

will not allow flowers or fruit to die if they are grown where the body lies. He states, “Of goud vche goude is ay bygonne.”<sup>18</sup> (From good is every good always begun.) Despite the father’s wise words and his recognition that the seeds of a garden will grow to fruition, he can only remember that at one time the goodness of his life with his daughter brought good to other aspects of his life, as well. Although he recognizes the joy inspired by the divinely created beauty of the flora that grows and covers the bitter ugliness of the grave, he has yet to remember how he can correct the error of clinging too tightly to his daughter’s earthly presence. He falls asleep in the garden and dreams: “Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space; / My body on balke þer bod. In sweuen / My goste is gon in Godez grace.”<sup>19</sup> (From that place there, my spirit soon sprang while my body on the earth stayed there, my soul in dream traveled with God’s grace.) The father envisions his spirit, no longer bound in his body, as he travels through God’s mercy. Similarly, Boethius might escape his sorrow through a vision if Wisdom could feather his mind and spirit to fly; he might hover above the earth (with God’s mercy) in wonder.<sup>20</sup> Both in need of consolation, the father in *Pearl* and Boethius are offered a vision that may take them, albeit briefly, to a place under the heavens where they may perceive a view *sub specie aeternitatis*. Wisdom’s song best describes this human need for consolation early in the *Froferboc* as he grieves for the prisoner’s weakness:

Eala, on hu grimmum and hu grundleasum  
 seaðe swinceð þæt sweorcende mod  
 þonne hit þa strongan stormas beatað  
 weoruld-bisgunga. Þonne hit winnende  
 his agen leoht anforlæteð,

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<sup>18</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, I.33.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, II.61-63.

<sup>20</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 4.m.24.4-5.

and mid uua forgit þone ecan gefean,  
 ðringð on þa ðiostro ðisse worulde,  
 sorgum geswenced. Swa is þissum nu  
 mode gelumpen, nu hit mare ne wat  
 for Gode godes buton gnornunge  
 fremdre worulde. Him is frofre ðearf.<sup>21</sup>

[Oh, how cruel and bottomless an abyss the grievous mind struggles in when the overwhelming storms of worldly affairs pound it. When in despair, it forsakes its own light and wretchedly forgets eternal joy and sinks into the dark mist of the world, weary because of sorrow. Such has happened now to this mind this mind, since it does not know any more of God's goodness, but only the deep misery of a strange world. It needs consolation.]

Wisdom addresses how the mind can fall into spiritual darkness when earthly troubles become too much to bear, and, in this state, the mind can forget the glory of God's goodness as manifested on earth. Wisdom recognizes the alienation Boethius feels from his former self and states quite clearly that his mind needs comfort.

In the same way, the father in *Pearl* needs comfort as he longs for his deceased daughter to return to him and to restore the happiness of his former life. As he walks in the dream, he is not overtly prompted by the wisdom of his own mind, as Boethius is prompted, to address the need for consolation, yet the dream provides the grieving father a reprieve, as he proclaims, "The adubbemente of þo downez dere / Garten my goste al greffe forzete."<sup>22</sup> (The adornment of those rich downs makes my soul forget all grief.) Here, the father sees the beauty of a glorious and heavenly landscape. The vision is important, for as discussed in Chapter Two, Gregory the Great had written that dreams may elevate the soul with hope or sink the soul with dread.<sup>23</sup> Audiences learn, as the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.m.3.1-11.

<sup>22</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, II.85-86.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, vol. I.part II.VII.xxiv.

poem progresses, that the father's extended dream evokes emotions that oscillate between hope and dread, but as he looks at the trees and sees the glorious light of the rich rocks of the cliffs, he observes, "For wern neuer webbez þat wygez weuen / Of half so dere adubbement!"<sup>24</sup> (Never were tapestries that humans weave of half so costly adornment!). He begins to feel true hope when he recalls the glorious power of the divinity that can create such great beauty.

Similarly, Boethius is encouraged to look upward to the heavens as Wisdom continues his appeal to the divine Maker:

Eala, ðu scippend scirra tungla,  
 hefones and eorðan, ðu on heah-setle  
 ecum ricsast, and ðu ealne hræðe  
 hefon ymbhwearfest, and ðurh ðine halige miht  
 tunglu genedest þæt hi ðe to herað.  
 Swylce seo sunne sweartra nihta  
 Ðiostro adwæsceð ðurh ðine meht.<sup>25</sup>

[Creator, you formed the stars of heaven and earth; you rule upon an eternal throne and quickly spin heaven around. Through your sacred power, you compel the heavenly stars to obey you. Equally, the sun destroys the darkness of the black night through your power.]

Wisdom's lyrics call upon the divine creator to remind Boethius that God's power working through the sun is the only force strong enough to dispel the darkness of the blackest nights. For Boethius and the father in *Pearl*, a recognition of the divine goodness of God is the only light that can dispel the darkness of despair that has blinded them both. The Alfredian work communicates to the prisoner that the power of divine goodness can help him remember the light of truth that shines forth from the universal creation just as

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<sup>24</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, II.71-72.

<sup>25</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 1.m.4.1-7.

the unearthly beauty in the dream begins to awaken the memory of truth in the father in *Pearl*. Gregory Roper in his study of *Pearl* posits that the father is initially only interested in the economic value and beauty of the earth,<sup>26</sup> yet as the narrative transitions to a dream, the father's quest to connect the world with the heavens begins as his place in the colorful flower garden atop his daughter's grave shifts when he observes,

The dubbement dere of doun and dalez,  
Of wod and water and wlonk playnez,  
Bylde in me blys, abated my balez,  
Forbidden my stresse, dystryed my paynez.  
Doun after a strem þat dryzly halez  
I bowed in blys, bredful my braynez.<sup>27</sup>

[The rich adornment of hills and dales, of wood and water and lovely meadows, raise me up in bliss, lessen my harms, forbid my distress, destroy my pains. Down along a stream that continually flows, I sat in bliss, my mind full.]

The poet devotes several stanzas to elaborate descriptions of the perfect order and beauty of the marvelous place in the father's vision. While he beholds the perfection of his surroundings, he longs to cross the river, "[f]orþy I þoʒt þat paradyse / Watz þer ouer gayn þo bonkez brade"<sup>28</sup> (and so I thought that paradise was just beyond the broad banks). As the father moves to the riverside, he is in awe of the purity of what he sees around him; his heart is briefly consoled even as he observes, "More of wele watz in þat wyse / Þen I cowþe telle þaʒ I tom hade."<sup>29</sup> (More happiness was displayed in that scene than I could tell though I had the time.) He cannot find a path to cross the river where, as he claims,

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory Roper, "Pearl, Penitence, and the Recovery of Self," *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 2 (1993): 169, 171, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25095840>.

<sup>27</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, III.121-26.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, III.137-38.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, III.133-34.

More and more, and zet wel mare,  
 Me lyste to se þe broke byzonde,  
 For if hit watz fayr þer I con fare,  
 Wel loueloker watz þe fyrre londe.  
 Abowte me con I stote and stare;  
 To fynde a forþe faste con I fonde,  
 Bot woþez mo iwysse þer ware,  
 Þe fyrre I stalked by þe stronde;  
 And euer me þoʒt I schulde not wonde  
 For wo þer welez so wynne wore.  
 Penne nwe note me com on honde  
 Pat meued my mynde ay more and more.<sup>30</sup>

[More and more, and still much more, I longed to see beyond the river, for if it is beautiful where I now journey, the farther land was even lovelier. I stopped, stared around me, quickly tried to find a ford to cross; but aware of more danger there indeed, further I walked beside the bank, and all that time it seemed to me I should not hesitate for fear of harm where joys were so delightful. Then, a new thing came to my notice, that moved my mind always more and more.]

As the father in *Pearl* longs to cross the river to whatever lies beyond the other bank, he becomes aware that the more he looks to ford the river, the more he has mixed feelings about what is on the other side. Then, however, he sees a figure among the cliffs across the river who inspires him to begin to perceive *something* beyond his life on one side of the river. This figure appears at a critical moment to guide the father who remains spiritually blind to a broader perspective and understanding of the divine order that brings events that appear both good and bad to the lives of humans.

At this point, however, the father is simply enamored of the image of “A crystal clyffe ful relusaunt: / Mony ryal ray con fro hit rere. / At þe fot þerof þer sete a faunt, / A mayden of menske, ful debonere”<sup>31</sup> (A crystal cliff, gleaming, many splendid [royal] rays did rise from there. At the foot thereof sat a child, a noble maiden, quite courteous.)

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, III.145-56.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, III.158-61.

Dressed in white, the maiden is immediately recognized by her father as someone familiar to him. This scene of a noble maiden bathed in light is quite powerful, for as Gregory the Great believes, the darkness of spiritual blindness can be illuminated by knowledge of the true light of God.<sup>32</sup> According to Beal, as the father progresses in his journey, the light he sees in his vision signifies “the inner light of the Dreamer’s reason or growing (but still limited) understanding.”<sup>33</sup> At this point in the dream, the identity of the child at the foot of the cliff is yet to be determined, but this luminous “pearl” becomes a beacon in the midst of the father’s deep sorrow, and the pearl maiden will help the grieving father remember a better perspective that offers a glimpse of “þæt soðe leoht”<sup>34</sup> (that true light), in the words of the Alfredian Boethian Wisdom, that illuminates and lifts the soul toward the heavens.

Like the words of Wisdom in *Boethius* that offer a possible moment of recognition of the statesman’s ability to recall the goodness of God, the father’s moment of recognition when he sees Pearl’s illuminated face that depicts Wisdom’s description of God’s likeness within the human mind: “hwæthwega godcundlices on eowerre saule . . . þæt is andgit and gemynd and se gesceadwislica willa þæt hine þara twega lyste”<sup>35</sup> (something godlike in your soul, that is understanding, memory, and rational will that finds joy in those two things). Reason, which leads to faith and encourages memory, begins to assert itself for Pearl’s father when he sets his eyes on his transformed daughter,

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<sup>32</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, vol. I.part II.VIII.xxix.

<sup>33</sup> Beal, *The Signifying Power of Pearl*, 150.

<sup>34</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 1.m.5.25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.pr.7.par.14.

and the vision of Pearl brings him “gladande glory”<sup>36</sup> (gladdening exultation) that, in a more enlightened state, helps him recall the divine goodness. To remember the vision of divine goodness again with the return of reason echoes the Anglo-Saxon monk Ælfric’s belief that a mortal man needs to know Almighty God by faith to know his own soul,<sup>37</sup> and the father in *Pearl* must regain his spiritual sight to find consolation for his grieving soul. Unfortunately, rather than awakening him fully so that he may move closer to God, the vision of Pearl at this point rekindles his memory of his past loss and immediately awakens his fear of losing his child once again. He stands paralyzed and states anxiously,

I dred onende quat schulde byfalle,  
Lest ho me eschaped þat I þer chos,  
Er I at steuen hir mozt stalle.  
þat gracios gay withouten galle.<sup>38</sup>

[I feared what might happen if she whom I there beheld should escape me before I with voice might delay her, this gracious maid without spot.]

Even in that moment of wonder in which the father beholds his lost Pearl, he does not yet possess the wisdom of reason fully enough to accept that his daughter has died, and she cannot stay with him. The inevitability of the death of loved ones, particularly children, is similarly addressed by the Alfredian Wisdom who observes that people may have children who may be unhealthy or die too soon, and “þæt þa eldran for ðam gnorniað ealle heora woruld. Forþam ne mæg nan man on þys anweardan life eallunga grad beon wið his wyrd”<sup>39</sup> (that the parents grieve for them until the end of their lives. Therefore, no one can accept fully his *wyrd* in this present life). Unlike the interpretation of *wyrd* in

<sup>36</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, III.171.

<sup>37</sup> Ælfric, “Nativitas,” I.79-81.

<sup>38</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, IV.186-89.

<sup>39</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 2.pr.6.par.9.

Chapters One and Two that sometimes suggests human actions may influence earthly outcomes through good acts for a greater good, the Middle English interpretation *wyrd* may be interpreted as simply “what happens” and cannot be prevented. Wisdom’s words suggest that there are events that unfold without warning and leave people with dreadful consequences that cannot be changed, such as the unexpected or premature death of a child, and just as the Alfredian Boethius learns that bad things sometimes happen without recourse, so too can the father in *Pearl* understand that the outcomes of what God has determined cannot be altered. Wisdom concludes that parents who grieve for their deceased children may very well continue to suffer until they die themselves, and this inconsolability is echoed in the father’s grief.

As the father in *Pearl* gazes upon the vision of the maiden whom he recognizes as his lost daughter, he exclaims,

Oh perle, [. . .] in perlez pyzt,  
 Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,  
 Regretted by myn one on nyzte?  
 Much longeyng haf I for þe layned,  
 Syþen into gresse þou me aglyzte.  
 Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,  
 And þou in a lyf of lykyng lyzte  
 In paradys erde, of stryf vnstrayned.  
 What Wyrde hatz hyder my juel vayned,  
 And don me in þys del and gret daunger?<sup>40</sup>

[Oh pearl, adorned in pearls, are you my pearl I have wept over and grieved over continually alone each night? Much longing I have concealed for you since you slipped away from me into the grass. Sorrowful, devastated, I am afflicted, and you in a life of pleasing alight in a land of paradise, untroubled by strife. What *wyrd* has brought my jewel here, and caused in me this grief and great fear?]

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<sup>40</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, V.241-250.

The father recognizes the disparity between pearl's current dwelling in paradise and his current circumstances within the darkness of his suffering on earth, yet it is in this passage that the *Pearl*-poet demonstrates the father's ability to see beyond his earthly confinement toward the heavens, where a broader view of his current circumstances is offered to him. His emotional words suggest a desperate belief that he may still have his pearl returned to him, and he sees his *wyrd* as unjust and cruel. Like the Alfredian Boethius, who cannot understand the injustice that takes all his earthly possessions, status, and family away from him, the father in *Pearl* has yet to gain an understanding that the outworkings of *wyrd* require endurance and acceptance. At this point in the poem, his ability to face his loss with courage requires a spiritual strength that he does not yet possess. Until the pearl maiden encourages and convinces him to recall divine goodness as it may manifest on earth, he will not recognize and accept that *wyrd* is not unjust or cruel but a result of earthly circumstances.

The father in *Pearl* cannot find consolation from his limited perspective through which he sees only the cruelty of his loss. He can, only if he so desires, see his daughter from a view *sub specie aeternitatis* and in spirit, but not in life, yet he continues to express his sorrow and despair. The *Pearl*-maiden chastises her father for his grievances in this passage:

“Thow demez noȝt bot doel-dystresse,”  
 Penne sayde þat wyȝt; “why dotz þou so?  
 For dyne of doel of lurez lesse  
 Ofte mony mon forȝos þe mo.  
 Þe oȝte better þyseluen blesse,  
 And loue ay God, [. . .].  
 For þoȝ þou daunce as any do,

Braundysch and bray þy brapez breme,  
 When þou no fyrre may, to ne fro,  
 Pou moste abyde þat He schal deme.”<sup>41</sup>

[“You consider nothing but bitter distress,” then said that personage, “Why do you so? For complaining in sorrow for losses smaller, often many men give up the greater. You should do better to bless yourself, and love always God. For though you writhe as any doe, struggle and bray your agonies loudly, when you can go no farther, to nor fro, you must abide by what God ordains.”]

Because he continues to see from a temporal view and cannot move beyond his loss, though painful, the father is not quite ready to abide by his guide’s advice to move his soul toward the divine creator so that he may see his suffering from a better perspective and accept what God determines. Just as the father questions the morality of unjust and cruel *wyrd*, the Alfredian Boethius asks similar questions of Wisdom who responds in this way: “Ne nanwuht ne bið yfel ær mon wene þæt hit yfel sie, and þeah hit nu hefig sie and wiðerweard, þeah hit bið gesælð gif hit mon lustlice deð and geþyldelice areæfneð.”<sup>42</sup>

(Nothing is evil [unjust] before a person believes it is evil, and though it now is grievous and adverse, it becomes happiness if it is willingly accepted and patiently endured.)

Wisdom finds Boethius in a state of mind that is quite like the *Pearl*-father’s state of mind as Wisdom advises the statesman to acknowledge that even if he finds no happiness in his current circumstances, he must embrace the events in his worldly life with composure. He will eventually find happiness again. Boethius must recall the words of Wisdom: “[I]s betere þæt feoh þætte næfre losian ne mæg ðonne þætte mæg and sceal.”<sup>43</sup>

(It is better [to have] treasure which can never be lost than that which can and must be).

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.337-42;345-48.

<sup>42</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 2.pr.6.par.11.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.pr.6.par.14.

Just as Boethius at first cannot accept his losses, the father in *Pearl* cannot accept that his daughter does not lie in the garden bed but is in the heavens. The father's persistence in clinging to that which he has lost invariably reinforces his spiritual blindness, his unhappiness, and his reluctance to change his perspective. Fear of losing Pearl forever paralyzes the father so that he cannot grasp that the soul is immortal and eternal, that it will never die, and that he must let her go now so that when he dies he may be with her for eternity.

Although the maiden presses her earthly father to look to God for a changed perspective, the maiden also asserts, "Bot, jueler gente, if þou schal lose / By joy for a gemme þat þe watz lef, / Me þynk þe put in a mad porpose."<sup>44</sup> (But gentle jeweler, if you shall lose your joy for a gem that you loved, it seems to me you are set on a mad purpose.) His heart and mind remain amiss when they are drawn only to temporal delights found in the natural movement of earthly life, yet the maiden knows and readers observe that in his dream, the grieving father is given a glimpse of a much broader picture in which he may recognize that happiness is transitory while joy found in the vision of God is eternal. Similarly, Wisdom addresses the imprisoned statesman:

Ðone soðan fruman and þone soðan ende ælcra gesælðe ge ongitað þeah ge hine fullice ne oncnawen, and swa ðeah sio gecynd eow tihð to ðæm andgite, ac eow tihð swiðe manigfeald gedwola of þam angite.<sup>45</sup>

[You can perceive a true beginning and a true end of all happiness, though you do not recognize it fully. Nature draws you [toward this perception], but numerous errors pull you away from that understanding.]

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<sup>44</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, IV.265-67.

<sup>45</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 3.pr.13.par.1.

Wisdom's words resonate with the maiden's as she tries to help her father understand that reason can empower him to maintain a joyfulness in life even when *wyrd* delivers a cruel blow. However, the father has not yet regained sanity of mind, it seems, for while death has not come to him, he becomes determined to join his pearl: "Now were I at yow byzonde þise wawez, / I were a joyfol jueler."<sup>46</sup> (Now were I with you across these waters, I would be a joyful jeweler.) His thoughts are firmly centered on his earthly goals with disregard for the *wyrd* that must be played out within the limitations of time. He refuses to see that his place across the river and in heaven with his daughter is not possible currently, and he does not believe in the promise that God made to raise his or his daughter's soul to the heavens after death. The maid responds to his troubling, misguided mind by stating,

I halde þat jueler lyttel to prayse  
 þat leuez wel þat he sez with yze,  
 And much to blame and vncortoyse  
 þat leuez oure Lorde would make a lyze,  
 þat lelly hyzte your lyf to rayse,  
 þaʒ Fortune dyd your flesch to dyze.  
 ze setten Hys wordez ful westernays  
 þat leuez noþynk bot ze hit syze;  
 And þat is a point o sorquydryze,  
 þat vche god mon may euel byseme,  
 To leue no tale be true to tryze  
 Bot þat hys one skyl may dem.<sup>47</sup>

[I hold that jeweler little to praise who believes only that which he sees with his eye, and much to blame and discourteous who believes our Lord would lie, who has faithfully sworn your life to raise though Fortune caused your flesh to die. You construed His words completely twisted who believes nothing but what he sees. And that is a point of pride, that each good person may evilly think, to believe no tale to be true to the test except that which his reason alone may judge [to be true].

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<sup>46</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, V.287-88.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, VI.301-12.

The maiden's harsh words serve as a reminder that her father believes with his mortal mind in nothing more than what he can see on earth. Just as he refuses to recall divine goodness, similarly Boethius also remains spiritually blind, according to Wisdom, and cannot recognize God, "hwær þa ecan good, / soða gesælða, sindon gehydda"<sup>48</sup> (where the eternal good, true blessings, are hidden). The spiritually blind cannot recognize that God is the true felicity, and the parallel between Boethius's inability to reason and the *Pearl*-father's believing only what he sees on earth is significant. He cannot yet put his faith in the vision of divine goodness that helps him see the folly of his clinging to his earthly relationship with his daughter.

Unlike her father, the maiden now knows fully "Hys prese, Hys prys, and Hys parage"<sup>49</sup> (God's worth, esteem, and lineage) that are the foundation of her bliss, and she remains eternally with her Lord.<sup>50</sup> The maiden offers to allow her father to walk with her and share her bliss, if only for a little while. Although the maiden is offering her father another opportunity to move ever closer to the God, he continues to speak to the Pearl maiden, still appearing to negotiate his place with her by raising questions about her right to be a queen within the eternal heavens, for her youthful soul has not been tested and has accomplished little on earth. "Alle þat may þerinne aryue / Of alle þe reme is quen oþer kyng"<sup>51</sup> (All that may therein arrive, of all the realm are king and queen), the maid responds, yet the father is still not satisfied, for he also believes she is much too young to be a queen. She has not earned her place in heaven, he believes, thus vocalizing his

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<sup>48</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 3.m.19.30-31.

<sup>49</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, VII.419.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.416-17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.447-48.

desperate need to reclaim his pearl. He compares her position of nobility with his desolate existence on earth, so the maiden utilizes Christ's parable of the vineyard to illustrate God's equitable distribution of heaven's rewards, just as when the Alfredian Wisdom in his discussion about *wyrd* states, "Þeah hit us manigfaldlic ðince, sum good sum yfel, hit is ðeah him anfeald good, forðæm he hit eall to godum ende brengð and for goode deð eall þæt þæt he deð."<sup>52</sup> (Though [*wyrd*] seems manifold to us, some good and some evil, it is a single good to [God], since he brings everything to a good end and does all that he does for good.) While in life the distribution of wealth, companionship, and recognition may seem unfair or taken away through evil acts, in the end, it is all for the greater good and justly rewarded in heaven.

The innocent and the newborn are graced enough, Pearl continues, and the only requirement for the gift of God's grace is to love God unequivocally in life.<sup>53</sup> At this moment, a shift in attitude and perspective occurs within the father, and he begs to glean her knowledge and to see her city, where thousands of pure souls reside. The maiden guides her father who then, for the first time in the poem, moves forward without encouragement. She states:

"If I þis mote þe schal vnhyde,  
 Bow vp toward þys bornez heued,  
 And I anendez þe on þis syde  
 Schal sve, tyl þou to a hil be veued."  
 Þen wolde I no lenger byde,  
 Bot lurked by launcez so lufly leued,  
 Tyl on a hyl þat I asspyed  
 And blusched on þe burghe, as I forth dreued,  
 Byzonde þe brok, fro me warde keued,

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<sup>52</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 4.pr.29.par.6.

<sup>53</sup> Finch, *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, XI.610-12.

Pat schyrrer þen sunne with schaftez schon.  
 In þe Apokalypce is þe fasoun preued,  
 As deuysez hit þe apostel John.<sup>54</sup>

[“If I this city shall reveal, set out toward the river’s head, and I parallel to you on this side shall proceed, until you have arrived at a hill.” [The father narrates], Then, I would no longer remain but passed under boughs so lovely leaved, until on a hill that city I perceived, and gazed on the town as I made way beyond the brook, at a lower height from me, fairer than the sun with rays shone. In Revelation is the form discovered, as it is described by Apostle John.]

The father follows alongside the maiden on the opposite side of the river until he sees New Jerusalem and becomes aware of the beauty of the city filled with the light of eternal joy and divine goodness. He acknowledges, “As John hum wrytez zet more I syze.”<sup>55</sup> (As John writes, still more I saw.) He sees a mass of virgins who “With gret delyt þay glod in fere / On golden gateg þat glent as glasse; / Hundreth þowsandez I wot þer were, / And alle in sute her liurez wasse”<sup>56</sup> ([w]ith great delight they glide in together, through golden gates that sparkled like glass; a hundred thousand I know there were, and were all alike their garments). Once the father sees a hundred thousand pearls like his Pearl, he recognizes that she is among many who have submitted to God and in death have been united with the Lamb in heaven. He then sees and hears “Legyounes of aungelez togeder uoched / Per kesten ensens of swete smelle; / Þen glory and gle watz nwe abroched; / Al songe to loue þat gay Juelle.”<sup>57</sup> (legions of angels all together, each casting incense of a sweet smell; then praise and sounds of music were expressed anew; all sang of love for that fine Jewel). Amidst the glorious sight of the virgin brides of Christ and songs of the

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.973-84.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII.1034.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.1105-08.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.1121-24.

angels, the father sees the entrance of Christ who brings about more singing and great rejoicing. As the angels sing for Christ, the true Jewel, the father declares that he has learned, “To loue þe Lombe His meyny inmelle / Iwysse I laȝt a gret delyt”<sup>58</sup> (To love the Lamb among His company, indeed, I took a great delight). He is lifted from his despair, and as he finds consolation, for the moment, his improved perspective reminds him of his love of Christ and the source of divine goodness that must always remain in his mind.

As the father’s eyes return to the maiden, he acts impulsively and attempts to cross the river to New Jerusalem. He learns, however, that “[h]it watz not at my Pryncez paye”<sup>59</sup> (it was not to my Prince’s liking), and his being cast out from the dream at this important point once again serves as a reminder that his earthly limitations prohibit him from being fully with his child or with God in this life. Not surprisingly, the father appears to despair again for had he “ȝerned no more þen watz me geuen”<sup>60</sup> (not yearned for more than was given to [him]), he might have been able to stay a little longer near the divine mystery of God. He once again stands exiled, not from the delight he enjoyed in life with his daughter, but from the bliss he felt while seeing the Lamb and experiencing a view *sub specie aeternitatis*.

In the final stanza of the poem the father, now awake and cognizant of his responsibility as a human confined to earthly constraints, acknowledges that Christ’s blessings are to be remembered and honored. The father concludes,

Ouer þis hyul þis lote I laȝte,  
For pyty of my perle enclyin,  
And syþen to God I hit bytaȝte,

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX.1127-28.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII.1164.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, XX.1190.

In Krystez dere blessing and myn,  
 Pat in þe forme of bred and wyn  
 Þe preste vus schewez vch a daye.  
 He gef vus to be His homly hyne  
 Ande precious perlez vnto His pay.  
 Amen. Amen.<sup>61</sup>

[Upon this hill, this word I received because of the compassion of my pearl lying prostrate. And afterwards, to God I committed it [the pearl], with Christ's precious blessing and mine, who in the form of bread and wine, the priest offers to us each day. He bestows upon us to be His obedient servants, and precious pearls for his pleasure. Amen. Amen.]

The awakened father describes in just a few lines how his perspective has changed from an inconsolable father to a human ready to honor and accept his earthly loss with patience by moving from lying prostrate in grief for his daughter to giving her over to God's divine goodness. Similarly, in the final pages of the Alfredian *Boethius*, Wisdom reminds the prisoner that since God is the highest eternity, it is not in vain to trust Him. However, humans must "biddað hine eadmodlice forðæm he is swiðe rummod and swiðe mildheort"<sup>62</sup> (pray to him humbly, for he is exceedingly generous and compassionate). Wisdom continues by encouraging the prisoner to act according to what is right and necessary in the presence of an eternal God, for "[e]all he hit gesihð and eall he hit forgilt"<sup>63</sup> (he sees and repays it all). The father's journey in *Pearl* ends much as Boethius's journey ends; both receive guidance and consolation, but they must never again forget the eternal presence of God and the importance of equanimity that brings goodness and happiness to earthly existence. The *Pearl*-poet's depiction of a father's

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, XX.1205-13.

<sup>62</sup> Irvine and Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, 5.pr.33.par.5

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

struggles to come to terms with his loss and suffering encourages readers to remember to trust in God and to act with virtue in life so that hope, peace, and true happiness can be multiplied on earth.

As the *Pearl* poet details a personal story of a father accepting the loss of his young daughter and finding consolation, audiences have the opportunity to look at him as a kindred soul and not the object/daughter Pearl as discussed in so many critical studies. They witness a chronological progression of a soul consumed with earthly loss who is eventually able to seek the divine view from the heavens. *Pearl* delivers consolation to its audiences and inspires a moral responsibility to use the knowledge within them that provides consolation to benefit others as well as themselves. Each stanza provides a sense of continuity in a journey that must be completed. The *Pearl*-poet is not unlike the Roman Boethius, Alfred the king, and the *Beowulf* poet, who although they explore circumstances involving class, wealth, and power that shape the characters in their works, offer guidance for their people who suffer in a world that can seem unjust and cruel. However, the *Pearl*-poet also weaves a poignant tale of the internal and personal struggles of a father who must come to terms with the loss of a child. The father's grief and loss are a matter of his heart, his ability to reason, and his recall of a view *sub specie aeternitatis*, and through the process of learning to accept his daughter's absence on earth in his life and the promise of eternal life with her after his death, he may find consolation and peace for the remainder of his earthly existence.

### Conclusion: Eternal Perspective and the Power to Endure

The publication of the complete Alfredian Old English adaptation of the Roman Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* has initiated new studies regarding the influence of the philosophical ideas put forth by the Roman statesman about the nature of good and evil, the human pursuit of mutable rather than immutable goods, and the ways in which humankind can endure the inevitable suffering that worldly events sometimes bring when misfortune strikes.

The words of the Alfredian Wisdom, the counterpart to Boethius's Lady Philosophy, encourage the fictional Boethius to see a broader perspective of divine order that includes the worldly struggle between good and evil, opposing forces necessary to one another and an integral part of the greater good. The Alfredian adaptation of *Consolation* is worthy of study as a stand-alone work that can make significant contributions to the medieval literary canon because it portrays the cultural and educational changes of the period as individuals questioned their role in the world and the nature of God's providence, fate, and free will. Through close examination of Alfred's interpretation of Boethian ideas found in the Latin text, this study addresses the Alfredian Boethius's despair that originates when he is separated from his family and loses his status and reputation as a Roman statesman because of the actions of an unjust king. Through the capacity to reason, audiences learn, individuals, such as Boethius, who are suffering from the loss of earthly goods because of the evil actions of others may gain knowledge of themselves and a greater understanding of divine goodness. Through a limited, but more expansive, perspective, individuals gain an understanding of the value

of virtuous acts that may influence the outcomes of *wyrd*. They also learn the benefits of navigating good and evil actions and events with patience and understanding when the outcomes cannot be changed.

The discussion of just and unjust kingship in the Old English *Boethius* also provides the characteristics of a good king. Alfred's life, as recorded by Asser, was an exemplar of this kind of kingship; Ælfric's life of St. Edmund also illustrated a similar Christian kingship. Considering the actions of Alfred and Edmund, audiences may learn that a good king can, through words and actions, share his knowledge and limited divine perspective of worldly events with his people to provide spiritual and intellectual guidance and consolation through troubling times, such as the pervasive Viking invasions during Alfred's and Edmund's reigns. An expanded study of parallels between the Alfredian ideas concerning kingship and other Old and Middle English literature is needed, particularly as the Old English *Boethius* has become more widely accessible to scholars. The Alfredian Wisdom encourages Boethius to utilize memory to recall the divine goodness that renders unjust kings powerless and to accept that if he forsakes his attachment to worldly goods, he can be less affected by *wyrd* that seems to form and reform according to human deeds and is an integral part of the divine order of the world.

Scholars have debated and challenged the meaning of *wyrd* mentioned often throughout *Beowulf*, and audiences may perceive that the unknown poet who transcribed the work recognized the importance Christian teachings and other educational texts of the period, thus creating a complex meaning of *wyrd* that, according to many critics, serves as a reminder that human actions can influence what happens in earthly events. The warrior Beowulf, who is to become king later in the poem, is much like the individuals

who may benefit from the instruction offered in the Old English *Boethius*. As his heroic acts unfold, audiences may see the poet's integration of certain Christian and Germanic warrior values challenge audiences to understand Beowulf's motivations, for in heroic society, he must act on his own behalf to exhibit his strength and courage and gain wealth, fame, and glory. Yet, his actions as he slays Grendel for Hrothgar and his people can also be seen as virtuous and reflective of the goodness so important when acting as a future king and on behalf of others to ease their suffering. As a result of Beowulf's courage, Hrothgar's sorrow is eased, and he is consoled.

Beowulf initially comes to the Danish kingdom to teach Hrothgar about finding again the courage and the strength to endure the devastation Grendel brings, and Beowulf seems to succeed; however, questions continue to arise about his competency as a leader, even though he is deemed a wise king by the poet. Beowulf's actions as he challenges the dragon in his old age make audiences question his reasoning and his placing entirely too much value on his courage and strength, diminished in his old age, that make his ability to transition from heroic warrior to king seem in doubt. His perspective becomes limited once again, and he cannot guide, protect, and provide for his kingdom as he should because he cannot move beyond his belief that as an individual, he can slay the dragon and provide treasure for his people. He seems to remain ignorant of the fact that his people and lands will not survive intact without a serviceable leader.

Earlier in the poem, Hrothgar observes Beowulf's pride and begins to recognize that he (Hrothgar) has neglected to provide for and protect his people; he clings to worldly goods, such as exhibited by the construction of Heorot. His advice to Beowulf suggests that he recalls the value of humility, goodness, and moderation that a good king

needs to care properly for his kingdom. Hrothgar reawakens spiritually and exhibits the qualities of a king who is aware of the implications of *wyrd* and how human actions can make a difference in outcomes. He, through experience, understands the power to endure suffering. Because Beowulf cannot fully make the transition from warrior to king, the poet provides a cautionary tale for audiences reminding them that by placing too much value on false goods leads to bad leadership and a miserable life for those affected by it. The Latin text of the *Consolation* is often mentioned in *Beowulf* scholarship, but a more expansive study of the parallels between the *Beowulf*-poet's depiction of Christian and philosophical ideas and the Alfredian Boethian worldview outlined in the Old English *Boethius* would be of great interest.

The need for all humans to maintain a close, spiritual relationship to God and an understanding of the divine order on earth through the capacity to reason is also an important theme as depicted by the warriors portrayed in "The Seafarer," "The Wanderer," "The Dream of the Rood," and *Beowulf*. Within these literary works, the poets depict warriors and other individuals in various stages of grief or hardships and suggest that recognizing the transience of earthly goods and knowledge of divine goodness to guide them allows audiences to explore the juxtaposition of the limits of earthly existence and the broader perspective of the divine found through contemplation of God's plan on earth. Desiring to reject the falseness of life on land, the traveler in "The Seafarer" returns to the sea, a journey representative of a life filled with hardship and loneliness. Because he has rejected worldly goods to pursue a life that allows him to meditate on the eternal joy promised to him, he accepts the fear and anxiety of an unknown path and his unknown purpose according to God's plan. Though good deeds are

memorable, the poet reflects, they are not enough to ensure eternal joy. The Alfredian Boethian ideas of moderation, a strong spirit, and virtue will move him toward a view *sub specie aeternitatis* and the joy he longs for in his travels.

“The Wanderer” illustrates a warrior who co-exists in a Germanic warrior culture and a Christian society. He has lost his lord and the life he once knew among his thanes. His dreams of his past life bring him sorrow as he awakens and remembers the days of community and companionship. The poet’s use of the dream and the effects that surface upon awakening exemplify the Gregorian dream theory that allows audiences to see how the wanderer uses the information in the dream to guide him. The warrior acknowledges that self-control and knowledge will help him to be patient and moderate as he chooses his path and intentions. By meditating on the divine goodness of God and acknowledging the transience of earthly goods, he may gain a better understanding of the divine order and his place on earth as he moves toward eternal joy.

“The Dream of the Rood” blends Christian themes and Germanic warrior culture through the poet’s depiction of a tree that is torn from the ground and made into Christ’s cross. The cross is also depicted as a warrior and thane to his lord. In the form of an unnamed speaker’s dream, the poem illustrates the consequences of the abrupt change the tree experiences from the life it once knew to the sorrowful life of the cross that must stand strong for its lord, yet by doing so it becomes the instrument of his lord’s death. The poet focuses on the tree’s profound sorrow because of the execution of Christ, a sorrow that the speaker also feels. Offering consolation, the cross describes its exaltation to a place under the heavens, where a view like the Alfredian Boethian view *sub specie*

*aeternitatis* gives him the wisdom to instruct the speaker so that he may accept his guilt and redemption, move forward to serve God in his daily life, and find eternal joy in heaven.

*Pearl* is the only Middle English poem in this study, penned by an unknown poet whose understanding of Christian values shape the story of a father's progression from the despair he feels over the unexpected death of his young daughter toward an acceptance of his *wyrd* that could not have been prevented. In search of consolation much like the consolation the Alfredian Boethius seeks, the father falls asleep and dreams of walking through an envisioned land filled with a beauty that only God can provide. He moves toward a view *sub specie aeternitatis* that allows him to progress beyond his current circumstances that have left him bereft. For a moment, as he meets and walks with a heavenly maiden who is his lost Pearl, he reclaims the happiness he once felt with his daughter and experiences the eternal joy he will find when he is reunited with his daughter in heaven and in the presence of God. The father's suffering is great, and as the Alfredian Wisdom tells Boethius, sometimes parents lose their children to death far too early, and they suffer for the remainder of their lives. Audiences cannot ascertain that the father will be able to find consolation for his grief on earth, but intellectually he does know that he must live out his life to the end so that he may rejoin his daughter in heaven. Because there are no clear connections between the Alfredian Old English *Boethius* and the *Pearl*-poet although there are some obvious shared themes in the works, a further study of the enduring influence of Alfredian Boethian worldview in other Middle English literature would be a valuable addition to the critical studies of Alfred's adaptations and cultural influence beyond his lifetime. Wisdom's words have the potential to resound

throughout the ages, and for individuals who feel the universal themes in the text are familiar yet unfamiliar because they have forgotten something important, a knowledge and greater understanding of that something can be found in the Old English *Boethius* and the literary works that echo a Boethian worldview.

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