

The Cultural Logic of Wisdom's Containment in Anglo-Saxon Literature:

A Senior Honors Thesis

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## Introduction

The wide semantic scope of “mind” in Modern English extends through history to a culture with both linguistic and cultural similarities to our own: early-medieval, or Anglo-Saxon, England. Old English contains many references that conflate the different possible qualities of the mind. Emotions can heat the mind into passion; the soul can inhabit the mind’s enclosure; reason can control the passionate mind. Indeed, as many scholars have noted, the “remarkably rich” lexicon in Old English of terms denoting the “mind” and its functions demonstrates the conceit’s cultural importance.<sup>1</sup> The full vocabulary for the mind is even more significant in the context of linguistic studies arguing that “every language suggests its own categorization and its own interpretation for the world” through its individual “set of lexicalized components.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the abundant vocabulary for the mind in Old English indicates the cultural perceptions of the Anglo-Saxons. Because of its very fullness, however, this vocabulary can be confusing to modern readers.

The poet of *The Wanderer*, for example, uses a well attested idiom localizing one’s thoughts in the *ferðlocan* (stronghold of the mind) or *hordcofan* (chamber of treasure). Along the same lines, Ælfric, though he almost certainly understood it as metaphor, suggests in places that the mind has distinct spatial dimensions differing from person to person. This confusion has led some scholars to attempt an awkward conflation of different perceptions of thought. Peter Clemons represents this group of scholars, contending that *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are in “harmony” with the patristic

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<sup>1</sup> Soon-Ai Low, “Vocabulary for ‘Mind,’” p. 11. See also Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition*, p. 20.

writings.<sup>3</sup> With what has since become a standard study in the field, Malcolm Godden has effectively changed the prevailing scholarly opinion by stating that “two distinct traditions of thought about the mind are evident among the Anglo-Saxons.”<sup>4</sup> There is, according to Godden, a classical tradition and a vernacular tradition of Anglo-Saxon psychology. The two traditions diverge in the way they treat thoughts and the mind. With Godden’s division of these two traditions, a new context has been created for the consideration of questions about the mind and thought in Anglo-Saxon literature. The status of scholarship at this time seems clear. What is not clear, however, is where to go from this point. The different models proposed by Godden, for instance, have wide ranging implications for the ethics surrounding wisdom’s use. Ideas of holding, sharing, and teaching differ between each tradition and within the traditions themselves. Yet, the cultural logic governing the mental exchange of wisdom is seldom examined in either tradition.

Among the complex writings that have survived from early-medieval England are differing and even opposing views about the acceptability of exchanging wisdom. Yet, the sources do more than simply disagree. The surviving works unfold the story of a struggle for control of the ethics governing wisdom’s exchange waged between the vernacular and Latinate traditions. Here the local wise men battle the clergy for cultural dominance while a more moderate strain of the Latinate tradition combines elements of both systems of belief. The focus of this study is the examination of the vernacular, moderate Latinate, and ecclesiastical Latinate traditions as they oppose and, in some cases, agree with one another. Just as revealing as the conflicts between the three

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Clemons, “*Mens absentia cogitans*,” p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm R. Godden, “Anglo-Saxons on the Mind,” p. 271.

traditions are the common beliefs they hold in spite of their differences, beliefs that point to deeply held opinions about the basic nature of wisdom and thought itself. Of course, as the division of “Latinate” into the “moderate Latinate” and “ecclesiastical Latinate” reveals, labels such as “vernacular” and “Latinate” are reductive. Since, however, they do provide a framework for discussion, these labels can be useful if their limitations are not forgotten. It is also very tempting to impose a diachronic explanation on these differing strains of tradition. With the difficulty of dating manuscripts and the uncertainties of authorship, this temptation must be resisted. As will be seen, simply because some of the works in the final section on the ecclesiastical tradition may come after other texts examined does not mean that they represent the definitive Anglo-Saxon opinion of wisdom’s use. A synchronic viewpoint must here carry the day since it is far more likely that these traditions coexisted in contact and conflict for many years. Even today the conflicts generated hundreds of years ago remain unsolved.

Still a contentious word, “mind” stores the various meanings imparted to it by generations. It is this confusion about the function of the mind that an examination of Anglo-Saxon literature will serve to illuminate. The Anglo-Saxons held a complex and multifaceted concept of the mind centrally important in their literature. Many of the complex workings of the mind they perceived appear to have survived into modern English. In frozen idioms and popular use, the mind performs a huge range of functions today just as it did in early-medieval England. Thus, an examination of Anglo-Saxon literature provides a lens through which modern western assumptions about the mind and

thought can be exposed and observed. Using Anglo-Saxon literature, yesterday's culture becomes today's cultural microscope.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> All translations of the texts examined below are my own unless otherwise noted. Where beneficial, I have silently added punctuation and expanded abbreviations. All biblical quotations are from Weber's edition of the Latin Vulgate Bible. Translations from the Vulgate were made in consultation with the Douay-Rheims translation (Challoner's Revision). Similarly, all translations from the *Pastoral Care* were made in consultation with Henry Sweet's translation.

## The “Vernacular” Tradition:

### The Dialogues, Arguments, and Lessons of Wisdom

When working with a corpus as large and fluid as Old English wisdom literature, any generalizations will inevitably prove inadequate. Such statements will, almost by definition, fail to capture the complexity and subtlety inherent in cultural beliefs. It is, however, often helpful when discussing the works of such an amorphous body of literature to sketch a tentative outline. Then to facilitate discussion I propose three basic types of wisdom exchange: genial, disputational, and didactic. Each of these is represented respectively by *Maxims I*, *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* and *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*, and *Precepts*. Together, these three texts represent instances of a culturally permissible movement of wisdom from one person to another.

The genial exchange of wisdom is characterized by comparatively friendly give and take discussion of wisdom.<sup>6</sup> During this type of interaction the parties involved appear to be working in a cooperative way to mutually increase their wisdom through discussion with another wise person. The opening lines of *Maxims I* depict the beginning of one such exchange:

Frige mec frodum wordum. Ne læt þinne ferð onhælne,  
degol þæt þu deopost cunne. Nelle ic þe min dyrne gesecgan,  
gif þu me þinne hygecræft hylest ond þine heortan gēpohtas.  
Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hansen, *The Solomon Complex*, p. 158 links the exchange in *Maxims I* with *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* labeling them both as contests. While there could, in any exchange between humans, be some element of contest I differ from her interpretation here since *Maxims I* does not show the emphasis on verbs of confrontation that characterizes *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*, examined below.

<sup>7</sup> *Maxims I*, ed. Dobbie and Krapp, pp. 156-175, lines 1-4a: “Ask of me with wise words. Do not let your mind be concealed, that which you most deeply know stay hidden. I will not tell you my secret if you hide your wisdom and the thoughts of your heart from me. Wise men should exchange proverbs.” Translations from *Maxims I* made in consultation with Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, p. 64.

Though only four lines of text, this opening encodes an abundance of information. It is clear from the outset that this interaction is necessarily mutual; unless his sharing is reciprocated, the poet, who casts himself here as a wise man, will not share his knowledge. It is also clear, as Elaine Tuttle Hansen notes, from the concluding maxim, “gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan” (wise men should exchange proverbs), that the “proposed exchange of *gied* accords with a universal ethical norm.”<sup>8</sup> Of course, this exchange is not ethically acceptable when conducted with any random person but only with “geleawe men” (wise men) such as the poet and his fictional interlocutor. It appears then, that these wise men form a specialist, almost cultish, group in control of wisdom. Indeed the use of “degol” and “dyrne” gives wisdom the cast of primitive magic: “by this view, wisdom—closer, as in Babylonia, to cult—excludes the uninitiated and involves mysteries, secrets, and powers shared, warily but urgently, by a privileged few.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a few lines later the idea of a learned elite is reinforced:

Þing sceal gehegan  
 frod wiþ frodne.    Biþ hyra ferð gelic.  
 Hi a sace semað,    sibbe gelærað,  
 þa ær wonsælge    awegen habbað.  
 Ræd sceal mid snyttro,    ryht mid wisum,  
 til sceal mid tilum.<sup>10</sup>

It is explicitly stated in this passage that wise men should be with wise men. Their minds are alike and, presumably, they will advise the same thing. It is as if a person with

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<sup>8</sup> Hansen, *The Solomon Complex*, p. 160. It will also be helpful to note here that the working definition of a maxim or gnome used in this paper comes from Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, pp. 50-52. By Cavill’s description, the defining features of a gnome or maxim are: the elements of a complete sentence, superlatives—when used—lacking an explicit base of comparison, a present tense main verb, a subject that is not a specific person, and no deictic reference to a specific situation.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>10</sup> *Maxims I*, ed. Dobbie and Krapp, pp. 156-175, lines 18b-23a: “A wise man should hold meetings with another wise man. Their minds are alike. They always settle disputes and advise for peace, which unfortunate men have previously disturbed. Good advice goes with wisdom, justice with a wise man, a good man should be with good.”

sufficient wisdom will always reach the abstractly “good” conclusion. At this point, then, there seems to be a firmly established group who control wisdom, an elite of the wise. It is not long, though, until this orderly system is disrupted.

In the third section of the poem, the brotherhood of the wise is cast down from its lofty position. No longer is there a unified group in control of thought. In place of an oligarchy of wisdom rises a democracy:

Wæra gewylcum wislicu word gerisað,  
 gleomen gied ond guman snyttro.  
 Swa manige beoþ men ofer eorþan, swa beoþ modgeþoncas;  
 ælc him hafað sundoersefan.<sup>11</sup>

Both the authority of the wise elite and the unity of mind seen before appear dashed by this passage. Wisdom is good for everyone and each of those people has a mind of his own. Though this passage seems to pose an insurmountable problem to the conceit of a small group of wise men controlling wisdom, a look at the larger work and its possible intention transforms this perceived contradiction into a fine distinction.

Though scholars have increasingly begun to acknowledge the value of *Maxims I*, they often remain hesitant to offer an explanation of the poem’s overall purpose. Paul Cavill states that the purpose was to collect, arrange, and elaborate “miscellaneous sayings because they were valuable and interesting in themselves” and because they are educational, reflecting a “common store of knowledge which the Anglo-Saxon would take for granted.”<sup>12</sup> Carlyne Larrington poses the idea that *Maxims I* depicts a “reassuring picture” of social and natural order which, while partially accurate, seems

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., lines 165-168: “Wise words are fitting for everybody, a song for the minstrel, and prudence for a man. There are as many opinions as there are men on the earth; everyone has a mind of his own.” Translation Shippey’s.

<sup>12</sup> Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, p. 185.



wanting in light of the poem's length and ideological breadth.<sup>13</sup> Hansen comes closest to a satisfying explanation arguing that "the *gnomic poem* as a whole foregrounds the contextuality of meaning throughout" and reminds "us that the meaning of general truth resides in its local application."<sup>14</sup> It is this final sense of purpose for *Maxims I* that I wish to elaborate. Rather than representing Cavill's list or Larrington's order, the individual maxims of the poem represent bits of knowledge applicable to a multiplicity of situations and necessarily subject to elaboration. For this I briefly turn to a cognitive approach to understanding proverbs.

According to Richard P. Honeck, the Extended Conceptual Base Theory explains that humans understand proverbs in predictable steps.<sup>15</sup> When a proverb is given a person first constructs a literal meaning, moves on to devise a figurative meaning, and then applies that figurative meaning to either a current or new situation. One example used to illustrate this point is the proverb "not every oyster contains a pearl."<sup>16</sup> On the literal level it is understood that oysters make pearls, something valuable, but not always. The figurative meaning, then, is something close to "not everything that makes valuable things does it all the time." This figurative meaning can then be applied to explain an immediate situation or help a person understand a novel future situation. As Honeck puts it, "almost any domain of reality in which normally productive processes fail to deliver becomes a candidate for the application of the oyster proverb."<sup>17</sup> In the way that a proverb can be applied to explain both past and future events it represents a kernel, or seed, of wisdom. When people use a proverb in a new context they effectively increase

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<sup>13</sup> Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense*, p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> Hansen, *The Solomon Complex*, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> Honeck, *A Proverb in Mind*, pp. 128-136.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 130-131.

their wisdom by a two fold process: first, they allow themselves to understand the new situation in context of a previous one in which the moral or point has already been made clear; second, since the proverb will not exactly match the new situation, the proverb's meaning will have to be revised and semantically expanded. An individual proverb is, then, less about itself than about its application to different situations. Hansen captures something close to this idea when she states that "these works [wisdom literature] demand and characterize an audience that takes a productive part in the interpretive process."<sup>18</sup> Though her insights are revealing, Hansen fails to make the final step and argue that the intention of a work such as *Maxims I* is to provoke thought, instigate the production of wisdom through the expansion of culturally relevant maxims functioning just as Honeck's proverbs. The perceived blankness of factual statements in *Maxims I* (and *Maxims II* for that matter) so long derided by early critics is also explained by the Extended Conceptual Base Theory.<sup>19</sup>

Proverbs tread in the realm of black and white. They describe things that are best and worst, things that must be and things that must not be. They represent a society's ideals and these ideals, by their nature, rest at the extremes.<sup>20</sup> The maxim "Þing sceal gehegan // frod wiþ frodne" (one wise man should hold meetings with another) represents an ideal state. Such an apparently blunt pronouncement, once abstracted, can raise more questions than it answers. Do only wise men meet together or does this mean that if men hold meetings together they are wise? Is the implication here that consensus is valued

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<sup>18</sup> Hansen, *The Solomon Complex*, p. 156.

<sup>19</sup> For two examples of these numerous early critics see Blanch Williams, *Gnomic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press (1914): 85. and Margret Schlauch, *English Medieval Literature and Its Social Foundations*. Warsaw: Panstowe Wydawnictwo Navkowe (1956): 12.

<sup>20</sup> Honeck, *A Proverb in Mind*, pp. 138-139.

more than an individual's choice?<sup>21</sup> The vagaries of this seemingly blunt statement are exactly the point of the poem. A parallel exists in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. As a glance at any critical edition of the work shows, the short and often cryptic statements of this text have generated centuries of commentary. Though dedicated students of *The Art of War* may have memorized the statements themselves, it is from the elaboration, the discussion and commentary on the work, that deep and valuable wisdom grows. Simply reading the book is not enough. I would argue that wisdom literature such as *Maxims I* has a similar intention. The broad statements are intended to provoke the discussion which generates true wisdom rather than stand for that wisdom alone.<sup>22</sup>

With texts such as *Maxims I* resting as the seeds of wisdom, waiting only to be cultivated, the question of a learned elite in control of wisdom comes once more to the fore. After all, it would stand to reason that a work such as *Maxims I* was, at least at one point, performed orally, giving all listeners access to the secret knowledge. If everyone is included in this system of wisdom acquisition then there could be no specific group in control. This, however, is not necessarily true. Learning the most basic level of wisdom, the sayings in *Maxims I*, does not initiate a person into the circle of the wise. Instead, it is the commentary, the elaboration and expansion upon these basic maxims, that represents the wisdom controlled by the elite who were described at the beginning of the poem.

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<sup>21</sup> See Robinson, "Artful Ambiguities," for discussion of the idea that Anglo-Saxon poets would exploit ambiguities to cast multiple meanings simultaneously. Though his study is limited in scope, the conceptual principal is very close to what I am arguing here: one seemingly simple line of text can support multiple interpretations.

<sup>22</sup> Shippey, "Maxims in Old English Narrative," p. 42. Though he does an exemplary job in advocating the value of Anglo-Saxon maxims, I must differ from his opinion that maxims, as depictions of the society's common beliefs, are "not meant to be verified or criticized." On the literal interpretation of a maxim this may possibly be true. Once, however, the meaning of a maxim has been abstracted and applied to a new situation the accuracy of the comparison and the implied expansion of the maxim's meaning would both be open for debate.

Basic wisdom is, as the poet says, “fitting for everybody.” The thoughts of “gelawe men” (wise men) are the secrets, the esoteric domain, of wisdom’s controllers.

While the specialist group of wise men appears capable of calm discussion in order to increase their wisdom, the genial exchange is by no means the only one illustrated in the literature. *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*, peppered with verbs of contention and hostile debate, stands as a prime example of a disputational exchange. In setting the stage, the opening lines of the poem reveal much of the work’s overall emphasis:

Hwæt, ic flitan gefrægn on fyrndagum  
 modgleawe men, middangeardes ræswan,  
 gewesan ymb hira wisdom. Wyrð deð se ðe liehð  
 oððe ðæs soðes ansæceð. Saloman was bremra,  
 ðeah ðe Saturnus sumra hæfde,  
 bald breosttoga, boca cæga,  
 leornenga locan.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most striking features of these lines is the poet’s specific choice of verbs signifying an engagement that is, in comparison to *Maxims I*, quite hostile.<sup>24</sup> Within the first line, the verb “flitan,” especially in conjunction with a prepositional phrase beginning with “ymb,” places the speech between Solomon and Saturn firmly in the realm of debate as the two “dispute” each other’s knowledge.<sup>25</sup> The next verb in the sentence, “gewesan,” meaning to “converse” or “discuss,” implies an active engagement

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<sup>23</sup> Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, p. 87, lines 1-7a: “Listen, I heard of a dispute held in the days of old by wise-minded men, leaders of the world, debating concerning their wisdom. He does worse who lies or denies the truth. Solomon was more famous, though Saturn, bold chieftain, held the keys to some books, the enclosures of learning.”

<sup>24</sup> Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense*, p. 156 suggests that the dialogue form seen in the poem is “to be related to Latin models rather than the Germanic wisdom contest.” If that is so then it seems that the Anglo-Saxon poet has added what is potentially a culturally specific perception of wisdom debate by changing the relatively neutral verbs of Latin dialogues to verbs signifying contention.

<sup>25</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *flitan*, sense A.2.a. “Indicating a matter disputed. . . . with prepositional phrase introduced by *be/ymb* ‘concerning.’”

with wisdom rather than the almost passive sharing in *Maxims I*.<sup>26</sup> Instead of a simple exchange of precepts, here knowledge is being questioned and examined. Nor is this example without support from the rest of the work. Later Saturn makes a statement which indicates an implicit understanding that the natural action for wise men was the discussion of wisdom:

Full oft ic frode menn   fyrn gehyrde  
 secggan and swerian   ymb sume wisan:  
 . . .  
 Ic to soðon wat—   sægdon me geara  
 Filistina witan,   ðonne we on geflitum sæton,  
 bocum tobræddon   and on bearm legdon,  
 meðelcwidas mengdon,   moniges fengon.<sup>27</sup>

The first two lines establish that discussion and assertion about philosophical topics is a common occurrence—here the assertions happen to concern the strength of fated events in comparison with foresight. A few lines later the poet moves from the general declaration that men often discuss “certain matters,” to a specific example of debate. In this example, the Philistine counselors, the “witan” of wise men, dispute thought about “many matters” with Saturn. “Flitan” is again used in this passage indicating that the action between Solomon and Saturn was much the same as that between Saturn and the Philistines. From this assumed homogeneity of interaction between wise men arises the intimation that, at least to this poet, arguing about wisdom is one acceptable activity for knowledgeable men.

Moving from the micro to macro level, the form of the work itself suggests a struggle between two minds. Many of the individual questions asked by Saturn are

<sup>26</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *gewesan*, “I. to be together, converse, debate. . .”

<sup>27</sup> Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, p. 98, lines 247-248 and 252-255: “Very often in the past I have heard men of experience talking and making assertions about a certain matter” . . . “I know this is true— the Philistine counselors told me in the past when we sat disputing, opening books and putting them in our laps, exchanging speeches and taking up many matters.” Translation Shippey’s.

reminiscent of a riddle contest in which, between two individuals, each would test the other's knowledge of existing riddles and ability to analyze new material. A large number of the questions are composed of clues to an answer with one ending in "saga hwæt ic mæne" (say what I mean).<sup>28</sup> While this ending is aberrant, it provides a firm bridge from the common structure of Saturn's questions to some riddles found in *The Exeter Book* which end in very similar constructions.<sup>29</sup> In this way each question posed represents an individual point of dispute.

Though departing from the overtly combative form of *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*, a related work, *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*, reiterates the focus on confrontational engagement over wisdom. The poem flatly states that: "her kið hu saturnus and Saloman fettode ymbe heora wisdom."<sup>30</sup> Once more a verb denoting contention, "fettode," is chosen to describe the interaction exhibited in the text.<sup>31</sup> Rare though this verb is, its formulaic pairing with "ymb heora wisdom," as marked before with "flitan," draws similarity between the two works and further marks "fettian" as a verb of dispute. In this way, *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*, while it reads much more like an extended question and answer session, lends support to the premise extended in *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* that argument is one format of wisdom exchange between wise men. As Hansen puts it, "in an exchange between two who are truly verbally skilled and hence wise, both can be winners."<sup>32</sup> Through the process of discussion the knowledge of both men grows. This idea of mutually increasing

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 88, line 59.

<sup>29</sup> Specifically see the endings of riddles 61, 62, 80, 83, and 86, ed. Dobbie and Krapp, pp. 229-238.

<sup>30</sup> Cross and Hill, *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, p. 25: "here it makes known how Saturn and Solomon disputed concerning their wisdom."

<sup>31</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *fettian*, "to contend, strive." Though this verb occurs only once in the Old English corpus it is linked to the noun s.v. *fitt*, "fight, conflict, struggle, battle," which places the definition on firm ground.

<sup>32</sup> Hansen, *The Solomon Complex*, p. 152.

knowledge links back to the concept that wisdom arises from discussion. There are, however, some problems depicting either exchange between Solomon and Saturn in the same role as *Maxims I*, serving as a base for elaboration.

Some of the comments are indeed far too specific to perform the function of an abstracted maxim. One notable example occurs early in *The Prose Solomon and Saturn* when Saturn asks how tall Adam was when he was created.<sup>33</sup> The extremely specific nature of these comments, which compose the bulk of the poem, makes it difficult to argue that this work is intended to provoke discussion. Instead, it suggests that one facet of wisdom was knowing these esoteric facts. Perhaps these were entry level questions and answers that could help establish a person's status as a wise man. In a culture where wisdom was closely guarded, these questions and answers, or a recitation of them, may have acted as passwords. *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* presents an even trickier problem since it contains maxims and many of its passages are in something like riddle form. Indeed, where Solomon is not answering Saturn's riddles the two slip into exchanges of maxims. On one occasion the two are discussing the same event, doomsday, and applying different maxims to it.<sup>34</sup> This is a model for the semantic expansion of maxims. Solomon, for example, says that "lytle hwile / leaf beoð grene" (leaves are green for a short time) when talking about doomsday.<sup>35</sup> He then goes onto explicate the use of this maxim, stating that those who have been committing crimes fall just as leaves when they die. The abstract meaning here seems to be that apparently good things, green leaves, will die and fall. That is, eventually all things will die and then be judged. This

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<sup>33</sup> Cross and Hill, *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, p. 27. "Saga me hu lang wæs adam on længe geseapen. Ic ðe secge, he wæs vi and cx ynca lang" : "Tell me how tall Adam was created in height. I tell you, he was one hundred and sixteen inches tall." Translation Cross and Hill's.

<sup>34</sup> Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, p. 92, lines 131- 156.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, line 136.

work is perhaps a model of discussion between two wise men. We see them exchange some of the passwords to knowledge in riddle form and then watch the abstraction and expansion of specific maxims to fit a situation that appears different than the one in which they were composed.

Though *Maxims I* and the engagements between Solomon and Saturn stand as examples of different types of wisdom exchange, they display a remarkably similar concern with the status of the participants. It appears that whether discussing wisdom in a genial exchange or contesting it in a disputational one, both parties should be wise. In *Maxims I* the “gleawe men” (wise men) discuss the fine points of wisdom. *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* is even more specific, providing a short history of Saturn in order to give him a status nearly equivalent to Solomon:

Saloman wæs bremra,  
ðeah ðe Saturnus sumra hæfde,  
bald breosttoga, boca cæga,  
leornenga locan.<sup>36</sup>

Because Solomon has the greater reputation, much pain is taken to establish Saturn as a worthy interlocutor.<sup>37</sup> References both to Saturn’s books and his extensive travels indicate that he is experienced and knowledgeable. The repeated emphasis on status points again to a specialist group in possession of higher knowledge and with control

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<sup>36</sup>Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, p. 87, lines 4b-7a: “Solomon was more famous, though Saturn, bold chieftain, held the keys to some books, the enclosures of learning.” Translation made in consultation with Shippey’s. A lengthy list of countries visited by Saturn follows this sentence in what presumably represents a further attempt to bolster Saturn’s status by demonstrating his great experience. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, p. 136, in reference to the status of Solomon and Saturn, makes note that “breosttoga” “is an unusual compound.” He states that, “the word, like ‘ræswan,’ seems chosen to show that, though the disputants are eminent men, they are not so in a simply military way.” The overtones of “ræswan” may also be examined. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v.: “I. a counselor. . . II. one who takes thought (for the public good), (a) a prince, king. . . (b) a leading man, chief person, leader.” These are all people who would have discussed and debated issues either with other “counselors” or, in the case of a leader or king, with a “witan.” Though lacking the dramatic impact on the passage possessed by the verbs, this vocabulary choice reinforces the overall theme of the piece.

<sup>37</sup>Hansen, *The Solomon Complex*, p. 150 supports the idea that Solomon and Saturn are contenders because of the comparatives used to describe them. Solomon is “bremra” (more famous).



over wisdom.<sup>38</sup> These cases, however, provide only for interactions between those already established as sufficiently learned. Since humans do not spring up endowed with knowledge and experience, at some point they must be taught.

One of the clearest pedagogical manifestos, and the first example of didactic wisdom exchange, occurs late in the first section of *Maxims I*. This clarity is, however, relative; the passage maintains an ample amount of the thought provoking vagueness of Old English wisdom literature. Much depth is implied in the poet's words as he sketches stages of the teaching process:

Læran sceal mon geongne monnan,  
 trymman ond tyhtan þæt he teala cunne,  
 oþþæt hine mon atemedne hæbbe;  
 sylle him wist ond wædo, oþþæt hine mon on gewitte alæde.  
 Ne sceal hine mon cildgeongne forcweþan, ær he hine acyþan mote;  
 þy sceal on þeode geþeon, þæt he wese þrithycgende.  
 Styran sceal man strongum mode.<sup>39</sup>

The main focus of the passage is the conflict between nature and civilization.<sup>40</sup> It seems that the process of teaching a young man culminates when he becomes “atemedne” (disciplined). The semantic range of this specific verb extends beyond meaning to “subdue” or “discipline” a person, encompassing the “taming” or “training” of a wild

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<sup>38</sup> Wise advice and counsel was not intended solely for the minds of the wise. *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* (Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, pp. 100-103, lines 312-319) sets the good advice of a man's relatives against evil and temptation. Since evil and temptation are bad, in this context wisdom is good for all men. *Maxims I* (ed. Dobbie and Krapp, p. 160, lines 118b-119b) similarly states that “wisdom is the most useful thing, evil the least.” Thus, the idea is not that only wise men can wield wisdom but that a specific subset of knowledgeable men is responsible for the growth, exchange, and debate of wisdom.

<sup>39</sup> *Maxims I*, ed. Dobbie and Krapp, p.158, lines 45b-50a: “One should teach a young man, strengthen and persuade him so that he knows things well, until one has disciplined him. Give him food and clothes until one has conducted him into knowledge. One should not reject the young child before he may show his nature. Thus shall he thrive among the people, become bold minded. One must check a strong mind.”

<sup>40</sup> Though a very learned article, I can not agree with O’Camb, “Bishop Æthelwold and Shaping” that this passage from *Maxims I* represents a Benedictine reform view of child education. While there are some lexical similarities between *Maxims I* and Æthelwold's translation of the Benedictine Rule, the poem also shares lexical similarities with elegies and other vernacular works. As a whole, the passage has too many connections to other literature, connections that O’Camb rightly notes, to read it as exclusively Benedictine.

animal.<sup>41</sup> This verb connotes that much more is occurring in these lines than is explicitly stated. There is an implication that the young man's mind was wild or uncontrolled before it was instructed.<sup>42</sup> Rather than allow the mind to remain in an uncultivated state, the teacher is responsible for leading the pupil to knowledge. Like "atemedne," the verb used in this passage for leading, "alædan," contains a much fuller meaning than provided by any single word gloss. More specifically, this verb refers to guiding a person's "mind, thoughts, or habits."<sup>43</sup> Overall this passage appears to depict a teaching process in which the instructor takes control of and then forms the student's mind. The thoughts of the young man are shaped. There is a hint of warning, developed more in vernacular elegiac poetry, that an excessively strong mind must be controlled.<sup>44</sup> Here, however, it is the "bold minded" product of instruction that thrives among his people.

Many of the characteristic elements of teaching evident in the passage from *Maxims I* appear in another heavily didactic poem, *Precepts*. Praise for a bold mind, for example, is inherent in the advice of the experienced father of *Precepts* instructing his son. Many of the actions that the father urges would require great strength of mind. Avoiding anger, spite, a woman's love, and recognizing good and evil—all things the father enjoins—are not easy tasks. Moreover, the wise father's instruction of his son, who

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<sup>41</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *atemedne*, sense 1. "to tame, train (an animal or bird)" and sense 2. "to subdue, discipline (someone/something acc.)."

<sup>42</sup> Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense*, p. 124 also notes the "implied comparison between the young man and a young animal who must be tamed" but calls the tone of the passage "light and affectionate" and does not examine the implications of an untamed mind.

<sup>43</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *alædan*, sense 1.a.v. "referring to the guiding of someone's mind, thoughts, habits: *alædan of / on* 'to guide (someone) out of / into.'"

<sup>44</sup> Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, p. 131 mentions the dispute over this half line, "styrān sceal man strongum mode," which is repeated almost verbatim in line 109a of *The Seafarer*. Some take it to mean "a man must rule with a strong mind" rather than "a strong mind must be checked" as Shippey translates it. Since Bosworth-Toller indicates that "styrān" takes the dative, there seems little reason for such a debate. Shippey's translation appears to be the most accurate. O'Camb, "Bishop Æthelwold and Shaping," p. 263 also contains discussion focused of this half line. He, however, uses it to link *Maxims I* with chapter thirty of the Old English Benedictine Rule, omitting in his extended discussion of the half line, though having previously noted it, the almost verbatim reproduction of the half line in *The Seafarer*.

does not reply throughout the piece, mirrors the unidirectional movement of wisdom from instructor to student in the passage on teaching from *Maxims I*. The father repeatedly gives advice without pause for interruption. Great as these similarities are, the most revealing details lie in the differences between the two poems.

Where as *Maxims I* blandly states that a youth should be given time in which to prove himself, *Precepts* appears to posit some ways that a young man may actually use wisdom to demonstrate his worth. Within this ninety-four line poem, wisdom is explicitly linked to verbal control twice. Over the work's course the father delivers ten individual sections of what he considers the most important advice. It is highly significant, then, that in two of these cases the theme of moderating wisdom is present. Both times wisdom prevents foolish or improper speech:

Wes þu a giedda wis,  
wær wið willan, worda hyrde  
. . . .  
Wærwyrd sceal wisfæst hæle  
breostum hycgan, nales breahhtme hlud.<sup>45</sup>

In the first instance “worda hyrde” (guard your words) is in apposition to the command “Wes þu a giedda wis” (always be wise in what you say). This apposition implies that a wise person necessarily guards his words. The second instance is straightforward. Wise men are careful with their words; they do not heedlessly spew them forth. They deliberate before speaking their minds since unpremeditated thought can be “loud and noisy,” an outcome that is “nales” (not at all) desirable. Here, wisdom plays a moderating role to the feelings by keeping potential outbursts contained. The implication from this passage is

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<sup>45</sup> Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, pp. 48-50, lines 41a-42b and 57a-58b: “Always be wise in what you say, watchful against desires; guard your words” . . . “A wise man must be careful with his words, and think things over in his heart, not be loud and noisy.” The parallel of the second sentence to *The Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care* is notable and examined later.

that a young man will be thought well of if he is able to control his words. Much better than emotional eruptions are the thoughtful exchanges of information from *Maxims I* or the debates from *The Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*. The advice that these works give, though, must be viewed in context of their overall function.

*Maxims I*, as seen above, is composed of many seeds of wisdom that require elaboration to reach their full potential for instruction. Though the preceding section from *Maxims I* sketches some guidelines for education, there is no reason to suppose that these statements would not have been discussed and elaborated in a manner similar to other gnomic utterances. The poem states, for instance, that “one should teach a young man.” It does not, however, say exactly how this teaching should be conducted. Whether a youth will spend time in the classical schoolroom of St. Augustine’s *Confessions* or take part in the imitative form of learning later used by some monasteries is left to be decided.<sup>46</sup> The next didactic poem, *Precepts*, poses a different interpretive problem. While it is interspersed with maxims, the wise father takes an interpretive role—a role unparalleled in *Maxims I*. One instance of this explanatory action occurs in line 37 after the father has warned his son to avoid a litany of evil things including the love of women:

Forðon sceal æwiscmod oft siþian,  
 se þe gewiteð in wifes lufan,  
 fremdre meowlan. Þær bið a firena wen,  
 laðlicre scome, long nið wið god,  
 getende gielp. Wes þu a giedda wis,  
 wær wið willan, worda hyrde.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Cochelin, “Besides the book,” pp. 28-39 discusses the role of imitation used at the monastery of Cluny to train young boys for the brotherhood.

<sup>47</sup> Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, pp. 48-49, lines 37-42: “For the man who falls to loving a woman, a girl he does not know, will often have to go away ashamed. One can always expect to find sin there, hateful disgrace, long enmity against God, and overflowing arrogance. Always be wise in what you say, watchful in your desires; guard your words.” Translation Shippey’s.

Here we see advice expounded and clarified. You should not love a woman “forðon” (for) you will find shame. The advice is elaborated upon much in the way that a stand alone maxim would need to be so that its full meaning would become accessible. This appears to be a glimpse of the type of explication that a maxim could receive. *Precepts* can, then, be taken at something closer to its face value than a work as enigmatic as *Maxims I*. The seeds of wisdom are given in this work but here they are cultivated before the reader’s eyes. Still, there is no reason to assume that this poem was meant to be memorized and accepted completely. Even after the explanations of the wise father in the poem, the lessons remain open to further discussion and clarification, which could go in any number of unpredictable ways. Clear as *Precepts* may be, its clarity is relative only in comparison to very obscure companions. It is, just as *Maxims I*, open to interpretation, elaboration, and semantic expansion through discussion.

In the end, none of these works can represent more than the first, second, or even third steppingstone on the long path to wisdom. They serve, each to a differing extent, as starting points for the elaboration of individual ideas into greater thought. While they can not be taken as the exact wisdom of the Anglo-Saxons, these poems do reveal some cultural beliefs. They indicate the importance of a select group of the super-wise in controlling and explicating wisdom, emphasize the importance of guarding wisdom itself, and display occasions when it is culturally permissible to share this tightly controlled wisdom. As noted above, making large generalizations about a diverse set of texts can lead to a poor understanding of both the works and the culture that produced them. The three categories of wisdom exchange suggested do, however, provide a framework for vernacular belief about the transmission of wisdom that enables further inquiry. Some of

the significant commonalities among the works composing the corpus of vernacular wisdom literature, for example, intrude into translations of Latin texts like Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*. Consequently, a qualified distillation of these similarities is useful in studying the larger corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature. With this goal in mind, three general patterns of wisdom transference appear represented in the literature: first is the sharing of knowledge depicted in *Maxims I*, the "genial exchange"; second is the confrontation between Solomon and Saturn, the "disputational exchange"; third is the unidirectional didacticism exemplified in part of *Maxims I* and *Precepts*, the "didactic exchange." In both the genial and the disputational exchanges great care is taken to clarify that the parties involved are equal. This anxiety that all interlocutors be proven wise suggests a concern that only the wise members of an elite group control wisdom. Because of their skill, these wise men keep their knowledge within their fellowship, their "witan." In some places concern for the control of wisdom nearly reaches an obsession. When the teacher subdues and guides his pupil's mind in *Maxims I* there is a sense of overriding control. More than representing a simple transfer of knowledge, the didactic exchange depicts the molding of the student's mental enclosure. Great consideration, it seems, is given to the security of any mental enclosure involved in the transfer of wisdom, whether giving or receiving. The cultural importance placed on this security is, in a large part, justified by the potential disaster of its failure. As *The Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care* warns, a leaky vessel will spill knowledge, the drink of life, and condemn the wasteful person.

## The “Latinated” Tradition I:

### The Moderate Control and Containment of Vernacular Wisdom

Studied relatively little, the Old English translation of Gregory the Great’s *Regula pastoralis* displays a revealing range of examples of mental containment and its logic. Two sections in particular show unique adaptations of the mental containment theme prevalent elsewhere in vernacular Anglo-Saxon literature: *The Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care* refashions the stock theme of thought as treasure to stress the general importance of mental containment; conversely, a passage from the body of the Old English prose translation indicates circumstances in which it is ethically permissible to share thought. In spite of their different resolutions, the logic apparently underlying both situations demonstrates the same conclusion seen in the vernacular texts examined above: containment is the natural state of wisdom. Going beyond their vernacular influences, both *The Metrical Epilogue* and the prose section from the *Pastoral Care* refigure the traditional control of wisdom along hierarchical lines. Rather than the wise men from the vernacular tradition, it is a select few, the clergy, who appear to control wisdom’s release with authority from God.

On first reading, *The Metrical Epilogue* appears merely to echo familiar classical and biblical images of flowing water or “aqua viva.”<sup>48</sup> Some of the first lines of the work, for instance, are rooted in John 7:38. The Old English reads:

He cwæð ðæt he wolde ðæt on worulde forð  
of ðæm innoðum a libbendu  
wætru fleowen, ðe wel on hine  
gelifden under lyfte.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Hays, “Flumen orationis,” pp. 18-26 discusses the traditional echoes.

These lines paraphrase the verse from John which states: “qui credit in me sicut dixit scriptura flumina de ventre eius fluent aquae vivae.”<sup>50</sup> This clear reference to the flowing waters common in the Bible has the potential to obscure the prevailing focus of this work: containment.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the poem there is deep concern unparalleled in the Bible with holding and guarding this water. With all its connections to preceding Latin literature, this short poem displays adaptations of antique metaphors that cast light on an Anglo-Saxon ethics of wisdom. Like the *Prose Preface to the Pastoral Care* that T. A. Shippey links with a particular vernacular maxim, *The Metrical Epilogue* appears formed around modified maxims equating wisdom with treasure.<sup>52</sup> Here water rather than treasure stands for wisdom. While the more traditional metaphor has been adapted, the emphasis on containing the precious substance, be it water or treasure, remains. This water is not from an earthly well but springs forth from the Holy Ghost and is wisdom. The importance of maintaining control of this water is evident in its transmission:

Donan hine hlodan    halge and gecorene,  
 siððan hine gierdon    ða ðe gode herdon  
 ðurh halga bec    hider on eorðan

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<sup>49</sup> “Alfred’s Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care,” in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Dobbie, p. 111, lines 3-6: “He said that He desired that water should flow forth into the world from the bellies of those who well believed in him under the sky.”

<sup>50</sup> “He who believes in me, as the scripture says, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” This debt was first recognized by A. S. Cook, *Biblical Quotations in Old English Prose Writers* (London, 1898), 42. This information was forgotten until Cross, “Metrical Epilogue,” p. 384, reintroduced it more than sixty years later.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of water imagery in the Bible and a brief historical overview of exegesis surrounding John 7:38, see Whobrey, “King Alfred’s Metrical Epilogue,” pp. 166-7. Whobrey discusses two conflicting traditions of interpretation that existed on this passage with the “living water” either flowing from the believer or from Christ. The former, proposed by Origen, seems to have been the accepted interpretation in the Middle Ages.

<sup>52</sup> Shippey, “Wealth and Wisdom,” p. 353. In his article Shippey discusses the proverb ascribed to Alfred “þus queþ Alured./ Wyþ-vte wysdome/ is weole wel unwurþ”: “Thus said Alfred, wealth without wisdom is worthless.” Rather than an original coinage of Alfred this proverb represents a saying that “could have been in existence from time immemorial, waiting for Alfred to seize on it and make it the groundwork of his first and most original literary venture.”



geond manna mod missenlice.<sup>53</sup>

The “holy and chosen” draw from the well and adorn what they have heard from God. What they have then prepared now goes among the minds of men in a book. At no point in this process is the water representing wisdom allowed to be free. Though it flows, it flows between vessels. It is either held in the “holy and chosen” or set in a book. The necessity of containing this valuable “wisdomes stream” (stream of wisdom) is reinforced with an example of the contrasting ways that the stream can be used. It can either be held or released. Far better is to hold this stream:

Sume hine weriað on gewitlocan,  
 Wisdomes stream, welerum gehæftað,  
 ðæt he on unnyt ut ne tofloweð.  
 Ac se wæl wunað on weres breostum  
 ðurh dryhtnes giefes diop and stille.<sup>54</sup>

This passage clearly praises the containment of wisdom. Wisdom, the stream, must be guarded or it can flow out, becoming useless. Once again the body is the container with the lips acting as the seal preventing this precious liquid from being spilt. The containment is implicitly praised since the well becomes “deep and still” only “through the gift of God.” It strains credulity to imagine that in a Christian context a gift from God is ever supposed to be wasted.<sup>55</sup> In this context, it can only be a good thing when this well is held in “the breast of the man.”

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<sup>53</sup> “Alfred’s Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care,” ed. Dobbie, p. 111, lines 9-12: “Then the holy and chosen drew it (from the well); afterwards they directed it, those who obeyed God, through the holy books to this place on earth among minds of men in various ways.”

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., lines 13-17: “Some guard the stream of wisdom in their enclosures of the mind, hold it with lips so that it does not flow out uselessly. Instead, the well remains deep and still in the breast of the man through the gift of God.”

<sup>55</sup> Whobrey, “King Alfred’s Metrical Epilogue,” pp. 179-182, finds correlating sentiments expressed in Prv 18:4 as well as in Gregory’s *Regula pastoralis*. Wisdom, always equated with water, should be stored so that it is “aqua profunda” (deep water). Weber makes a marginal note of correspondence between Prv 18:4 and 20:5, which Whobrey seems to have overlooked: “sicut aqua profunda sic consilium in corde viri sed

Of course, not all can recognize the value of what they receive. The next few lines are concerned with the consequences of carelessness with the “stream of wisdom,” that gift from God:

Sume hine lætað ofer landscare  
riðum torinnan; nis ðæt rædlic ðing,  
tofloweð æfter feldum oð hit to fenne werð.<sup>56</sup>

Here is some of the clearest possible support for the necessity of containing the “stream of wisdom.” Those who allow this precious commodity to be wasted flowing away in streams across the land are chastised as unwise. The water must be held within, not allowed to escape. The idea of containment is further elaborated with the imagery of fields. Fields in Anglo-Saxon England had boundaries clearly defined by both nature and man. Useful fields were sharply delineated from the wilderness and those of neighboring settlements.<sup>57</sup> Not only was it essential to divide fields to determine which belonged to whom, but to resist the untamed forests and swamps that would press against this cleared land. In that sense, another layer of containment is added as the water should not be allowed to flow beyond the marked areas where it will be useful. This pure water must be held and turned to good purpose, not permitted to run off into the useless tracts, the swamps and fens.

After the brief interlude of pastoral imagery, the attention returns to the personal containment of wisdom. The next few lines discuss how Gregory the Great has prepared

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homo sapiens exhauriet illud”: “counsel in the heart of a man is like deep water but a wise man will draw it out.”

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-21: “Some let it flow away over the landscape in streams; this is not a wise thing, if such pure water, noisy and shallow, flows over fields until it becomes a fen.”

<sup>57</sup> For an extended discussion on boundaries, their establishment, and their significance see Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England*. Unwin, “Model of Anglo-Scandinavian Rural Settlement” provides insight on reorganization of settlement patterns and their boundaries in pre-conquest England in the context of contemporary field systems in Germany and Scandinavia. Whobrey, “King Alfred’s Metrical Epilogue,” p. 185, reminds his reader of Alfred’s familiarity with and probable dislike of swamps such as the fens of Somerset in which he hid from the Vikings during 877.

the well of God, again the stream of wisdom, and brought it to his readers' very door.

Within these lines the transmission of wisdom once more takes place only between secure containers. From person, to book, to person, the water of wisdom is never released at all. Instead, it is transported. The final lines of the poem especially emphasize the importance of secure containers for wisdom:

Fylle nu his fætels, se ðe fæstne hider  
 kylle brohte, cume eft hræðe.  
 Gif her ðegna hwelc ðyrelne kylle  
 brohte to ðys burnan, bete hine georne,  
 ðy læs he forseade scirost wætra,  
 oððe him lifes drync forloren weorðe.<sup>58</sup>

Those with secure vessels and only those are told to come often to the well of God. The secure vessel is alone trusted to carry the stream of wisdom. Conversely, a punctured vessel must be mended or grave things will occur. The owner of an insecure enclosure could “scatter the clearest of waters,” a line recalling the metaphor of field and fen where water becomes diluted and useless. Nowhere is it said that this precious substance should be dispersed in the hope that someone will absorb a drop. Quite to the contrary, it is only in “prepared” and contained book form that this wisdom is allowed to circulate and, even then, it can only be shared out to those who have secure vessels to receive it.

In a recent article Britt Mize also examines this short poem and appears to agree with the emphasis on containing the water through the first lines of the text:

The saints and elect have drawn from this water source, and those primary recipients have directed the flow into the world by means of books, so that others can partake of it. These latter-day, secondary recipients, once they have the living water, manage it variously.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Alfred’s Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care,” ed. Dobbie, p. 111, lines 25-30: “Let him fill now his vessel, he who brought a secure vessel here; let him come often to this place. If any follower brought a punctured vessel to this well, let him fix that lest he scatter the clearest of waters or the drink of life be destroyed for him.”

<sup>59</sup> Mize, “Manipulations of the Mind-as-container Motif,” p. 48.

The “stream of wisdom” is again seen moving from one secure source to another under the direction of those “holy and chosen.” The path between containers is once more outlined. This water moves from the “holy and chosen,” to books, and then to its readers pouring only between closed vessels. Mize, however, does not see the poem as emphasizing enclosure, arguing that Alfred is following the “example of Gregory and other fathers” by allowing wisdom to flow out to the people.<sup>60</sup> Citing as support lines 18-19a, “hine lætað / ofer landscare riðum torinnan’ (they allow it to run all over the country in streams),” Mize builds his argument that “Alfred does not say that it is imprudent for teachers, preachers, and writers to release wisdom in streams running across the land, as some have interpreted lines 18-21.”<sup>61</sup> Identifying what he calls an “ethics of reception,” Mize argues that it is permissible for the water to be released, with responsibility for its proper use resting both with those who have released it and with those supposed to receive it.<sup>62</sup>

While some elements of the poem may be supposed to advocate this stance, as a whole the work appears to discourage the release of water. Were Mize working within the system commonly found in heroic poetry where thought equals treasure, as he does so well elsewhere, then his argument for release would be correct.<sup>63</sup> As the final lines of the poem show, however, the work has moved outside of the heroic world and the metaphor has changed. The last six lines of the poem compose a modified maxim; these lines fit all

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>63</sup> Though not his main focus, Mize discusses the equation of thought with treasure in heroic poetry in two of his articles: “Manipulations of the Mind-as-container Motif” and “Representation of the Mind.” For other discussion of the heroic mind see Harbus, *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 161-182 and Matto, “A War of Containment.”

of the basic rules for a maxim put forth by Paul Cavill.<sup>64</sup> It seems that the author of the poem has simultaneously adapted both the vernacular metaphor of wisdom as treasure and the form of the Old English maxim to his needs. Because of these modifications, the poem is seated firmly outside the heroic system. While Mize argues quite correctly that it is a good thing to have water brought “from the heavenly wellspring ‘to durum iowrum’ (to your doors),” this water does not flow unattended to a person’s dwelling. Instead, the water follows a course between secured vessels. When it comes “to durum iowrum” the stream is contained in a book and is, in fact, called a well. This description of the book as a well links it to that of the man who holds wisdom inside until it becomes “deep and still” very much like the water in a well. It is, then, closed sources of wisdom that are valued. The book which holds the water, not a running stream, arrives at a person’s door. As J. E. Cross notes: “it is Gregory who channels the ‘spring of the Lord’ through his book, and readers may drink ‘the clearest of waters’. . . if their containers are *fæst*.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the second half of the line 19 contradicts the argument that water should be allowed to flow freely. Those who let water run over the landscape are explicitly labeled as unwise.

With the focus of *The Metrical Epilogue* established, there is some concern that this shorter work is simply parroting motifs found in Latinate literature. Though there are commonalities between the *Pastoral Care* and *The Metrical Epilogue*, the poem does much more than blandly repeat old themes.<sup>66</sup> *The Metrical Epilogue* displays a depth of

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<sup>64</sup> Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, pp. 50-52. According to Cavill, the following are the defining features of a gnome or maxim: the elements of a complete sentence, superlatives—when used—lacking an explicit base of comparison, a present tense main verb, a subject that is not a specific person, and no deictic reference to a specific situation.

<sup>65</sup> Cross, “Metrical Epilogue,” p. 386.

<sup>66</sup> Whobrey, “King Alfred’s Metrical Epilogue,” pp. 179-183.

metaphorical elaboration that reaches far beyond its possible sources. Allen Frantzen's work on prefaces shows that their use "implies the need for a supplement to the text" explaining the larger work.<sup>67</sup> *The Metrical Epilogue* is operating in a similar capacity to one of Frantzen's prefaces; positioned at the end of the work, this poem provides a final chance to instill a message in the reader. Thus, while either a biblical source or a passage from the *Regula pastoralis* can be matched with almost every passage in the epilogue, this does not detract from the distinctly vernacular concepts expressed within it. There are so many potential antecedents that it is impossible to select any single one as the source governing the overarching metaphor of containment in the poem. The biblical passages, while parallel, consist of one or two lines scattered between volumes of writing which do not encompass the metaphorical depth that the poem reaches. Though many possible sources exist, none of them demonstrates either the length or consistent concern with control exemplified in *The Metrical Epilogue*. Yet, while the poem is not dominated by the *Pastoral Care*, there are common themes in the two works. The central concern with containment addressed in the poem appears in the larger prose text. In contrast with *The Metrical Epilogue*, however, information about vernacular beliefs does not exist in the form of blunt statements and assertions. Instead, it is the changes made to the *Regula pastoralis* during translation that indicate the cultural logic governing mental enclosures. In some instances these changes are almost trivial; in others they are elaborate modifications that reveal the model of mental containment.

One place in which discrepancies between the intended meanings of the two texts are evident is in chapter twenty-two of the Old English version. This passage begins with

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<sup>67</sup> Frantzen, "The Form and Function of the Preface," in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Century Conferences*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), p. 123.

a quotation from Isaiah. The full quotation, as it is written in the Vulgate, is an injunction ordering those who carry the vessels of the Lord to be clean: “recedite recedite exite inde, pollutum nolite tangere, exite de medio eius, mundamini qui fertis vasa Domini.”<sup>68</sup> In the Vulgate these vessels are physical dishes of gold or silver from the Lord’s temple.<sup>69</sup> By placing these dishes as elements of the Lord’s temple, these lines from Isaiah are developing their symbolic significance. The translated passage makes a similar movement towards endowing these vessels with symbolic meaning. In Old English, however, the container image carries much different implications, as we have seen in *The Metrical Epilogue*. The first lines of the Old English prose passage are strongly reminiscent of the end of *The Metrical Epilogue* where the vessels represent a person’s individual mental enclosure capable of containing wisdom. This imagery of mental containment is reinforced through the word choice in the *Pastoral Care*:

Forðæm wæs ðurh ðone witgan gecweden: Doð eow clæne, ge þe berað Godes fatu. Ða ðonne berað Godes fatu, ða þe oðerra monna saula underfoð to lædonne on ða triowa hiera agenra gearnunga to ðæm innemestan halignessum.<sup>70</sup>

In both this passage and *The Metrical Epilogue* the mental enclosures are described as *fatu*. Yet, while the end of *The Metrical Epilogue* served in part as an enjoinder for people to make their enclosures secure, within the *Pastoral Care* the imagery is of already secure containers being transported by priests. In the context of *The Metrical Epilogue*, these secure containers appear to carry moral significance. It is not the leaky or unfit vessels that are carried to the “innemestan halignessum,” but those already fixed and

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<sup>68</sup> Is 52:11: “Depart, Depart, Go from that place. Refuse to touch unclean things. Go from the midst of her. Be clean you who carry the vessels of the Lord.”

<sup>69</sup> I Esr 1:7-11 provides a catalogue of the vessels of the Lord, making certain that metal vessels are being referred to in the Vulgate.

<sup>70</sup> *Pastoral Care* 13, ed. Sweet, p. 76, lines 1-4: “Therefore it was said through that prophet: ‘make yourselves clean, you who bear the vessels of God.’ They then bear God’s vessels who undertake to guide the souls of other men on the faith of their own merits to the innermost sanctuary.”

secured. The passage in the prose *Pastoral Care* strengthens the idea seen throughout the text and in *The Metrical Epilogue* that weak vessels are morally flawed and unworthy of containing wisdom. Only those secured are to be carried to the highest good: God.<sup>71</sup> Significant as well is the place to which these vessels are conveyed. “Innemestan halignessum” refers literally to the sanctuary of the tabernacle and holds connotations of spatial containment. These vessels are not taken simply anywhere; they are transported to the most central and secure place in the tabernacle, a place surrounded by numerous barriers and which a select few alone may enter. The secure containers are only moved into a secure area, reinforcing the message that nothing should escape from them.<sup>72</sup> This parallels not only the idea of containment expressed in *The Metrical Epilogue* that insecure vessels are bad and should not be used, but also strengthens the conceit that the natural state of wisdom is to be tightly controlled.

In the next few lines, attention shifts from the vessels being carried to the mental enclosures of those bearing the burden. The priests, since they bear the weighty responsibility of guiding souls to God, have reason to consider their own worthiness and to fear failure:

Geðencen hie ðonne betweoh him selfum hu swiðe hie sculon beon geclænsode  
ða þe berað on hiera greadum ða a libbendan fatu to ðæm ecean temple on hiera  
agenre borg.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> In reference to the idea that insecure or weak minds should not be taught too much see *ibid.*, p. 459, lines 6-8: “þæm lareowe is to wietanne ðæt he huru nanum men mare ne beode ðonne he acumen mæge, ðylæs se ráp his modes weorðe to swiðe aðened, oð he forberste” : “The teacher is to know that he can by no means give any man more than he can understand, lest the rope of his mind be stretched too much, until it bursts.”

<sup>72</sup> While a manuscript variant of *interna* for *aeterna* prevents an unreserved attribution of this apparent modification to Anglo-Saxon beliefs, in the context of this passage’s emphasis on enclosure, a translation to “Innemestan halignessum” appears to reinforce the theme of containment.

<sup>73</sup> *Pastoral Care* 13, ed. Sweet, p. 76, lines 4-7: “Let those then think between themselves how much they should be cleansed who bear in their breasts the ever-living vessels to the eternal temple on their own pledge.”



So heavy is their duty that individual meditation is not enough. They must think “betweoh him selfum” (among themselves).<sup>74</sup> In Old English, this three-word phrase indicates an action engaged in by multiple people, a communal effort. In Gregory’s *Regula pastoralis*, the corresponding section reads, “apud semetipsos ergo quantum debeant mundari conspiciunt [var. conspiciant].”<sup>75</sup> As a gloss to the Latin phrase “apud semetipsos” that it was meant to translate, the Old English phrase is inaccurate. The Latin idiom, in fact, means “to themselves” and represents much more an act of internal, individual reflection. With the Old English modification, the emphasis shifts from the internalization of thought to its externalization. In this passage priests are required to examine their possible faults, to reveal their own weaknesses, in an effort to rectify them. In a process of sharing much like the one urged in the opening lines of *Maxims I*, priests increase their wisdom, growing through the knowledge of their own imperfections.<sup>76</sup> It is possible that this change is simply the fault of confusion during translation. The modification, however, appears to fit the overarching pattern seen in what I am calling the vernacular tradition: namely, that the mental enclosure can be opened for the betterment of wisdom. This instance is a combination of genial and didactic exchanges seen before. Priests voluntarily open their minds in order to grow in wisdom together and teach each other. In that vernacular context, this small change becomes indicative of the pattern seen across texts and, consequently, gains importance. Here, as in other texts, opening the mental enclosure is morally permissible if it increases wisdom.

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<sup>74</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *betweoh*, sense A.12.b. “governing a reflexive pronoun (in *dat.* / *acc.*), indicating mutual participation in an action: with / to one another, reciprocally; *betweoh him* ‘between / among themselves.’” In this passage then “betweoh him selfum” means not “to themselves” but “between themselves.”

<sup>75</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 2.2, ed. and trans. Judic et al., p. 176, lines 11-12: “Therefore let them observe to themselves how much they ought to be clean.”

<sup>76</sup> Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred*, p. 135. Pratt also mentions the importance of leaders being men of “outstanding virtue.”

Continuing to provide insight into vernacular beliefs, the lines following the directive for priests to be clean supply a possible reason for these priests to fear failure and require improvement through personal disclosure. They are guiding the souls of their flock to God. This is the heaviest of responsibilities and, since they are undertaking it “on hiera agenre borg” (on their own pledge), they stand to bear the burden should they fall into error. The possible consequences appear to have inspired such fear that the priest was thought to be in danger of having his mental container overwhelmed:

Forðy wæs ðurh þa halgan stemne beboden ðætte on Arones breostum sceolde beon awriten sio racu ðæs domes on ðæm hrægle þe mon hætt rationale, & mid nostlum gebunden, forðæm ðætte sio oferflownes ðara geðohta ne meahte ofsittan þæs sacerdes heortan, ac hio sceolde beon gebunden mid ðære ilcan race, ðætte he ne ðohte naht ungesceadwislices ne unnytlices.<sup>77</sup>

The priest is in danger of having his heart oppressed by “oferflownes ðara geðohta” (superfluity of thoughts).<sup>78</sup> The idea is that an excessive amount of thought, or, given the possibly emotive aspect of wisdom, emotion caused by thought could overpower the priest’s mental faculties. So forceful could this “superfluity of thoughts” be that the priest has the “racu ðæs domes” (account of judgment) as an aid. What is given in the Old English *Pastoral Care* as an “account of judgment” has gone through two transformations before arriving at this point.

The origin of the “racu ðæs domes” is in a translation of *rationale*, the name given by the Vulgate for an article of priestly attire. This item was set with twelve stones, each

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<sup>77</sup> *Pastoral Care* 13, ed. Sweet, p. 76, lines 7-12: “Therefore it was commanded through the holy voice of God that on Aaron’s breast should be written the account of judgment on that clothing that is called *rationale*, and bound with fillets, so that the superfluity of thoughts might not oppress the heart of the priest, but it should be bound with the same account so that he not have thought anything unintelligent or useless.”

<sup>78</sup> The possibility of an overfull mind is also discussed later in the text when wheat is used as an allegory for words which could overwhelm the shallow mind, p. 459, lines 14-15: “ðylæs hira mon má geote on ðæt úndiope mod ðonne hit behabban mæg, ðæt hi ðon oferflowe;” “lest more of them are poured into that shallow mind than it can hold, that it then overflows.”

bearing the name of one of the twelve tribes, and held the two stones Urim and Thummim, understood by the Vulgate translator as “doctrine” and “truth.” It sounds as though the *rationale* is secured over the breast with gold chains so that Aaron can bear the “judgment of the sons of Israel”:

Pones autem in rationali iudicii doctrinam et veritatem quae erunt in pectore Aaron quando ingreditur coram Domino et gestabit iudicium filiorum Israhel in pectore suo in conspectu Domini semper.<sup>79</sup>

The Vulgate defines the *rationale* as only a physical object. At the same time, it is invested with symbolic significance by simultaneously holding doctrine, truth, and the judgment of the sons of Israel. While not explicitly allegorized in the Vulgate, the *rationale* appears to function, in medieval understanding, as a reminder to lead an upright life following the doctrine of the church and God’s truth. In his *Regula pastoralis* Gregory transforms this article of clothing intended as a reminder to live according to biblical standards into an allegory. This allegory depends on a pun made between the priestly robe *rationale* and *ratio* as a reminder that the priest should use reason:

Hinc diuina uoce praecipitur, ut in Aaron pectore rationale iudicii uittis ligantibus imprimatur, quatinus sacerdotale cor nequaquam cogitationes fluxae possideant, sed ratio sola constringat.<sup>80</sup>

In the Latin, the “rationale iudicii” is a symbolic reminder to use reason. This means more than to use logic in decisions or thought. In providing a cue to use *ratio*, Gregory is calling on the Latin tradition in which the higher rational nature is opposed to carnal appetites. By utilizing this tradition Gregory extends his allegory beyond enjoining

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<sup>79</sup> Ex 28:30: “Place in the *rationale* of judgment doctrine and truth, which will be on Aaron’s breast when he enters into the presence of the Lord and he will always bear the judgment of the sons of Israel on his breast in the sight of the Lord.”

<sup>80</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis* 2.2, ed. and trans. Judic et al., p. 176-8, lines 14-17: “Hence it is taught by the divine voice, that the *rationale* of judgment be affixed with fillets on Aaron’s breast, so that foolish thoughts do not take hold of the priestly heart, but it is bound by reason alone.”

priests to use reason and reminds them also to disdain pleasures of the flesh. In the Latin the *rationale* is attached to Aaron's breast just as it is in the Old English translation. The two key differences between the texts are the rendering of "rationale iudicii" and the absence in the Old English translation of Gregory's final Latin clause concerning reason. These changes transform the passage from an allegorical reminder to use reason to an elaboration of the vernacular concept of mental enclosure. A clear indication that the *Pastoral Care* has moved away from Gregory's allegorical interpretation is the division of "rationale iudicii" into two things: "sio racu ðæs domes" accompanied by the explanation "on ðæm hrægle þe mon hætt rationale." Suddenly there are two entities, the account of judgment, and the robe that is called "rationale." Translated in this manner, the focus of Gregory's allegory is lost.

While connecting itself with the vernacular tradition of mental enclosure, this passage elaborates the theme in a distinct way. More than reinforcing the importance of controlling wisdom so prevalent in *The Metrical Epilogue*, this section of the *Pastoral Care* strengthens and expands upon the concept of sharing thought to increase wisdom, a concept prevalent, as I have shown, in wisdom literature. The choice of *racu* to stand for *rationale* alters the meaning of this passage on a basic level. Appearing in only one other passage in the *Pastoral Care*, the semantic range of *racu* in this text indicates that it was understood as reasoning or an argument. This use of *racu* is supported by the dictionary definition and moves the "account of judgment" further from its interpretation as a reminder to use reason.<sup>81</sup> Instead, the "rationale iudicii" appears to have been perceived

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<sup>81</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *racu*, "I. an exposition, explanation, orderly account, narrative. . . II. comedy. . . III. The art of exposition. . . IV. an account, reckoning." From *Supplement* add: "Ia. reasoning, argument. . . V. reason. . . Va. reason personified."

as an account of judgment.<sup>82</sup> It seems important to the Anglo-Saxons to have the reasoning behind a decision. To a culture where wisdom, thought itself, has a communal aspect an unsupported statement lacks credence. The reasoning behind a decision is important perhaps so that it can be checked and better understood. The “*racu ðæs domes*” is conceivably a transcript of God’s “*witan*,” the debate explaining the decisions of the final Judgment. Thoroughly transformed during the Old English “translation,” what was the “*rationale iudicii*” also contains the “*oferflownes ðara geðohta*” (superfluity of thoughts). Whether acting as a force itself or as a reminder for control, this newly fashioned entity marks the cultural ethics of mental containment.

Though *The Metrical Epilogue* urges a stringent control of wisdom and the prose passage discussed above argues for a conditional release of thought, both demonstrate that containment is the natural state of thought. The two sections emphasize their points by drawing on vernacular concepts: *The Metrical Epilogue*, the writer’s last word, concludes with a modified form of the thought-as-treasure metaphor, while the prose passage is subtly altered to foreground vernacular beliefs. Yet the Old English sections examined go beyond adapting existing tropes or changing a text in translation. More than exemplify the rules of thought transfer, these sections appear to co-opt the clergy as an elite group controlling the ethics of mental containment. In *The Metrical Epilogue* the line of authority is clear. With God as the highest power, the “holy and chosen” direct

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<sup>82</sup> The second of two uses of *racu* in *Pastoral Care* ch. 30, ed. Sweet, p. 204, lines 1-4: “And ðeah oft gebyreð ðæt ða bioð mid liðelicre race gehwifde, & eft ða medwisan oft mid bisenum gehwifde. Ðæm lytegan ðonne is betre ðæt hie mid ryhtre race weorðen oferreahte & mid ðære race gebundene & oferswiðde” : “And yet it often happens that they (worldly people) are converted with mild arguments, and again the simple are often converted with examples. It is better then that the cunning be convinced with righteous argument and bound and overcome with that argument.”

wisdom and bind it in a written form that they, as the educated elite, control.<sup>83</sup> Likewise, in the prose passage from the *Pastoral Care* the priests compose the group that, while allowed to share thoughts, speak them only to each other. These texts represent a refiguring of the vernacular wisdom tradition along hierarchical lines. In the process of containing thought, the wise men of the vernacular tradition are supplanted by the clergy as the moderators of the ethics of containment.

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<sup>83</sup> Discenza, "Alfred's Verse Preface to the *Pastoral Care*." An analogue to *The Metrical Epilogue* is again found in the preface to the *Pastoral Care*. In her article Discenza convincingly argues that in his role as the interpreter of Latin texts Alfred is intentionally expanding his own authority by placing himself at the head of a chain of authority extending back to Pope Gregory the Great.

## The “Latinate” Tradition II:

### An Anglo-Saxon Ecclesiastical Wisdom

If *The Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care* and the prose passage from the *Pastoral Care* itself represent a bridge between the wise men of vernacular literature who control thought and the clergy who attempt to assume that control, then the writings of Ælfric display a tradition in which not just the clergy, but an elite group of clergy, control the definition of correct and incorrect wisdom. More forcefully than any text or author considered above, Ælfric asserts his prerogative as a clergyman trained to the highest standards at Winchester to determine the validity of other texts and the amount of knowledge suitable to place in the minds of others. The importance that Ælfric places on establishing his own credibility manifests itself in the numerous different techniques that he employs.

Much as the author of the *Metrical Epilogue* places himself and the *Pastoral Care* in a chain of spiritual authority, Ælfric displays a recurrent desire to place his education, and by extension the works he produces, in a reputable context. As many scholars have noted, the prefaces to Ælfric’s texts often include some reference to the schooling he received at Winchester under Æthelwold.<sup>84</sup> This learned genealogy enforces Ælfric’s own ability to discern correct teachings from incorrect. Ælfric does not stop at invoking his clerical history, however. He also directs attention to his powerful secular patrons. In this way Ælfric gains the weight of worldly authority to influence those swayed more by temporal power than by clerical prestige. Finally, Ælfric even attempts to establish the validity of his works through his own name. While to a modern reader this may seem

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<sup>84</sup> Wilcox, *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, pp. 68-69. See also Hill, “Life and Works,” p. 47 and Swan, “Identity and Ideology,” *passim*.

normal to the point of insignificance, the rarity with which medieval texts are attributed to, or claimed by, a named person lends this act special significance. Ælfric was using every technique at his disposal to enhance the correctness of his own works. The Old English preface to Ælfric's *First Series of Catholic Homilies* simultaneously displays these different methods for establishing authority:

Ic, Ælfric, munuc and mæsspreost, swa ðeah waccre þonne swilcum hadum gebyrige, wearð asend on Æþelredes dæge cyninges from Ælfeage biscope, Æðelwoldes æftergengan, to sumum mynstre ðe is Cernel gehaten þurh Æðelmæres bene ðæs þegenes, his goodnys sind gehwær cuðe.<sup>85</sup>

First Ælfric establishes his personal credentials; he is a “munuc and mæsspreost” (monk and mass-priest). By stating these two positions, Ælfric is giving the reader an indication of the knowledge he holds both as a person educated by monks, the most learned group at that time in England, and as someone who received training as a preacher. After connecting his name with those two positions, Ælfric demonstrates his relationship to Winchester where he was educated with a reference to “Ælfeage biscope, Æðelwoldes æftergengan” (Bishop Ælfheah, the successor of Æthelwold).<sup>86</sup> In affirming his connection to Winchester, a center of education, Ælfric is indicating even greater learning than the average monk or priest would have received and thus building his own authority. Ælfric's final strategy is to place himself under the protection of a powerful thegn, Æthelweard. It is at this thegn's request that Ælfric is moved to Cerne. With such a prestigious patron Ælfric has much less need to worry about his works offending, and in

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<sup>85</sup> *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: First Series*, ed. Clemoes, p. 174, lines 44-48: “I, Ælfric, monk and mass-priest, though weaker than is fitting for such orders, was sent in the time of King Æthelred's from Bishop Ælfheah, the successor of Æthelwold, to a certain minster that is called Cerne, through the request of the thegn Æthelweard. His status and goodness are known everywhere.”

<sup>86</sup> The Latin preface, coming just before the Old English preface in the *First Series of Catholic Homilies*, establishes Ælfric's relationship to Æthelwold much more directly (ibid. p. 173, lines 1-2): “ego Ælfricus, alumnus Adelwoldi, beneuoli at uenerabilis presulis, salutem exopto domno archiepiscopo Sigerico in Domino”: “I, Ælfric, a student of the benevolent and venerable prelate Æthelwold, send a greeting in the Lord to the lord Archbishop Sigeric.” Translation Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, p. 127.



his preface, Ælfric is revealing his secure position to his readers.<sup>87</sup> Ælfric, by associating himself with traditionally educated positions, a center of education, and an influential secular lord creates a powerful position for himself as an educated authority with protected status.<sup>88</sup>

It is vital for Ælfric to place himself within a secure chain of authority because he perceives a great need for correction in vernacular works. While Alfred, whom Ælfric references with approval, was seen in the tenth and eleventh centuries as having carried out a significant amount of translation into the vernacular, he did not share all the same concerns as Ælfric. As Godden notes, the translation of Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* supposedly done by Alfred "was itself seen by contemporaries as a heterodox work with some extremely questionable antique ideas."<sup>89</sup> The translation of Boethius, as well as the free additions made to the translation of Augustine's *Soliloquies*, shows a much less strenuous adherence to written authority. Thus, while Ælfric praises the works that he attributes to Alfred, he himself possesses a far more rigorous idea of orthodoxy than was displayed in writings before his own.<sup>90</sup> Much to Ælfric's apparent chagrin, however, Alfred's translation project seems to have at least indirectly inspired the translations of other works that were either heterodox or translated so poorly that they misled readers. It is these fallacious texts that Ælfric condemns:

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<sup>87</sup> Barrow, "The Clergy in English Dioceses," pp. 20-22. Barrow discusses the patronage of secular clerics in context of political and economic flux. Such patronage appears to have been a common practice and to have protected the cleric's position and standing.

<sup>88</sup> For discussion of the dates of Ælfric's movements to Winchester, Cerne, and Eynsham see Hill, "Life and Works."

<sup>89</sup> Godden, "Ælfric and the Alfredian Precedents," pp. 146-147.

<sup>90</sup> See Godden, "Ælfric and the Alfredian Precedents" for an extended discussion of which texts Ælfric actually attributed to Alfred. Godden argues that while Ælfric knew of the translations of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bede's *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, and Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, we can only be certain that Ælfric attributed the translation of *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* to Alfred.

Ða bearn me on mode, ic truwiġe ðurh godes gife, þæt ic ðas boc of ledenum gereorde to engliscre spreæce awende, na þurh gebylde micelre lare, ac for ðan ðe ic geseah and gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum engliscum bocum ðe ungelærde menn ðurh heora bilewitnysse to micclum wisdom tealdon. And me ofhreow þæt hi ne cuðon næfdon ða godspellican lare on heora gewritum, buton ðam mannum anum ðe þæt leden cuðon and buton þam bocum ðe Alfred cyning snoterlice awende of ledene on englisc.<sup>91</sup>

Here Ælfric, having already established his education and authority, engages in a short polemic against the “gedwyld” (error) in books written in English. Though he does not specify which books he means, it is probable that Ælfric is referencing texts without a specific tradition to give them credence. As Nancy Thompson convincingly demonstrates with Ælfric’s translation of the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, Ælfric trusted tradition much in the same way that his contemporaries did and “tended to believe what he read.”<sup>92</sup> Ælfric, then, must be referring to texts that he views as lacking an authoritative tradition of acceptance, though this body of works is still undefined. A problematic dichotomy between theory and practice is created by Ælfric’s own acceptance of tradition. In practice, it appears as though Ælfric uses written tradition as his standard. At the same time, he condemns other people’s acceptance of written information that, as written word, they perceive as authoritative. This problem is, in part, why it was so important for Ælfric to establish his education. As books were becoming increasingly common and providing different potential sources of ‘tradition,’ Ælfric was placing himself as the gatekeeper to correct knowledge. The importance of disseminating only correct information is revealed by Ælfric’s conceit of the mind.

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<sup>91</sup> *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: First Series*, ed. Clemoes, p. 174, lines 48-55: “Then it came into my mind, I trust through the gift of God, that I should translate this book from the Latin language into the English tongue, not through confidence of great learning, but because I saw and heard much error in many English books that unlearned men through their ignorance held as great wisdom. And it made me sorry that they neither knew nor had the gospel teachings in their own writing, except for those men alone who knew Latin and except for those books that King Alfred wisely translated from Latin to English.”

<sup>92</sup> Thompson, “Anglo-Saxon Orthodoxy,” p. 59.

As the preface states, unlearned men were accepting fallacies through their “bilewitnysse” (ignorance). Rather than the positive connotations of moral purity or ignorance of evil sometimes associated with the word, here “bilewitnysse” carries a pejorative sense; men are accepting what they read because they are simply too stupid to know better.<sup>93</sup> They do not have the discretion or mental acuity to filter out the errors in what they hear or learn, but rather blindly take the information that is given to them. In a sense, then, the minds of the unlearned are very similar to the mental vessels of the *Metrical Epilogue* and *The Pastoral Care* discussed above. The capacity, or ability, of each mind is, to Ælfric, fixed:

We rædað nu æt godes ðenungum be ðan eadigan were Iob. Nu wille we eow hwæt lytles be him gereccan for ðan þe seo deopnys ðære race / oferstihð ure andgit and eac swiðor þæra ungelæredra. Man sceal læwedum mannum secgan be heora andgites mæðe swa þæt hi ne beon ðurh ða deopnysse æmode ne ðurh ða langsumnysse geæðrytte.<sup>94</sup>

This narrative about Job “oferstihð” (exceeds) the understanding “þæra ungelæredra” (of the unlearned). The idea implicit in this passage is that the minds of the laypeople do not have the capacity to absorb all of the information about Job.<sup>95</sup> Even if Ælfric were to attempt a complete explication of the book, his audience would become “æmode” (disheartened) and “geæðrytte” (wearied) from the explication’s depth and length. The

<sup>93</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *bilewitnes* sense 3.a. “want of sense; ignorance, gullibility.”

<sup>94</sup> *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, ed. Godden, p. 260, lines 1-6: “We will read now at God’s service about the blessed man Job. Now we will explain to you a little about him because the narrative exceeds our understanding and moreover very much exceeds the understanding of the unlearned. One must speak to laymen according to the measure of their understanding so that they will not be disheartened by the depth or wearied by the length.”

<sup>95</sup> Further evidence of Ælfric’s belief in the limited absorptive powers of the lay mind occurs in his letter to Sigeward. *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, ed. Crawford, pp. 51-52, lines 844-847: “Ic wille nu secgan eft sceortlice þe be þære niwan gecyðnisse æfter Cristes tocyme, þæt þu mid ealle ne beo þæs andgites bedæled, þeah þe ðu be fullan underfon ne mage ealle þa gesetnissa þæs soþan gewrites: bist swa ðeah gebet þurh þas litlan bysne” : “I will now further speak to you briefly about the New Testament after the coming of Christ, in order that you be not altogether deprived of its meaning, even though you cannot grasp fully all the contents of this true Scripture; you will nevertheless be advanced somewhat in your understanding through these little samples.” Translation Magennis, “Letter to Sigeward,” p. 225.

spatial terms used to describe the minds of the laypeople are themselves indicative of Ælfric's understanding of the mind; like something tangible, the mind described here has a limited amount of space that can be exceeded.<sup>96</sup> The concept of human understanding being exceeded and the spatial vocabulary used by Ælfric to describe the mind seem to parallel a passage from the *Pastoral Care*. Towards the end of the *Pastoral Care* wheat is used as an allegory for words which have the potential to overwhelm the shallow mind: "ðylæs hira mon má geote on ðæt úndiope mod ðonne hit behabban mæg, ðæt hi ðon oferflowe."<sup>97</sup> Ælfric, whose writings echo the *Pastoral Care* in other places as well, ties himself into the tradition of conceptualizing the mind as something with a limited, spatial capacity.<sup>98</sup> Through his works, Ælfric is attempting to fill the space of unlearned minds with just the right amount of orthodox thought. These minds must be filled both to prevent error on their part and because their owners have a specific role to fill in the scheme of evangelism.

To Ælfric, it appears that the active life was the most desirable. Mary Clayton finds that Ælfric devalues the eremitic life to the extent that he "seems to have deliberately refrained from presenting the life of the hermit as ideal."<sup>99</sup> Much more important than contemplation were good works. Ælfric himself embodies the emphasis on the active life filled with good works. In his homilies for Christians, his letters answering theological questions, his translations, and his crusade against the error he sees in other texts, Ælfric is every bit the active evangelist. At Cerne, where Ælfric composed the majority of his homilies, it is very likely that the monks provided pastoral care to the

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<sup>96</sup> Davis, "Boredom, Brevity, and Last Things," pp. 328-329.

<sup>97</sup> *Pastoral Care* 63, ed. Sweet, p. 459, lines 14-15: "lest more of them are poured into that shallow mind than it can hold, that it then overflows."

<sup>98</sup> For echoes of Alfred in the works of Ælfric see Godden, "Ælfric and Alfredian Precedents," *passim*.

<sup>99</sup> Clayton, "Hermits and the Contemplative Life," p. 162.

community and shared with them a place of worship.<sup>100</sup> This situation would have been a relative anomaly but, as Wilcox argues, would have become more common as the Benedictine reform progressed.<sup>101</sup> This context places Ælfric in contact with many more souls than the monks of Cerne. If one imagines a chapel filled with both monks and laypeople, the circumstances surrounding Ælfric's emphasis on the active life become clearer. The fact that some laypeople would retire to monastic life must also be taken into account.

With people who had spent most of their lives outside of the church occupying positions as monks, the diversity of Ælfric's audience is almost assured. The presence of these former laypeople in the monastic setting could also help explain the content of those homilies of Ælfric that explicate tenets of the Christian faith seemingly too basic for the ears of lifelong monks. This simplified teaching further informs what appears to have been a larger view of laypeople's minds, held at least by the Winchester reform circle, that was similar to Ælfric's own opinions on the subject. Æthelwold, the teacher Ælfric so frequently references, believes much in the same vein as his student that the minds of laymen are of inferior quality. In his "Account of King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries," Æthelwold prefaces his discussion about laymen who join the church by stating that they, not scholars, require the following translation of the Benedictine Rule:<sup>102</sup>

Is þeah niedbehefe ungelæredum woroldmonnum þe for helle wites ogan and for Cristes lufan þis earmfulle lif forlætþ and to hyra Drihtne gecyrrað and þone halgan þeowdom þises regules geceosaþ; þy læs þe ænig ungecyrred woroldman

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<sup>100</sup> Wilcox, "Ælfric in Dorset," p. 58.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>102</sup> For a brief discussion of Æthelwold's authorship see "An Account of King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries," ed. and trans. Whitelock et al., pp. 142-143. Whitelock, "Authorship of the Account," provides a detailed study in support of Æthelwold's authorship.

mid nytnesse and ungewitte regules geboda abræce and þære tale bruce þæt he þy dæge misfenge þy he hit selre nyste. Ic þonne geþeode to micclan gesceade telede. Wel mæg dagan hit naht mid hwylcan gereirde mon sy gestryned and to þan soþan geleafan, butan þæt an sy þæt he Gode gegange. Hæbban forþi þa ungelæreden inlendisce þæs halgan regules cyppe þurh agenes gereordes anwrigenesse, þæt hy þe geornlicor Gode þeowien and nane tale næbben þæt hy þurh nytnesse misfon þurfen.<sup>103</sup>

At the very heart of this passage is the idea that the minds of laymen are not able to able to understand what the learned scholars can. The translation is necessary for the “ungelæredum woroldmonnum” (unlearned laymen) about whom the passage speaks with a patronizing tone. These lay converts may fall into error with their “nytnesse and ungewitte” (ignorance and stupidity). This is not a case in which the secondary meanings belonging to either of these pejorative words provide a different interpretation. *Nytness* primarily means “ignorance” but can also mean “laziness, disgrace, or ignominy.”<sup>104</sup> Similarly, *ungewit* carries the meanings of “madness, insanity” and “folly, stupidity.”<sup>105</sup> These two words, used in proximity to emphasize the point, leave no doubt that laymen, whether they become monks later in their lives or not, are thought to have lesser intelligence. So poor is the quality of mind in this lay population that Æthelwold is conceding the fact that they can not be expected to learn the Rule in Latin. Instead, he gives the “ungelæreden inlendisce” (unlearned natives) a translation to remove any excuse that they broke the rules through ignorance. Though this text is not one of

<sup>103</sup> “An Account of King Edgar’s Establishment of Monasteries,” ed. and trans. Whitelock et al., pp. 151-152: “It (the translated Rule) is nevertheless necessary for unlearned laymen who for fear of hell-torment and for love of Christ abandon this wretched life and turn to their Lord and choose the holy service of this rule; lest any unconverted layman should in ignorance and stupidity break the precepts of the rule and employ the excuse that he erred on that day because he knew no better. I therefore consider translation a very sensible thing. It certainly cannot matter by what language a man is acquired and drawn to the true faith, as long only as he comes to God. Therefore let the unlearned natives have the knowledge of this holy rule by exposition of their own language, that they may serve God and have no excuse that they were driven to ignorance by error.” Translation Whitelock’s.

<sup>104</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *nytness* sense I. “ignorance” and sense II. “laziness, disgrace, ignominy.”

<sup>105</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *ungewit* sense I. “madness, insanity” and sense II. “folly, stupidity.”

Ælfric's, it appears to express a conception of laypeople very like Ælfric's own: laypeople are stupid and inadequate, breaking rules and employing whatever excuse they can. Not only are these laypeople entirely inadequate, but they have infiltrated monastic ranks. With a mixed audience of monks, a retired semi-monastic lay population, and actual laypeople before him, it is no wonder that Ælfric felt a strong need to take action and correct errors that must have been, to him, painfully clear. There is also some evidence that Ælfric was exposed to laypeople beyond the context of village worship and pastoral care.

The third section of a letter written by Ælfric to an unknown "brother Edward" contains some indication that Ælfric ventured beyond the monastery walls:

Ic bidde eac þe, broðor, forþam ðe þu byst uppā lande mid wimmannum oftor þonne ic beo, þæt þu him þing secge, gif ðu for scame swaþeah hit him secgan mæge.<sup>106</sup>

The qualifier, "oftor þonne ic beo" (more often than I am), used in reference to Edward being in the country suggests that Ælfric himself ventured beyond the boundaries of Cerne. This qualifier could, of course, be intended by Ælfric as understatement meaning something along the lines of "you, Edward, tell them since I am never up country." In context of Ælfric's letter to Sigefyrth, however, with its reference to his becoming intoxicated while visiting, it appears that Ælfric was "up country" much more often than the Benedictine Rule would have prescribed.<sup>107</sup> Together these references to time spent outside the monastery paint Ælfric as an active local traveler in contact with many

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<sup>106</sup> Clayton, "Letter to Brother Edward," pp. 282-283: "I also ask you, brother, since you are up country with women more often than I am, that you say one thing to them, if, however, you can say it to them on account of shame." Translation Clayton's.

<sup>107</sup> *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, ed. Crawford, p. 74, lines 1-2: "Ðu woldest me laðian, þa þa ic wæs mid þe, þæt ic swiðor drunce swilce for blisse ofer minum gewunan"; "You wished to persuade me, when I was with you, that I drink excessively as if for enjoyment beyond my custom."

people. Ælfric's travels, in context with the mixed group of monks and laypeople whom he would have seen at church services, further illuminate the reasoning behind his emphasis on the active life over the contemplative one. Yet, while Ælfric certainly favored good works over the eremitical tradition, he did not assign the same duties to each group.

The beginnings of a system of labor division based on mental capacity appear in Ælfric's *Hexameron*. Here Ælfric outlines the responsibility of people with less mental acuity by contrast:

Du scealt gelyfan    on ðone lifigendan God,  
and na ofer ðine mæð    motian be him,  
ðe læste ðu dwelige    swa swa to feala dydon  
ðe ofer heora andgit    embe ðæt smeadon  
buton geleafan    and forði losodon.<sup>108</sup>

From this it is clear that Ælfric believes that it is not for everyone to ponder theological issues. Should someone delve too deeply without adequate “andgit” (understanding), they will be destroyed as many have been before. It is worth noting here that “andgit” is the same word that Ælfric used in the beginning of his homily on Job to describe the differing levels of comprehension between himself and the lay population. Ælfric's perception of the carefully ordered world places laypeople far from the realm of spiritual and mental inquiry. Rather than prejudice, this seems to represent the straightforward belief that these “simple” people did not possess the ability, the understanding, to carry out independent thought without error. No matter how simple Ælfric perceived the lay

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<sup>108</sup> *Exameron Anglice*, ed. Crawford, p. 41, lines 91-95: “You must believe in the living God, and not inquire about him beyond your ability, lest you go astray just as many did who thought about that beyond their understanding, without belief, and therefore perished.” Translation made in consultation with Crawford's.



population to be, he did assign them a role in God's overall design. Rather than advance theological thought, laypeople were to assure their favor with God by performing deeds:

Ic secge þe to soðan þæt se bið swiþe wis, se þe mid weorcum spricð, and se hæfð forþgang for Gode and for worulde, se ðe mid godum weorcum hine sylfne geglengð.<sup>109</sup>

Far different than the hermits who turn inward seeking a spiritual connection to God, the wise and successful person in Ælfric's world proves his worth through action. The actions of laymen held a specific benefit to the church, as Ælfric illustrates in his homily on the three servants who receive different amounts of money from their lord. To Ælfric the servants are rewarded according to their merit, with the servant who receives the most representing laymen. Ælfric foregrounds the importance of works in this story by doubling the money given to the layman because he teaches "other men about God through his good example":<sup>110</sup>

Se goda deowa þe ða fif pund underfeng gestrynde his hlaforde þærto oðre fif for ðan þe sume læwede men sind swa geworhte þæt hi, mid onbryrdnysse þæs upplican eðles, syllað gode bysne oðrum geleaffullum, and symle tæcað riht þæs ðe hi magon tocnawan be ðam ytrum andgitum, þeah ðe hi ne cunnon ða uncundan deopnysse Godes lare asmeagan. And ðonne hi on heora flæsclicum lustum gemetegode beoð, and on woruldlicum gewilnungum ne beoð to grædige, and eac oðrum unðeawum þurh Godes ege hi sylfe healdað, þonne styrað hi eac oðrum mannum ðurh heora lifes rihtwisnysse and gestrynað Gode sumne oðerne mannan oððe ma. Se ðe swa deð se gebrincð Gode tyn pund of ðam fif ytrum andgitum þe he underfeng.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>109</sup>*The Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, ed. Crawford, p. 15, lines 1-4: "I tell you in truth that he is very wise who speaks through works, and he has success before God and in the world who adorns himself with good works."

<sup>110</sup> Upchurch, "Pastoral Care and Political Gain," p. 70.

<sup>111</sup> *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, ed. Godden, p. 320, lines 54-66: "The good servant who received the five pounds gained for his lord another five beyond that because some laymen are so made that they, with devotion to the heavenly homeland, give a good example to other believers, and always teach the laws of that [heavenly home] which they can recognize with their outer senses, although they are not able to think of the unknown depth of God's doctrine. And when they are moderate in their fleshly lusts, and are not too greedy in worldly desires, and also guard themselves against other vices through fear of God, they then guide other men through the righteousness of their lives and gain for God some other person or more. He who does so brings ten pounds to God from the five outer senses that he received." I differ from Upchurch, who translates this passage as well, primarily in the reference of "þæs" in the phrase "symle tæcað riht þæs ðe hi magon tocnawan" (lines 57-58). Upchurch translates this as "always teach properly

Once again, it is through works, here figured as living a pious life, that the average person pleases God. These people give a *god bysen* (good example) and teach those laws of God that they are able to perceive with their limited minds. As members of a group who cannot think about the “uncundan deopnysses Godes lare” (the unknown depth of God’s doctrine), the people discussed here are clearly considered by Ælfric as below him in intelligence. Nevertheless, these laypeople are important since they bring more souls to the church. Part of the continued survival of the church, then, depends on the actions of these laypeople. This dependence heightens Ælfric’s interest in controlling what information the lay population receives by changing the stakes of that control.

Ælfric, as has been seen, views minds as vessels with fixed capacity. He also appears to believe that the minds of laypeople will take in any information given to them. Because this same unwary population helps determine the success of the church, it is vital for Ælfric to control the flow of information that reaches them. If he can provide them with orthodox teachings, then their actions will be correct and more people will come into the church’s fold. The concern for control is the factor that drives Ælfric to vehemently establish his authority in his prefaces. It is also why the Old English prefaces to the *First and Second Series of Catholic Homilies*, the *Grammar*, the *Translation of Genesis*, and the *Lives of Saints* contain remarkably similar passages stressing the importance of exact copying from the exemplar. The strength of this concern to Ælfric is indicated by the final words of his preface to the *First Series of Catholic Homilies*:

Nu bydde ic and halsige on Godes naman, gif hwa þas boc awritan wylle, þæt he hi geornlice gerihte be ðære bysene, þy læs ðe we ðurh gymelease writeras

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that which they are able to interpret.” In the context of the passage, however, it seems more likely that “riht” is a plural accusative meaning “laws” and “þæs” refers back to “eðles” with which it agrees in both gender and number.

geleahtrode beon. Mycel yfel deð se ðe leas writ, buton he hit gerihte, swylce he gebringe þa soðan lare to leasum gedwylde; forði sceal gehwa gerihtlæcan þæt þæt he ær to woge gebigde, gif he on Godes dome unscyldig beon wile.<sup>112</sup>

Everything is just as Ælfric desires in the texts that he has produced. He has prepared them to fill the minds of the unlearned and any deviation from his orthodox teachings by “gymelease writeras” (careless writers) will cause great harm. Ælfric gives much thought to the accuracy of copying because once a manuscript is produced it becomes a repository of knowledge. A book is a vessel in and of itself carrying the wisdom entrusted to it and, orthodox or not, that wisdom has a high probability of being interpreted as authoritative. Even Ælfric has a tendency to give the written word uncritical acceptance.

While in many places Ælfric appears to thoroughly examine the tradition governing a text or story before giving it his approval, there are hints that even he is occasionally victim to the excessive faith in books that he derides elsewhere in his works:

And se Halga Gast ða heora ealra mod þe ðærinne wæron, þæt sindon an hund manna and twentig manna swa onbryrde and onælde þæt hi cuðon ælc gereord þe on middanearde is, and hi ðurh ðone Halgan Gast ealle ða bec and ðone wisdom awriton and asetton ðe Godes þeowas rædað geond ealle ðas woruld.<sup>113</sup>

This passage is highly indicative of Ælfric’s perception of tradition. All of what were to be considered by Ælfric the correct books, began with instigation from God or part of the Trinity, here the Holy Ghost. Thus, any works that can establish a link to either a credible church father, an apostle, or a long standing literary tradition gain Ælfric’s approval.

These works he takes as incontrovertible fact, basing his translations and homilies on

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<sup>112</sup> *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: First Series*, ed. Clemoes, p. 177, lines 128-134: “Now I ask and implore in God’s name, if anyone will copy this book, that he write it carefully by the exemplar, lest we be corrupted by careless writers. He does much evil who writes faithlessly, unless he corrects it, as if he brings the true learning to faithless heresy. Therefore he must correct that which he before bent to error, if he will be innocent before the judgment of God.”

<sup>113</sup> *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, ed. Godden, p. 23, lines 141-145: “And the Holy Ghost then so inspired and inflamed the minds of them all, that is, of the one hundred and twenty men who were inside, that they could understand each language that is on earth, and through the Holy Ghost they wrote and established all the books and wisdom that the servants of God throughout this world read.”

them. When speaking about the Assumption of the Virgin, for instance, Ælfric makes it clear that the only valid information comes from divinely inspired works:

Gif we mare secgað be ðisum symbeldæge þonne we on ðam halgum bocum  
rædað þe ðurh godes dihte gesette wæron, ðonne beo we ðam dwolmannum gelice  
þe be heora agenum dihte oððe be swefnum fela lease gesetnyssa awriton.<sup>114</sup>

In contrast to the “dwolmannum” (heretics) who write books from their own thought or some vision, are the correct books sent from God. It is these holy books that Ælfric considers authoritative and which he claims as sources.

In his trust that the written word contains wisdom, Ælfric is reflecting a much larger Anglo-Saxon belief. Sections of the Exeter Book depict beliefs very similar to Ælfric’s own. The anonymous riddles contained in the Exeter book point to a conviction of the wisdom of books and their role as containers of wisdom extending far beyond Ælfric alone. *Riddle 26*, to which the answer is book or Bible, indicates the containment inherent in book form and advantage of the knowledge held:

Mec siþþan wraþ  
hæleð hleobordum, hyde beþenede,  
gierede mec mid golde; forþon me gliwedon  
wrætlic weorc smiþa, wire bifongen.<sup>115</sup>

The emphasis in this passage begins with the use of the verb *wrean* (here “wraþ”). On one level of interpretation this verb can simply mean “to cover.” The nature of riddles, however, is to invoke the multiple meanings of a word, or words, to concurrently confuse and enlighten the listener. As Fred Robinson has shown with *Riddle 47*, the implication of multiple meanings was a device consciously used, at the very least, by the individual

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<sup>114</sup> Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, ed. Godden, p. 23, lines 141-145: “If we say more about this feast-day than we read in the holy books which were set down through God’s direction, then we are like the heretics who wrote through their own direction or from visions many lying compositions.”

<sup>115</sup> *Riddle 26*, ed. Dobbie and Krapp, p. 193, lines 11b-14b: “Then a man protected me with book-covers, covered me with hide, clothed me with gold. From then on the wondrous works of smiths adorned me, surrounded me with wire.”

who composed *Riddle 47* and, more probably, by many Anglo-Saxon poets.<sup>116</sup> The intentional use of this device means that the reader must go beyond the primary meaning of a word and take into account the secondary or even tertiary definitions. The verb *wreon*, beyond its literal meaning of “to cover,” contains the ideas of protection and concealment.<sup>117</sup> The next verb, *bepennan* (here “bepenede”), adds another level of binding, strengthening the idea of enclosure.<sup>118</sup> Finally, the hero is said to have “gierede” (clothed) the book. With the further sense of “to make ready” inherent in this third verb, the idea that the book is not ready until it has been surrounded by multiple protective layers is added to the sentence as well as a third emphasis on containment.<sup>119</sup> In the second sentence quoted above, the verb *befon* (here “bifongen”) carries a strong sense of enclosure.<sup>120</sup> Together these verbs form a constellation of connotation. Their grouping together could not have been an accident. Rather, since these meanings must function as clues to the riddle’s answer, the grouping must indicate the composer’s perception that the knowledge held in a book, just as knowledge held in the mind, must—by its nature—be contained. Taken together, the lexical evidence in this passage illustrates a positive conceit of the containment of wisdom within a book. Though *Riddle 26* ends with an extended list detailing the benefits of reading, another riddle suggests what was one of Ælfric’s greatest fears: a person may not understand what they read.

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<sup>116</sup> Robinson, “Artful Ambiguities,” *passim*.

<sup>117</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *wreon* sense I.2. “with the idea of concealment,” sense I.3. “with the idea of protection.”

<sup>118</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *bepennan* “to stretch over, cover.” This verb is attested only here. See *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *pennan* sense I. “to stretch, spread out, extend, bend” for the root meaning of *bepennan*.

<sup>119</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *gierwan* “to make ready, prepare, put on, clothe, adorn.”

<sup>120</sup> *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *befon* sense 8. b. i. “to cover, envelop, cloth” and sense 8. b. ii. “to encase, cover, overlay.”

*Riddle 47*, the “Bookworm” riddle, highlights the idea that someone can read without benefiting from the knowledge contained within a book. As Robinson explains in his discussion of the riddle, the fact that it begins with the answer hints that there is something more to it:<sup>121</sup>

Moððe word fræt. Me þæt þuhte  
 wrætlicu wyrd, þa ic þæt wundor gefrægn,  
 þæt se wurm forswealg wera gied sumes,  
 þeof in þystro, þrymfæstne cwide  
 ond þæs strangan stapol. Stælgieþ ne wæs  
 wihte þy gleawra, þe he þam wordum swealg.<sup>122</sup>

While on a literal level the answer to this riddle of “bookworm” satisfies the given clues, the connotations once again direct the reader’s attention to another level of interpretation. The statements that the worm “forswealg” (devoured) a man’s sayings and that he “swealg” (swallowed) words are more than references to eating.<sup>123</sup> The semantic range of the root verb encompasses figurative meanings of learning.<sup>124</sup> If the riddle is interpreted on a figurative level, much as the proverbs and maxims above, then it is logical to assume that “wurm” in line 3a is also being used figuratively.<sup>125</sup> When it is understood in this way, the riddle express disgust with someone who reads but does not learn. Implicit here is the assumption that a person who reads should gain wisdom. There is faith that what is in a book is necessarily good and that an individual should benefit from imbibing those

<sup>121</sup> Robinson, “Artful Ambiguities,” p. 356.

<sup>122</sup> *Riddle 47*, ed. Dobbie and Krapp, p. 205, lines 1-6: “A moth ate words. I thought that a curious fate, when I heard of that wonder, that the worm should devour a man’s saying, a thief in the dark, an illustrious speech and something founded by a strong man. The thievish stranger was nothing the wiser, he who swallowed the words.”

<sup>123</sup> Robinson, “Artful Ambiguities,” pp. 357-358.

<sup>124</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *swealgan* sense II. “to take in to the mind, accept, imbibe (wisdom).”

<sup>125</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Bosworth et al., s.v. *wurm* sense II. “Ic eam wurm (vermis) and nales mon.”

contents.<sup>126</sup> Conversely, it is possible for someone to “steal” or make improper use of wisdom, as the moth does here. The theft weakens wisdom by destroying a part of the vessel thereby keeping it from another’s use. It is this cultural assumption that reading necessarily leads to wisdom, however, that makes Ælfric so concerned with the correct copying and transmission of his works. He knows that what is written will be interpreted as truth. Yet, as secure in his opinions as Ælfric appears, he must remain a single voice.

As multiple scholars have noted, the varying transmission of Ælfric’s works displays that there were multiple strains of religious thought at the time. Ælfric’s contemporaries appear not to have shared many of his attitudes. The repeated pleas Ælfric makes that his works remain unmixed with those of other authors often went unheeded. Possibly within his own lifetime, Ælfric’s productions were mixed with those of anonymous homilists.<sup>127</sup> The rigid orthodoxy that he attempts to project was ignored by some of Ælfric’s contemporaries who, when producing manuscripts, freely mixed his works with apocrypha.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, the inclusion of the *Life of St. Mary of Egypt* with Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, which, as Hugh Magennis convincingly demonstrates, conflicts with many of Ælfric’s views, hints that “the extent of the influence of his full message was a good deal more limited than he would have liked.”<sup>129</sup> Moreover, if John Blair’s assessment is correct that a great many localities in Anglo-Saxon England were associated with local saints, then it is logical that these cults must have produced vast

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<sup>126</sup> Scattergood, “Eating the Book,” surveys analogies between the Old English metaphor of alimentary wisdom and Classical Latin, Old Irish, and Middle English metaphors of ingesting wisdom. He finds that the idea is not at all unique to the Anglo-Saxons and that the *wyrm*, from any perspective, is committing a wrongful act.

<sup>127</sup> Wilcox, *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>128</sup> Thompson, “Anglo-Saxon Orthodoxy,” p. 60.

<sup>129</sup> Magennis, “St. Mary of Egypt and Ælfric,” p.111.

amounts of unauthorized hagiography.<sup>130</sup> Thus, a reader of Ælfrician texts must be cautious not to assume that this figure, who produced a monumental amount of literature, represents the beliefs of the entire Anglo-Saxon church. Instead, Ælfric represents only one of the groups vying for the control of wisdom in early-medieval England.

As a representative of this single group, however, Ælfric has very clear concepts of knowledge and the mind. As demonstrated above, Ælfric's obsessive attempts to control the transmission of his writings, as well as his denunciation of other works filled with 'error,' indicate both his attitude that orthodox knowledge is objectively correct, and the belief that he is in a position to determine what is right. Discussions by Ælfric of laymen and their mental capacity indicate that the same view of mental containers—that they are vessels with fixed capacity—running through the *Pastoral Care* informs Ælfric's writings. Because Ælfric seems to believe that the laymen's minds will absorb any information without question, it is vitally important that he fill them with what he views as correct knowledge. Ælfric, then, attempts to take over the control of wisdom so that he can pass on the good and weed out the evil. More is at stake for Ælfric, however, than simply the control of wisdom. The very survival of the Christian church, to him, depends on the actions and beliefs of the laypeople. In turn, these actions depend on the Ælfric giving them the correct teachings. As a cautionary note, the fact that Ælfric's works were mixed with others in exactly the way that he did not want demonstrates the impossibility of maintaining control of knowledge in any form. This proves that Ælfric's beliefs were not at all the only ones held by members of the church at the time. It seems that Ælfric, though officially backed to some extent, was not the representative of the entire Anglo-

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<sup>130</sup> See Blair, "A Saint for Every Minster?," for an extended examination of saints' cults in Anglo-Saxon England. Blair argues that there was a large number of local saints' cults, linking English practices with similar



Saxon church. Consequently, he represents what is perhaps the most extreme strand of Benedictine reform.

### Conclusion

Though ending with Ælfric's relatively extreme views, two larger ideas become apparent in the examination of the vernacular, moderate Latinate, and ecclesiastical Latinate traditions above: all three permit the exchange of wisdom if it will lead to improvement, either personal or institutional; and all three illustrate that wisdom is contained in its natural state. While the authorities governing the ethics of exchange and their reasons for that exchange differ, these two main ideas permeate the works considered above.

In the vernacular tradition, an elite group of exceptionally wise men control the cultural logic of wisdom's exchange. These men debated among themselves, elaborating on basic sayings to create higher wisdom. While they will teach the young, the emphasis on the taming and shaping of the unformed mind highlights the control inherent within the system of wisdom transfer. In both cases the exchanges take place for improvement. When wise men debate with each other, wisdom is improved. When they teach a young person, that individual is improved. The moderate Latinate tradition, represented by the translation of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*, marks a hierarchical shift in authority from local wise men to the clergy. These clergy, who bear the weighty responsibility of guiding others to God, disclose their innermost thoughts in order to improve themselves. Yet, as the changes made in the translation of the *Regula pastoralis* into Old English and the adaptation of traditional metaphors in *The Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care* demonstrate, this tradition too places great value on containing thought. Finally, the ecclesiastical Latinate tradition, the most stringent example of

hierarchical control of wisdom, allows for a third case of sharing thoughts. Wisdom must fill laypeople's spatial minds so that they can strengthen the church. Wisdom is once more shared for the sake of improvement, but it is not shared immoderately. Only an exact amount of wisdom must fill the mind. Should there be too much, it will overflow the capacity of a layperson's mind and be lost. Should there be too little, there will be room in a layperson's mind for evil. Once more wisdom moves from different containers with an emphasis on control. Thus, while subtle differences exist between each of the identifiable authors and the various texts examined above, there were two watchwords in an Anglo-Saxon ethics of wisdom exchange. No matter the tradition, no matter the genera, these two concepts prevailed: control and improvement.

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