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The beasts of battle: associative connections of the wolf, raven and eagle in Old English poetry

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The Beasts of Battle

Associative connections of the wolf, raven and eagle in Old English poetry

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Abstract

The term 'Beasts of Battle' refers to the scavenging wolf, raven and eagle that appear after or in anticipation of armed conflict in Old English poetry. This thesis argues that the beasts carry with them a body of associations that would have been strongly apparent to an Anglo-Saxon audience, with echoes of these associative connections still discernible by the contemporary reader. Various and often conflicting usages of the Beasts of Battle are examined, investigating sources, analogues and attitudes towards these three beasts both in Anglo-Saxon literature and that of associated cultures including Scandinavian, Celtic and the imported Judeo-Christian tradition. This includes a thorough analysis of the fourteen surviving Beasts of Battle passages which are then examined through the differing lenses of multiple associative connections. The analysis not only draws together but reinvigorates the ongoing debate on this topic, opening the theme up to multiple interpretations rather than seeking a single explanation for its usage, as has frequently been the case in past scholarship. A better understanding of the many possible Anglo-Saxon responses to the Beasts of Battle will lead to an improved comprehension of the significance and intended purpose of the theme's inclusion in so many of the surviving Old English poems.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

- the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,
- all translations from Old English are my own unless otherwise indicated,
- due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
- the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies and appendices.

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Thank you to my parents, Victoria and Michael, for instilling in me an enquiring mind and a lifelong drive to learn. Most of all, thank you to Edwina and Charlie.

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Introduction

In the wake of an army, the dark raven, the dewy-plumaged eagle and the wolf of the forest, eager for slaughter and carrion, give voice to their joy.¹

If we can wrest our attention from the fascinating human drama at the centre of Old English poetry, we notice that there are a host of animals prowling around the edges of the narratives. One group of animals appears so frequently and under such similar circumstances that they cannot be ignored and have excited discussion and debate among readers of Old English. They are the so-called 'Beasts of Battle'; the raven, eagle and wolf that appear in anticipation of or after a slaughter in those Old English poems that deal with the subject of battle.² The appearances of these beasts, whether in their role as Beasts of Battle or in other contexts, carry with them a host of implications. For modern readers these implications can be elusive, but would most likely have resonated strongly with the *scops*' (poets') contemporary audiences.³ Pettitt stresses the importance of a knowledge of Old English sources and analogues when attempting to properly appreciate a poem. He writes of *Beowulf*:

... the fact is that when we become familiar with certain aspects of the narratives from which *Beowulf* and its analogues are derived, our response to *Beowulf* is altered, and, assuming that those narratives were traditional and widely known, we may take it that our new response is closer to that of the original audience of the poem, and closer to that intended by the poet ... we have the opportunity not only of enriching our appreciation of *Beowulf*, but of making that appreciation more accurate in medieval terms: a vital factor in connection with a literary work about which we otherwise know so little.⁴

This thesis applies the above concept to the appreciation of the Beasts of Battle theme and examines the inferences or associations created by the beasts' sources and analogues that are likely to have been recognised by an Anglo-Saxon audience.

¹ Summary of the Beasts of Battle theme, from Mark Griffith, 'Convention and Originality in the Old English "Beasts of Battle" Typescene', *ASE* 22 (1993): 184.

² See Appendix B (p.213) for a full list of the Beasts of Battle passages used in this thesis.

³ The word *scop* is used throughout this thesis to reflect the poems' performative aspect and the Beasts of Battle themes' pre-literate roots. See pp.12–15 for a discussion of orality versus literacy.

⁴ Thomas Pettitt, 'Beowulf: The Mark of the Beast and the Balance of Frenzy', *NM* 77 (1976): 527. Pettitt expands further upon this idea: '... the inferences are both substantiated and enriched by checking them against the analogues ... which have by chance survived to us. In so doing we may bring ourselves closer to the minds of the Anglo-Saxon audience of the poem, and thereby be in a better position to appreciate what the poet intended, and the way he went about expressing it.' *Ibid.*, 535.

In his discussion of early Germanic animal imagery, Glosecki makes a number of observations that also ring true for the portrayal of beasts in Old English literature. He writes that Germanic animals:

... move across a spectrum of possible implications. Scholars in general have been too eager to narrow this spectrum. We should rather be expanding the possibilities for likely referents of these animal signs that have been left over from the Iron Age.⁵

This thesis also explores the extent to which the ‘spectrum of possible implications’ has been narrowed in the scholarly debate around the theme of the Beasts of Battle, arguing that the development of oral-formulaic theory and its application to the theme has served to constrain rather than widen the discussion around these animals. As Glosecki writes, ‘...we need to give these beasts wider range to roam’.⁶

Importance of this topic and original contributions to research

This is an important piece of research for a number of reasons. Firstly, the study of the Beasts of Battle theme has been neglected by scholars when compared with the significant amount of scholarship around the human protagonists of Old English battle poetry.⁷ No researcher has amalgamated the body of Beasts of Battle scholarship on this scale, nor have the beasts been examined through the speculative lens of differing conceivable audience reactions, thus moving towards a better understanding of the intention of the *scops*. Another unique contribution to scholarship in this area is the examination of the beasts through five main associative areas, as reflected in the chapter headings and detailed in the methodology section below – associations with doom and elegy, scorn and victory, Christian influences / interpretations, cross-cultural usages and influences, and lastly, an association with the fear of the wild.

Scholarly discussion of the *scops*’ use of these creatures has mainly been driven by the interest and debate concerning oral-formulaic theory, in which this theme plays an important part.⁸ The comparatively narrow scope of the chosen topic allows for more detailed analysis and

⁵ Stephen Glosecki, ‘Movable Beasts: The Manifold Implications of Early Germanic Animal Imagery’, in Nina Flores, ed., *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1996), 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ Not only human protagonists, but monsters such as Grendel have also received significantly more scholarly attention than the everyday wolf, raven and eagle.

⁸ Debate has typically centred around whether the beasts, as an example of oral-formulism, are ornamental or integral to the narrative. A similar focus has been on creative versus conventional usages of the theme within the formulaic confines – this discussion is revisited and expanded upon in chapter one.

understanding of the use and purpose of the Beasts of Battle theme, examined on its own merit rather than merely highlighted as a prime example of oral-formulaic composition, as has been the case in previous studies. The chief concern throughout this thesis is to reinvigorate the discussion around this theme by opening up the number of possible associative connections attributable to the three beasts.

One of the purposes of this research is to question the assumption that the Anglo-Saxon response to these creatures was predominantly negative, contributing to scholarship in related disciplines such as medieval studies, folkloric studies and the burgeoning field of animal studies, in which researchers may make the mistake of supposing the negative portrayal of creatures such as the wolf in later centuries was already well-established in Anglo-Saxon England. Chapter two of this thesis challenges the widely-accepted role of the beasts as harbingers of doom by presenting them as positive symbols of victory and scorn for the fallen enemy, reversing the traditional associations through a new reading of selected passages (including *Beowulf* 1799a–1803a, *Brunanburh* 28b–32a, 60a–6b and *Genesis A* 2159b–61b).

The exploration of the theme's usage is advanced through a focus on the placement of the beasts in the order of narrative events – that is, before, during, or after battle – which had a significant bearing on the associative power of the theme and subsequent audience reaction. Research into appearances of these creatures both across the body of Old English literature and outside the Beasts of Battle tradition serves to create new links and associations between different works. The theme is examined across parallel literary cultures including Old Norse and Celtic, contributing to the understanding of stylistic differences by comparing Old English subtlety with Old Norse and Celtic specificity. Theories of a skaldic connection (first put forward by Frank and Jesch)⁹ are revisited and expanded upon.

Another original contribution to research is my exploration of the ways in which the pre-conversion Germanic theme of the Beasts of Battle inherited a body of foreign (Judeo-Christian) associations after the conversion of England. The theme has frequently been identified by researchers as 'pagan' or pre-conversion, but inherited Christian associations – including a substantial body of allegorical meaning – have rarely been touched upon in scholarship to date.

⁹ Roberta Frank, 'Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences have a Skaldic Tooth?', *SS* 59, (1987): 338–55; Judith Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves: Beasts of Battle, Symbols of Victory and Death', *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective* (San Marino: The Boydell Press, 2002).

This thesis further contributes to the discussion of what it meant for a carcass to remain unburied in Anglo-Saxon England, in both a corporeal and spiritual sense, by building upon Victoria Thompson's work on responses to death in Anglo-Saxon England and applying her discussion of the reduction of human body to food to the Beasts of Battle theme.¹⁰ It is argued that although the beasts have traditionally been read as impartial agents of fate, there is evidence in the relevant passages (such as indications of the beasts' 'mood' and the noises they make) to suggest they sometimes displayed a preference for one group over another.

Finally, this research contributes to the understanding of the cultural linkages between beasts and outlaws in Anglo-Saxon culture, drawing a number of comparisons between the portrayal of the Beasts of Battle and that of 'wolf-like' human outcasts. Chapter five builds upon Lapidge's work on the psychology of fear (in reference to the monsters of the *Beowulf* manuscript) by applying his theory to the Beasts of Battle theme, thus reading the carrion-eaters as 'monsters' in the same vein as Grendel.

Manifold portrayals

Alongside the negative imagery of the Beasts of Battle, this thesis explores Anglo-Saxon depictions of these three creatures that present them in a positive light, in order to demonstrate that there was a significant body of positive portrayal that offset to some extent the more pervasive negative perceptions. Glosecki urges art historians to take the same approach with Germanic animal imagery:

Various possibilities, not all negative, should be articulated and explored in our effort to see the full spectrum of symbolic associations lurking behind early animal art.¹¹

Glosecki suggests that Germanic animal motifs would have had manifold implications for the people who crafted them, beyond the basic economic importance of animals in an ancient agrarian culture. These implications include 'myth, magic, shamanism, totemism, protoheraldry, warrior cults, rites of propitiation, of passage, of fertility, of diplomacy, and of warfare'.¹²

The literature that is the focus of this thesis belongs to a later era and different culture than the art about which Glosecki writes, but the origins of Old English poetry lie firmly in a Germanic

¹⁰ Victoria Thompson, 'The Understanding of Death in England 800–1100' (PhD thesis, University of York, 2000), 161–2.

¹¹ Glosecki, 'Moveable Beasts', 15.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

background. Among other scholars, Bonjour speculates on the source of the theme and concludes that its origins are ‘lost in the abyss of time’;¹³ that is, a Germanic agrarian/warrior past. Some of Glosecki’s above-mentioned implications (such as shamanism and totemism) would have died out with the proliferation of Christianity in Britain, yet we must keep in mind that although a Christian Anglo-Saxon *scop* may not have intended such implications to be attached to his image of a particular beast, they are still present in the theme’s origins.

The point to take from Glosecki’s article is that just as a modern-day reader can sense hidden implications behind an ancient portrayal of an animal, just so the Anglo-Saxons would have had the same experience with animal imagery in literature. They were, however, much closer to the origins of this imagery, and it is possible that there is a whole range of implications behind every animal (now lost to us) that was common knowledge among an Anglo-Saxon audience.¹⁴

An essential concept to grasp when researching any topic involving animals in Anglo-Saxon England is their importance in that culture, unparalleled in 21st-century developed societies. Jones writes that as we increasingly distance ourselves from the animal world, we find it more and more difficult to understand the close relationship with animals enjoyed by previous generations.

As man increasingly denies himself communion and contact with animals and birds, save for a limited sentimentality on the one hand and an unlimited exploitation on the other, inevitably he finds it ever harder to comprehend their insistent role in the lives and beliefs of his forebears.¹⁵

Animals in Germanic society were valued not only for their usefulness as food, prey, possessions, or companions to man, but as symbols, ideas and images.¹⁶ This positive summation of the human/animal relationship can also be applied to animals with negative associations, such as the wolf – hated for its literal role as a carrion eater and threat to livestock, but also feared because of its symbolic role as a harbinger of doom and omen of death.

¹³ Adrien Bonjour, ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle’, *PMLA* 72 (1957): 565.

¹⁴ Griffith writes, ‘The close relationship between warriors and certain beasts has its source deep in the Germanic imagination, and this link may provide the motivation for the substance of the [Beasts of Battle] typescene’. From ‘Convention and Originality’, 190.

¹⁵ Gwyn Jones, *Kings, Beasts and Heroes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 86(n).

¹⁶ Flores, *Animals in the Middle Ages*, introduction.

The linking of symbolism and moral interpretations to particular images, whether it came about through accident or design, serves a great purpose – to teach mankind about itself. As Flores writes: ‘[animals] were used to teach man some truth about his cosmos, or as mirrors to reflect the values of contemporary human society’. She notes that it is the task of scholars to debate how certain moral interpretations become attached to particular beasts. When there is a range of associations behind an animal image in literature or art, the task becomes even more difficult: ‘If the image does signify something beyond its obvious literal representation, which of the many possible meanings do we choose?’¹⁷ It is the large number of possible meanings inherent in the Beasts of Battle that makes this such an interesting topic – we are tasked with reading the beasts both intertextually and intratextually to seek the associative meaning intended by the *scop*. At the same time, it is important to avoid attaching a single association to a beast, as meaning is changeable depending on context. To quote Augustine:

Learn to understand when things are said figuratively; so that when you have read that the Rock signifies Christ, you do not imagine it to mean Christ everywhere. Here it means one thing, there another ... Do not then interpret these divine things so naïvely – as if you were to suppose that because I said above that the beasts of the forest signify the Gentiles, while I now say that they signify devils and fallen angels, I am contradicting myself. For they are figures, and in whatever place they occur they are explained by their situation.¹⁸

This thesis also seeks to trace Christian symbolism linked to the Beasts of Battle – a problematic task, as the theme is commonly thought to pre-date the conversion of England and thus any associative Christian meaning would have overlayed an existing body of pagan associations for each beast. There is an abundance of biblical references to animals, with commentators such as Isidore expounding on the symbolic meaning behind just about every creature known to the Anglo-Saxons (and many exotic creatures that were not). Augustine stresses the importance of knowledge of the nature of animals in his *De Doctrina Christiana* (‘On Christian Teaching’):

An imperfect knowledge of things causes figurative passages [of Scripture] to be obscure; for example, when we do not recognise the nature of the animals, minerals, plants, or other things which are very often represented in the Scriptures for the sake of an analogy...

¹⁷ Ibid., xi.

¹⁸ *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, in CCSL 40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), 1518–19. Trans. Marijane Osborn, in ‘Reading the “Animals” of *Wulf and Eadwacer* with Hrabanus Maurus’, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 29 (2003): 37. Osborn writes that Augustine ‘thus urges us to read the figure within its context, being ready if the context calls for it to utterly reverse the expectations and emotive meanings that we ordinarily associate with a particular symbol.’ Ibid., 37.

... A knowledge of the nature of the serpent, therefore, explains many analogies which Holy Scripture habitually makes from that animal, so a lack of knowledge about other animals to which Scripture no less frequently alludes for comparisons hinders a reader very much.¹⁹

Ælfric writes similarly in his *Hexaëmeron* (9–12):

*We wyllað ðeah eow secgan sum ðing deoplicor be Godes weorcum on ðysum soðum
gewrite ðæt ge wislicor magon witan eowerne Scyppend mid soðum geleafan and eow sylfe
oncnawan.*

We wish to add further some things about God's works in these truthful writings, that you can wisely see your Creator with true belief, and know your own self.

Like Augustine, Ælfric teaches that the study of nature will lead to an understanding of biblical animal analogies and their comments upon mankind itself. In particular, a lack of knowledge about a certain animal may cause a reader or listener to miss the significance of an animal acting against its nature. Creatures in Christian writing are often so overawed by the sanctity of a saint, holy hermit or other Christian figure that they do something unnatural, such as not attacking a defenceless human, or even helping someone who is in need. A well-known example of this trope is Daniel in the lions' den, or the bird that plucked the thorn from the crucified Christ's forehead. There are many other examples of such instances, and this holy 'power' over the wolf, raven and eagle is discussed in detail in chapter three.

Flores writes that the association of animals with symbolism is largely due to the influence of the *Physiologus* and its later development, the bestiary.²⁰ It is likely that the *Physiologus* was never intended to be read as a work of natural history, instead allegorising its beasts in terms of Christian dogma and interpreting animals as symbols of moral and metaphysical truths.²¹

Bradley writes:

Christian use of the *Physiologus* rested upon the belief that all things in the created universe offered by design some portion of the truth of God's purpose for mankind, or illumined some truth about man's nature, moral or physical, since man was the sum of the traits of the whole created world.²²

¹⁹ St Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Animals have been used as symbols and metaphors since classical times, a well-known example being the collection of beasts in Æsop's *Fables*.

²¹ Flores, *Animals in the Middle Ages*, ix.

²² Sid Bradley, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Dent, 1982), 352.

The *Physiologus* was extremely popular during the Anglo-Saxon period and it has been suggested that no book apart from the Bible was so widely distributed among so many people and for so many centuries.²³ Its popularity increases the likelihood that Anglo-Saxon *scops* and their audiences were in the habit of reading the associated meaning behind animals and are thus likely to have done so with the wolf, raven and eagle upon encountering the theme of the Beasts of Battle. Bestiaries, including *The Wonders of the East*, are explored further in chapter five.

Methodology

The remainder of this introduction will review previous scholarship concerning the Beasts of Battle and will situate this research within the existing debate. The overarching methodology in this thesis is to compare the various Beasts of Battle passages and examine how a shift in stress or context can alter the intended meaning and associations called up by the theme. These passages will also be contrasted with portrayals of the beasts outside of their traditional role, both in Christian and secular writing. There are many fascinating appearances of these beasts in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse art, but for the purposes of this thesis the focus will be upon their literary representations.

Chapter one, titled ‘Melancholy harbingers’, argues that the primary associations behind the Beasts of Battle are elegy and doom. Their function as heralds of impending violence is explored, along with possible associations an Anglo-Saxon audience may have made between the appearance of the beasts and impending slaughter or death in battle. The use of the theme to generate or heighten an elegiac atmosphere is investigated, and the beasts’ subsequent association with this mood. Also discussed in this chapter is the concept of *wyrd* (fate), the effect of different placements of the theme (before, during or after battle), ‘naturalistic’ (realistic) portrayals of the beasts, and associative connections between poems containing the theme.

Chapter two, titled ‘The final insult’, examines the beasts’ function as symbols of victory and scorn, in direct contrast to their above-mentioned association with elegy. Relevant poems include *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Genesis A* and *Beowulf*, all of which contain Beasts of Battle passages that can be read as scornful or celebratory due to the context of victory and a perceptibly ‘upbeat’ mood. The exulting, scornful or greedy ‘mood’ of the beasts and the way in which the noises they make contribute to the atmosphere of the theme is also discussed in detail. Another association explored in chapter two is the way in which the

²³ Edward Evans, *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Art*, (New York: Harry Holt, 1896), 62.

beasts can be read as a final insult to the slain losers of battle. The treatment of carcasses seen as undeserving of burial is compared with the burial/cremation of warrior-heroes such as Beowulf. Lastly, this chapter explores the idea of the human corpse reduced to the level of carrion, considering the despoilment by carrion-eaters in light of the Anglo-Saxon concern with the link between bodily preservation and the sanctity of the soul.

In chapter three, 'Diabolical beasts and miraculous obedience', the discussion is moved outside of the Beasts of Battle tradition to explore representations of the beasts in scripture and other Christian sources with which an Anglo-Saxon audience may have been familiar. The theme is discussed in the context of a major transition from paganism to Christianity which impacted strongly on cultural and literary traditions. Naturalistic representations of the beasts in scripture are explored, along with the Judeo-Christian tradition of the 'unclean' animal. The allegorical role of these beasts as symbols of moral and metaphysical truths and mirrors of human society is also considered, as reflected in the *Physiologus* and *Bestiary* tradition. The focus of chapter three is the tradition of the 'miraculous intervention', wherein wild animals (including the three beasts under discussion) voluntarily act against their own natures to assist or protect a Christian holy figure. Examples of this include the wolf that protected (rather than devoured) the decapitated head of St Edmund, and the raven that saved St Benedict from poisoned bread.

Chapter four, titled 'Raven-gladdeners', focuses on Old Norse and Celtic poetry, both of which contain Beast of Battle passages very similar to the Old English tradition, with important differences in usage and character. This chapter explores whether the association of the beasts with foreign/enemy cultures may have altered the Anglo-Saxon reaction to this theme. Old Norse works such as the *Poetic Edda* and skaldic praise-poetry, along with the Celtic *Mabinogion* and *Y Gododdin* are all relevant to this topic. Norse mythology contains figures such as the wolf Fenrir (who is destined to swallow Odin at *Ragnarok*),²⁴ Odin's tame wolves Geri and Freki, his raven spies Huginn and Muninn, and the eagle named 'Corpse-Swallow' that dwells in the branches of the World-Tree.

Chapter five, titled 'Denizens of the wild', discusses the concept of 'the wild' and associated human fears in reference to the three Beasts of Battle. Descriptions of the wild are often intertwined with darkness, particularly in *Exodus* and *Beowulf* in which hostile or unfriendly creatures stalk the night. Representations of the Beasts of Battle are compared with the treatment of monsters such as Grendel, followed by an exploration of the Anglo-Saxon

²⁴ The Old Norse apocalypse.

fascination with the exotic. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the wolf as an enduring symbol of human outlawry.

To conclude this thesis, a number of later usages of Beasts of Battle-like passages are identified, including *The Owl and the Nightingale*, the Scottish poem *The Twa Corbies* and Lydgate's portrayal of the aftermath of a battle in the *Life of Saint Alban and Saint Amphibal*. The vague but enduring perceptions of these beasts held by modern-day readers are discussed, particularly our (largely unfounded) fear and distrust of wolves and ravens.

All of the above-mentioned portrayals may have formed, together or individually, a frame of reference and conception of these three beasts that would have made the reaction of the *scops*' contemporary audience to the relevant passages markedly different from ours. The more we understand about the responses and associations made by the Anglo-Saxon audience, the closer we will come to understanding the significance and intended purpose of the beasts' inclusion in so many Old English poems.

Challenges

As with any research in this field, the antiquity of the sources and paucity of primary material make it difficult to reach any definitive conclusion with confidence. In addition, the oral tradition wherein these poems originated means the texts are fluid and dynamic. Caution must be used not to hold a single word or phrase as 'proof' of an argument, as the recorded version of any poem would have been one of many possible renderings. We are usually left with a single version of each poem, no doubt altered by the scribe as it was written down. Tracing a pattern for the Beasts of Battle theme is further complicated by the uncertain dates of composition of the poems, making it difficult to speculate upon whether the writer of one Beasts of Battle passage may have had knowledge of another in a related work.

Another consideration is the poems' performative aspects – the text would have been supplemented and enlivened by gesture, movement and vocalisation during delivery, and it is likely that the *scop* would have refashioned a story in light of his audience's response. Texts from the oral tradition are therefore unstable, meaning the surviving literature may or may not offer evidence for a complete understanding of the audiences' reaction to the theme.

Literature review

The body of scholarship concerning the Beasts of Battle stretches over almost two centuries from the time of Thomas Warton to the present day. In reviewing this work it becomes

apparent that critics can be grouped according to their particular angles or interests. Generally, scholars either believe the theme to be ornamental and unessential, or regard the beasts as an integral and functional part of the poems. Many scholars uphold this motif as a prime example of oral-formulaic theory, generating a debate which was especially vigorous in the 1950s and 1960s. Others (such as Grimm) focused on exploring the roots of the theme and discussing whether or not this is a purely pagan trope. A review of the literature has presented an opportunity to advance the debate around the Beasts of Battle with a thorough exploration of the multiple associations (both positive and negative) raised by the theme.

Earliest identification of the theme

The earliest discoverable identification of the theme can be attributed to Thomas Warton, who recognised the similarity between two Beasts of Battle passages:

... there is so close a resemblance between [lines 60–5a of the *Battle of Brunanburh*] and a passage in the fragment of *Judith* [lines 205b–12a], that it will not be too much to assume that they have been drawn from some common source, or that the one has had its influence in producing the other.²⁵

This search for a ‘common source’ tended to be the focus of Beasts of Battle scholarship up until the 1950s and the emergence of oral-formulaic theory, which overturned this idea.

Jacob Grimm was another of the early scholars to recognise the recurring theme running through a number of Old English poems and identify some of the relevant passages. His interest lay in finding a common source for the theme in Old North-Germanic poetry after comparing similar passages in Old Norse and Old English. In 1840 Grimm wrote that the motif was *durch und durch heidnisch*²⁶ (‘pagan through and through’), an opinion echoed by Stopford Brooke, who wrote in 1892 that the beasts ‘never became Christian in English song’.²⁷ Gustav Neckel was struck by the differences between the Old English Beasts of Battle and their more brutal Old Norse equivalents. He surmised that the difference was due in a large part to the Christian background of the Anglo-Saxon scribes while the Old Norse authors were almost certainly pagan.

²⁵ Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry: From the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century, Vol. 1* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1824), c.

²⁶ Jacob Grimm, ed., *Andreas und Elene* (Cassel: T. Fischer, 1840), xxviii. Grimm’s work reflects a Romantic interest in German antiquities that continued to drive scholarship well into the 20th century and is alive in the popular imagination today.

²⁷ Stopford Brooke, *The History of Early English Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1892), 129.

The contrast between the traditions is very significant. From this contrast one may discern the inner difference between Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse literature. The Anglo-Saxon poets, whom we know of through their work, are almost all ecclesiasts. Their work bears witness to a very profound Christianisation of thought and emotion. The Germanic element in their work is more or less external. It is restricted to diction, meter, style, and certain subject material from heroic literature. That the pagan mythology was replaced by the Judeo-Christian tradition is very important, yet not the most important factor.

The most significant factor is the new world-view which controls this literature, the characteristic, gently-serious emotion with which they express everything; the partiality to elegiac modes and splendid, moving imagery with hazy outlines. A battle description in the northern style cannot fit into this world; it would appear too crass ... It is too wild.²⁸

The 'wildness' that Neckel refers to is manifest in the behaviour of the beasts, who are rarely shown in the act of devouring carrion, although they leave little doubt about their gruesome intentions. The Old English beasts' 'hazy outlines' (or lack of detail) are further explored by Griffith, who writes:

The creatures are never extensively described: the raven is dark and twice said to be hook-beaked (*Brunanburh* 62, *Judith* 212); apart from its dewiness, the eagle is once said to be grey-plumaged and white-tailed (*Brunanburh* 62–3); and the wolf is twice described as grey (*Brunanburh* 64, *Finnsburh* 6), and once as lean (*Judith* 205).²⁹

The Old Norse beasts, on the other hand, are portrayed ripping, clawing and tearing at the bodies of fallen warriors. This difference and its implications are further discussed in chapters four and five, which expand upon the effectiveness of the *scops*' 'subtle' touch in Old English poetry. It is argued that Anglo-Saxon *scops* relied on the body of associations carried by each beast, thus reducing the need to describe the appearance and behaviour of the wolf, raven or eagle in extensive detail.

Oral-formulaic theory as applied to the theme

The term 'Beasts of Battle' was coined by Magoun in his 1955 article 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry',³⁰ a seminal work for this subject. He applied to Old English poetry the oral-formulaic theories of Parry and Lord, who had analysed the

²⁸ Gustav Neckel, 'Die Kriegerische Kultur der Heidnischen Germanen', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 7, (1919): 28–9. Trans. Hrafnhildur Bodvarsdottir, 'The Function of the Beasts of Battle in Old English Poetry' (PhD thesis, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1976), 28(n).

²⁹ Griffith, 'Convention and Originality,' 186.

³⁰ Francis Magoun, 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *NM* 56 (1955): 81–90.

compositional techniques of Slavic singer-poets (*guslari*) and utilised them in their study of the works of Homer. Lord tells us that:

Once a singer has a command of the common themes of the tradition, he has merely to hear a song which is new to him only once to be able to perform it himself. A Yugoslav singer told me last year that he made no attempt at word-for-word memorisation but learned only the 'plan' of the song, which he explained as 'the arrangement of the events'. This plan he then proceeded to fill in with the themes which he already knew.³¹

In essence, a learned *scop* would have in his mind a pool of stock formulas to draw upon, meaning that the audience could expect to hear a certain phrase whenever a particular subject or theme arose. This expectation and familiarity with poetic formulas led in turn to the audience associating certain phrases with particular expectations; in the case of the Beasts of Battle, an anticipation of slaughter and feeling of doom was often created. Magoun describes the singers' technique:

A singer faced with the problem of describing a battle or a banquet will not have time to meditate on how he is to set the scene up or what props are to be got out for the occasion. For this he must have themes ready-made...³²

Anglo-Saxon formulaic themes include Battle (with the Beasts of Battle a sub-theme), Sea-travel, Exile and the Hero on the Beach. The demands of Old English diction and alliteration further meant that a formulaic phrase was bound to be quite similar between one poem and the next. The fact that the fourteen Beasts of Battle passages focused upon in this thesis are so similar, however, makes the differences more apparent and more meaningful, with some *scops* deliberately positioning the beasts out of their usual context to achieve a different effect. The effect of context on meaning is summarised by Greenfield, who defines originality as 'the tension achieved between the inherited body of meanings in which a particular formula participates and the specific meaning of that formula in its individual context'.³³

Historically, perhaps the most exciting aspect of oral-formulaic theory is described by Benson, who writes '...it casts light on an area that we thought was forever darkened, the pre-literary history of Germanic and Old English verse.'³⁴ The origins of the Beasts of Battle passages in

³¹ Albert Lord, 'Composition by Theme in Homer and Southslavic Epics', *TAPA* 82 (1951): 73–4.

³² Magoun, 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle', 83.

³³ Stanley Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Speculum* 30 (1955): 205.

³⁴ Larry Benson, 'Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry', *PLMA* 81 (1966): 334.

particular were believed by scholars such as Bonjour to be ‘lost in the abyss of time’.³⁵ Grimm writes that the theme ‘breathes the oldest poetry of our antiquity’,³⁶ while Ryan notes that themes such as the Beasts of Battle are ‘confused recollections of beliefs which were once for writers no mere conventions or animal lore, but very deep-rooted in their ancestors’ emotions’.³⁷

Honegger writes that there is a general consensus that the theme ‘has its origin in the well-attested fact that ... carrion beasts feed on the corpses left on the battlefield’.³⁸ Oral-formulaic theory as applied to Old English poetry cannot pinpoint the earliest use of this theme, but it has shed light on possible methods of composition, reasons for its repeated use and its special place in the Old English poetic corpus.³⁹

While oral-formulaic theory found many proponents, Fry and Benson urged caution in its blind application, the latter writing that: ‘So useful has the theory proved and so widely has it been accepted that it is not surprising to find it already hardening into a doctrine that threatens to narrow rather than broaden our approach to Old English poetry.’⁴⁰ Schaar proposes that similarities in detail between poems reflect literary borrowing rather than evidence of oral composition,⁴¹ although this line of argument would appear to make assumptions about the *scops*’ access to rare manuscripts. Benson’s introduction of ‘written-formulaic’ theory is something of a compromise between the two theories. He points out that those poems that we can be sure were not orally composed (such as the *Boethius Metres*, or translations into Old English from Latin sources) contain just as high (or sometimes a higher) percentage of formulaic verse as those that are presumed to be orally composed. He writes:

To prove that an Old English poem is formulaic is only to prove that it is an Old English poem, and to show that such a work has a high or low percentage of formulas reveals nothing about whether or not it is a literate composition, though it may tell us something about the skill with which a particular poet uses the tradition.⁴²

³⁵ Bonjour, ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle’, 565.

³⁶ Quoted in Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth,’ 348.

³⁷ John Ryan, ‘Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Folklore* 74 (1963): 479.

³⁸ Thomas Honegger, ‘Form and Function: The Beasts of Battle Revisited’, *ES* 79, no.4 (1998): 289.

³⁹ See also Robert Diamond, ‘Theme as Ornament in Anglo Saxon Poetry’, *PMLA* 76 (1961): 461.

⁴⁰ Benson, ‘Literary Character’, 334.

⁴¹ C. Schaar, ‘On a New Theory of Old-English Poetic Diction’, *Neophilologus* 40 (1956): 304.

⁴² Benson, ‘Literary Character’, 336.

This would appear to be the general consensus among present-day scholars – that Old English poetry is heavily formulaic even when literary, and (as Benson writes) ‘...the study of its formulas and themes need not be based on an assumption of oral composition’.⁴³

In using the Beasts of Battle as a prime example of an oral formula, Magoun inextricably connected them with oral-formulaic theory, and since his seminal article there has been very little scholarship concerning this theme that fails to discuss its formulaic qualities.⁴⁴ A recent study by Harris discusses the difficulty of moving from formalism to aestheticism when reading Beasts of Battle passages.⁴⁵

Defining the Beasts of Battle

Another important aspect of Magoun’s article is his definition of various terms in oral-formulaic theory (drawing on the work of Parry and Lord) and his clarification of what constitutes a Beast of Battle passage.⁴⁶ Early articles on Old English oral-formulaic theory displayed some disagreement over the different terms (such as ‘themes’, ‘motifs’ and ‘type-scenes’), with Fry later noting the confusion and suggesting improved definitions. For the purpose of this thesis, a Beasts of Battle passage will be referred to as a ‘theme’ as defined by Albert Lord: ‘a subject-unit, a group of ideas, regularly employed by the singer, not merely in any given poem, but in the poetry as a whole.’⁴⁷

The Peterborough Bestiary gives an excellent definition of ‘beasts’, classifying them not by species but by their wild or savage nature. This gives us an idea of the Anglo-Saxon usage of the word that is entirely appropriate for this thesis:

The term ‘beasts’ belongs properly to lions, leopards and tigers, wolves and foxes, dogs and monkeys, and all others (except snakes) which rage by mouth or with claws. They are called ‘beasts’ from the force with which they rage; and they are termed ‘wild’ because they are

⁴³ Ibid., 340.

⁴⁴ ‘So closely associated with Magoun is the topos that the phrase ‘Beasts of Battle’ would itself now probably be felt as an allusion to the Oral Theory by most Old English scholars.’ Joseph Harris, ‘Beasts of Battle, South and North’, in C. Wright, F. Biggs and T. Hall, eds., *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 4–5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 3–25.

⁴⁶ Since Magoun’s identification of the theme it has been customary to use the term ‘beasts’ to describe the raven, eagle and wolf, although the former two carrion-eaters are birds.

⁴⁷ Albert Lord, ‘Homer and Huxo II: Narrative Inconsistencies in Homer and Oral Poetry’, *TAPA* 69, (1938), 440.

by nature used to freedom and they are motivated by their own will. They do indeed have freedom of will and they wander here and there, going as their spirit leads them.⁴⁸

A Beasts of Battle passage may contain all three beasts, two or even only one, and always appears in anticipation of, during or after a battle. This thesis also focuses on a number of appearances of wolves, eagles and ravens that do not adhere to the characteristics of the theme, arguing that it is likely that some of the fourteen Beasts of Battle passages may be in some way referential to these appearances outside of the theme. Alternatively, even if this were not the intent of the author, the appearance of a wolf (for example) during a battle may have touched off a recollection of unrelated appearances of wolves in the minds of an Anglo-Saxon audience.

Previous research on associative connections

Another invaluable article published soon after that of Magoun was Bonjour's *Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle*. Bonjour lists a number of associations behind the beasts, the first of which is the 'realism' they add to a battle description. The Beasts of Battle theme most likely originated through observation of a natural fact – that bodies left unburied will inevitably be devoured by scavengers. Bonjour writes that the theme was thus 'probably first used by *scops* in order to add a harsh and realistic note to the descriptions of battles and their sequels.'⁴⁹

A second association that has been explored in previous scholarship around this theme is the prophetic nature of the beasts and their function as a symbol of doom. Bonjour writes that their presence at an impending battle 'casts a shadow of death and slaughtered corpses in advance' and adds a 'lurking sense of the inexorability of fate'.⁵⁰ In his article 'Ten Natural Animals in *Beowulf*', Metcalf also calls attention to the beasts' role as symbols of doom and heighteners of melancholy and darkness.⁵¹ The approach of doom is a major association connected with the Beasts of Battle and is discussed in depth in chapter one.

A third association raised by previous researchers is the Norse connection and possible link between the Beasts of Battle and paganism. Ryan links the Beasts of Battle to what he believes

⁴⁸ The fourteenth-century *Peterborough Bestiary*, fols. 189–210v, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Library, MS 53, trans. Christopher de Hamel.

⁴⁹ Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 565. Thompson expands upon this point, writing that the real events referred to by critics such as Bonjour were 'not only part of normal life, but also carried a moral weight when depicted in a literary context' ('Death in England', 76).

⁵⁰ Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 566.

⁵¹ A. Metcalf, 'Ten Natural Animals in *Beowulf*', *NM* 64 (1963): 378–89.

was an enduring cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England, finding hints of pagan beliefs in the language of *Exodus* in particular. He writes of the theme:

... In a sense it may have been conventional before the Germans left the Continent, but it had a reality for the people in pagan times. Here [in *Exodus*] we may feel that the detested cult of Woden and dark necromancy is not far away ... The references to the birds and beasts of battle are most important. They can scarcely be held to be the result of observation or ornithological lore. As time goes on, they become rather blurred, the most vivid accounts occurring earlier in the literary period. This is what we should expect to happen as the details of the cult fade, as they are handed down in the folk-memory. At the earliest period they are particularly vivid and horrific, for then the terrors of the heathen gods had still a strong hold of the popular imagination. If the references are to a literary convention, then we may marvel, for there is no convention in the poetic texts which has such a long life, or is so pervasive.⁵²

The ‘blurring’ and fading of the tradition need not be attributed only to the vanishing of a pagan cult, but to its conventionality and somewhat mechanical overuse. Meaney disagrees with Ryan’s suggestion of a surviving pagan cult in later Anglo-Saxon times, writing ‘... it would be unwise to imagine anything more than attenuated half-memories of paganism, however much accompanied by strong superstitions, persisting after the late-8th century.’⁵³ Even ‘half-memories’, however, are worthy of further investigation. A vague association is an association nonetheless, and will help us attempt to understand how and why the Anglo-Saxons reacted to poetic representations of the Beasts of Battle.

Meaney and Bodvarsdottir both disagree with Ryan’s statement that the Beasts of Battle theme ‘can scarcely be the result of observation or ornithological lore’, pointing out that all three beasts were still populous in England in 1066 and were almost certainly present in the aftermath of every Anglo-Saxon battle. Ryan’s words are also contradicted by the fact that the basic description of the beasts as they appear in the theme is generally correct – wolves are grey (*þat græge deor*), eagles often have wet feathers (*urigfeðra*) and ravens are black in hue (*sweartan hræfn*).

Frank’s article entitled ‘Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences have a Skaldic Tooth?’⁵⁴ details some compelling evidence for an Old Norse source for the Beasts of Battle theme. Like Ryan and Meaney, Frank focuses upon the unusual language of the *Exodus* Beasts of Battle passage

⁵² Ryan, ‘Othin in England’, 477.

⁵³ Audrey Meaney, ‘Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence’, *Folklore* 77.2 (1966): 109.

⁵⁴ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth,’ 338–55.

(162a–8b). For example, she translates *wælceasega* as ‘chooser of the slain’ and suggests that it is an imitation of the Old English *wælcyrige*, itself a derivative of the Old Norse *valkyrja* or *valkjosandi*. Frank writes that this ‘recalls both the raven’s privileges on the battlefield and the Valkyries of Norse mythology who hover over the fighting warriors and, in the words of one skald, have their “choice of the slain”’.⁵⁵ *Wælceasega* and other notable compounds in *Exodus* are examined further in chapter four.

A review of scholarship in this area reveals a debate around whether the Old English Beasts of Battle were derivative of their Old Norse equivalents or vice-versa, or whether the two traditions held no influence on each other, developing independently from a yet-to-be-discovered Old Germanic source.

Jesch notes that the two traditions make very different use of the convention and summarises the main contrast as follows: the Old English beasts ‘evoke the grim expectation of slaughter, sometimes from the point of view of the eventual losers of the battle, while the Norse poets use them to glorify the victorious warrior who causes the slaughter.’ This tendency was strongest in skaldic poetry, ‘which has as its function the praise of warriors and chieftains.’ The tone of the Old Norse Beasts of Battle scenes is more often than not ‘upbeat and positive’,⁵⁶ starkly different from the brooding, elegiac tone of the Anglo-Saxon equivalents.

Jesch’s article thoroughly examines the use of the beasts in Old Norse verse, drawing attention to more differences than similarities between the two traditions. She notes that the treatment of the Beasts of Battle in the Old Welsh *Y Gododdin* lies closer to Old Norse than Old English treatment.⁵⁷

Associations with Christianity

Few scholars have thoroughly explored the link between the Beasts of Battle and the Christian tradition. Appearances of the beasts in Christian contexts such as *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Judith* are more often than not seen as throwbacks to a pagan past; museum-pieces in a post-conversion setting. The Beasts of Battle tradition almost undoubtedly pre-dates Christianity, yet *scops* continued to include them in the poetry for centuries after the conversion of England. The biblical equivalent of the Beasts of Battle theme is discussed in chapter three, including a

⁵⁵ Ibid., 350.

⁵⁶ Judith Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 254.

⁵⁷ Jesch’s discussion of the symbolism behind the Old Norse beasts is particularly valuable.

number of associations that the theme would have gained post-conversion as Judeo-Christian narratives and traditions were assimilated into Anglo-Saxon culture.

In his article 'The Battle of Maldon', Blake focuses on the terms *wælwulfas*, *hæðen* and especially *færsceaðan* (comparable to *helsceaðan*, the devils of hell who afflict a Christian's soul). He points out that these terms are used to describe the Vikings in the *Battle of Maldon* in a Christian light, further strengthening his argument with Old English biblical descriptions of terrible 'wolfish' or 'wolf-hearted' kings. Blake suggests that we see the Vikings as 'devils coming like wolves to destroy God's sheep'.⁵⁸ This is a firm step away from the commonly held view of the beasts' solely pagan associations. Britton presents the *Maldon* Vikings as consciously animalised, an unnamed threat impossible to identify with or even recognise as individual men. He compares their terrifying advance to the approach of Grendel in *Beowulf*.⁵⁹

Honegger writes that the theme of the Beasts of Battle was a secular tradition, the connection with Odin having vanished long before the Anglo-Saxon poems were written down. After dwelling on the beasts' association with *wyrd* (fate or doom) he identifies only one Christian variation on the tradition, Ælfric's 11th-century *Passio Sancti Edmundi Regis* (examined in chapter three). With this exception, Honegger states that 'a connection between the divine sphere and the Anglo-Saxon Beasts of Battle ... was more or less absent in all the known vernacular texts of the Old English period'.⁶⁰ Rejecting a connection with pagan or Christian deities, Honegger explores the beasts' association with slaughter, death and an atmosphere of doom.

In taking this stance on the lack of the 'divine' in this theme, Honegger does not consider the possibility of implicit associations made by the *scops* and their audiences. Although the worship of pagan gods is thought to have been more or less stamped out by the church by the time the poems under discussion were written down, the Anglo-Saxons lived comparatively close to their pagan past, and the Norse gods were later re-imported by subsequent waves of Viking invasions and settlement.⁶¹ Even if the beasts pre-dated Christianity (as is very likely), there is no reason why their mention would not carry associations of Christian analogues for an Anglo-Saxon audience thoroughly steeped in the Christian tradition.

⁵⁸ Norman Blake, 'The Battle of Maldon', *Neophilologus* 49 (1965): 333.

⁵⁹ G. Britton, 'The Characterization of the Vikings in 'The Battle of Maldon'', *N&Q* 12 (1965): 85–7.

⁶⁰ Honegger, 'Form and Function', 291.

⁶¹ For further information on paganism in post-conversion England, see E.G. Stanley, *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1964) and Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650 – c.850* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995) 99, 103–4, 114–15, 118–21, which demonstrate an ongoing focus on the extirpation of pagan practices in Anglo-Saxon England.

Conventional versus creative applications of the theme

There has been a running thread of criticism about the ‘conventional’ nature of the Beasts of Battle theme; with a recent counter-argument that at least some of the passages have been crafted with incredible skill and are anything but conventional. Neckel wrote in 1919 that ‘the [Beasts of Battle] imagery clearly originated in real experiences in old North-Europe, but had obviously become conventional.’⁶² Bonjour sees the use of the theme in *Beowulf* as exceptional, but argues that their use as heralds of a storm (battle) is very conventional. He writes of its use in *Elene*:

One cannot help feeling that the theme here merely belongs to the paraphernalia of warfare descriptions, like the raising of a battle standard, the clash of arms, and the usual noise of battle ... It seems to be automatically applied with reference to the raising of enemy armies ... as well as with reference to the first meeting of those armies.⁶³

Diamond disagrees with this view of *Elene*, praising the *scop*’s inclusion of the beasts in battle imagery and writing that the ‘poet handled the battle in a manner much more expanded than the essential story demands’ and, importantly, that ‘the term “cliché” is not a pejorative one in discussing oral-formulaic poetry’.⁶⁴ Oral-formulism, however, does not preclude inspiration and originality – to compose skilfully within this poetic tradition means to surprise your audience by working against expectations.

In his article ‘Form and Function: The Beasts of Battle Revisited’, Honegger identifies three different uses of the theme: naturalistic, mechanistic and creative. A naturalistic approach involves the appearance of the beasts where one would expect – in the aftermath of a battle, feasting on the corpse-littered *wælstede* (‘place of slaughter’). The second (and most common) use of the theme is when the beasts ‘mechanistically’ appear just before or during the clash of two groups. Honegger writes that this treatment of the beasts positions them as mere ornamentation and that in this respect ‘the “Beasts of Battle” are of no greater poetic value than the swords, shields, banners and all the other paraphernalia of battle.’⁶⁵ The third use is the creative application of the theme, in which a *scop* demonstrates his skill through the metaphoric use of the key terms or by removing the beasts from their conventional setting.⁶⁶

⁶² Neckel, ‘Die Kriegerische Kultur’, 26. Griffith makes the very same argument, writing that ‘through repetition it became formulaic and fixed ... and thereby lost its power to shock’, (‘Convention and Originality’, 179–99, 184). Thompson notes that the frequent repetition of the theme suggests that ‘it was seen as a necessary part of thinking about death in battle and elsewhere’ (‘Death in England’, 76).

⁶³ Bonjour, ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle’, 570–1.

⁶⁴ Diamond, ‘Theme as Ornament’, 461–2.

⁶⁵ Honegger, ‘Form and Function’, 295.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

The ‘conventionality’ of the beasts is closely linked to another scholarly debate; whether the theme is ornamental or integral to the poetry. Arising out of oral-formulism, the point was first made by Magoun, who states that it is ‘an ornamental rather than an essential theme’.⁶⁷ He writes that their presence ‘serves to embellish a battle-scene or a reference to warfare’.⁶⁸ Crowne writes, ‘... These additions are not merely “poetic elaboration”. They are elements of the traditional theme which the poet is using to fill in this part of the plan of the story.’⁶⁹

Ryan writes that the Beasts of Battle theme ‘occurs so often that it is usually regarded as something inherited, traditional, a sort of literary pyrotechnic, which can be guaranteed to give some élan and spectacle to a set battle-piece.’⁷⁰

In his article ‘Convention and Originality in the Old English “Beasts of Battle” Typescene’, Griffiths highlights unusual treatments of the beasts within the oral-formulaic framework. He writes that although they are ornamental and non-essential to the action of the narrative, the Beasts of Battle are functional in the sense that no battle exists without them. ‘They are symbolically essential to it, and cannot be eliminated without destroying [the battle’s] poetic coherence’.⁷¹ Griffiths sets parameters on what constitutes a battle worthy of the beasts’ attendance:

Whilst it is true that the scene may appear outside the usual context of battle (in *Exodus* where battle threatens but fails to materialize, and in the messenger’s speech in *Beowulf*), nonetheless, where pitched battle – as opposed to single combat or conflict with the focus on a single warrior – really takes place and is narrated, then the beasts are always in evidence.⁷²

Griffiths concurs with Bonjour that the *Beowulf* poet’s treatment of the theme (lines 3024b–7) was unusual and showed particular skill. This treatment of the beasts is examined in detail in chapter one.

⁶⁷ Magoun, ‘The Theme of the Beasts of Battle’, 83.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁹ David Crowne, ‘The Hero on the Beach: An Example of Composition by Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry’, *NM* 61 (1960): 367.

⁷⁰ Ryan, ‘Othin in England’, 468.

⁷¹ Griffiths, ‘Convention and Originality’, 184. Thompson presents a similar view: ‘The formulaic nature and frequent occurrence of the Beasts of Battle *topos* suggests that it was ... something without which no account was complete’, (Thompson, ‘Death in England’, 76).

⁷² Griffiths, ‘Convention and Originality’, 182.

Associations with fear and the monstrous

Grendel is one of the most popular figures in Old English literature and as such there is a wealth of scholarly discussion around whether he is a human being, an animal, a symbol or a monster. If Grendel is indeed a monster, scholars have sought to understand what exactly this means – what defines a monster, and what exactly makes one frightening? Lapidge's article 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror' is a valuable study on why we fear Grendel. He argues that the *Beowulf scop* plays upon two innate human fears – firstly, the fear of the unknown, and secondly, the *approach* of the unknown. The (possibly) deliberate withholding of Grendel's descriptive detail in *Beowulf* means the monster remains mysterious and difficult to envisage until late in the poem, with Lapidge quoting a number of psychological studies documenting the human fear of the unknown.⁷³ Lapidge's 'psychology of terror' can be applied to the Beasts of Battle as they share a number of traits with Grendel, including a shadowy nature or lack of descriptive detail and a certain inexorability in their approach when slaughter is imminent. Chapter five explores whether the beasts can thus be read as monsters through the application of the above criteria.

Research opportunities

As the above review has demonstrated, there has been relatively little targeted research into the associative connections of the Beasts of Battle. Much like the descriptions of the beasts themselves, speculation in this direction has often been vague. Ryan comments, 'It is ... widely admitted that the ideas, which were given heathen dress, meant a great deal – in some vague way – to the minds of the early English.'⁷⁴

The Anglo-Saxons had a love of the romantic, the mysterious, the vague, the half-expressed, and they did not readily cast aside all their heritage at the behest of the Church. We may accept the definition of their literature as being a fusion of pagan vocabulary and Christian ideas [...] the poet had a feeling for them, and a power to evoke half-sleeping memories.⁷⁵

The very vagueness of these 'half-sleeping memories' adds to their fascination. Even modern-day readers can feel a response to the Beasts of Battle passages that goes beyond mere repulsion at their grisly scavenging. It follows that the response of the Anglo-Saxons was considerably stronger. The primary research question of this thesis, therefore, is to

⁷³ Michael Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honour of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr*, eds. Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 373–402.

⁷⁴ Ryan, 'Othin in England', 460.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 479

understand the nature of this response through an analysis of the associations called up by the beasts. Ryan further comments:

... one hopes that, as for the original audience of *Beowulf*, the mention of the wolf, the eagle or raven, will rouse in readers some feeling for the past beliefs, some greater response to the poetry itself, and the primitive nature of the beliefs, in fact, more respect for the monsters...'⁷⁶

The application of oral-formulaic theory to Old English poetry has brought about the recognition of meaningful association between similar formulas in different contexts. Benson argues that '...the most significant contribution of the formulaic and thematic studies made thus far has been the demonstration that the Old English poetic language carried with it a richness of reference that allows us to approach these poems with an aesthetic sympathy.'⁷⁷

Isaacs similarly writes:

In oral-formulaic poetry, formulas and themes impart a denotative meaning elicited according to the precision with which they are used in the particular context; but over and above that they supply a host of connotative meanings evoked from the common store of suggestions, emotional and intellectual, which the particular formulas and themes hold in the hearts and minds of audience and poet. This theme of the beasts of battle should suggest other uses of the same theme and thereby broaden *and* deepen the sense of the particular context.⁷⁸

In his article 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', Greenfield writes (of formulism):

The most notable advantage is that the very traditions it employs lend extra-emotional meaning to individual words and phrases ... The associations with other contexts using a similar formula will inevitably colour a particular instance of a formula so that a whole host of overtones springs into action to support the aesthetic response.⁷⁹

This thesis seeks to clarify these 'overtones' through exploration and discussion of the beasts' associations with doom and prophecy, with victory and as a final insult to the losers in battle, with wolf, eagle and raven narratives from the imported Christian tradition, with parallel themes from the Norse and Celtic tradition, and finally with fear, outlawry and the monstrous.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 480

⁷⁷ Benson, 'Literary Character', 340.

⁷⁸ Neil Isaacs, 'Battlefield Tour: Brunanburg', *NM* 63 (1962): 242.

⁷⁹ Greenfield, 'Theme of "Exile"', 200–6.

This research revisits and reinvigorates existing Beasts of Battle scholarship with the aim of piercing the vagueness inherent in the majority of research concerning associative connections and reigniting the debate as to the purpose of the beasts' inclusion in so many poems.

We cannot know what the *scops* intended when they wrote down these poems, nor can we know how the audiences reacted or whether they had heard any of the other surviving poems containing Beasts of Battle passages.⁸⁰ The notorious difficulties in the dating of Anglo-Saxon poetry compound this problem. Without suggesting that an individual Anglo-Saxon audience member would have made all the associative connections set out in this thesis, we *can* surmise that he or she would have had some sort of response to the theme. The relatively high number of Beasts of Battle occurrences in such a small corpus of surviving poetry indicates that the theme was in all likelihood extremely widespread, well-used and well-understood by the Anglo-Saxon audience.

⁸⁰ Impressive progress has been made in this direction with projects such as *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, a register of written sources used by Anglo-Saxon authors. See <http://ota.ahds.ac.uk/headers/2453.xml> (accessed 19/1/10).

Chapter 1

Melancholy harbingers: associations with elegy and doom

Of the various associations accorded to the Beasts of Battle and explored over the course of this thesis, this chapter argues that the primary associations for an Anglo-Saxon audience would have been those of elegy and doom. These are the least speculative of the associations explored – that is, it seems more than likely that the *scops* used this theme with the intention of deliberately creating a specific atmosphere. The connotations discussed in subsequent chapters are treated more as possible associative developments through the changing circumstances of the Anglo-Saxons, such as the ascendancy of Christianity in England and contact with Norse culture.

Pervading the fourteen passages under discussion in this analysis is an atmosphere of melancholy – the elegiac quality beloved by the Anglo-Saxon *scops* and so palpable in poems such as *The Wanderer* and *The Ruin*. The elegiac tone serves to temper the excitement of an impending battle, dampening the mood and bringing to light the stark truth that warriors will die in the conflict. The qualities that make a passage elegiac can be difficult to define, and these passages need to be read in context to gain a broader appreciation of their elegiac effect.⁸¹ Inseparable from the Beasts of Battle and the elegiac tone is the concept of *wyrd* ('fate'), also explored in this chapter – as Bonjour writes, '*wyrd* ... looms large behind the theme'.⁸² This chapter explores the ways in which the Beasts of Battle were seen as harbingers of slaughter and doom, examining how they lent focus to the concept of *wyrd* and how they contributed to the elegiac tone of the poems in which they appear. Different usages of the theme of the Beasts of Battle will also be examined, ranging from the conventional to the creative, and their subsequent associative effects.

⁸¹ The elegiac atmosphere is particularly discernible when reading the Old English Beasts of Battle passages alongside their Old Norse equivalents. The Old Norse passages are more celebratory, the main difference in function being that they were written for eulogistic rather than elegiac effect. As Jesch writes, the tone of the Norse passages is 'quite the opposite [of the Old English elegiac tone]: upbeat and positive' (Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 254). Contrasts between the Old English and Old Norse Beasts of Battle traditions are further examined in chapter four, but for the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to note that the Old English beasts generally lack the celebratory mood of their exuberant northern cousins.

⁸² Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 565. *Wyrd* is a complex term with differing critical uses and responses – derived from the verb *weorðan* ('to become'), *wyrd* represents the same Indo-European root as the Latin term *vertere* ('to turn') in all its compound manifestations. *Wyrd* means both 'what has happened' and 'what will happen', an important consideration for the ways in which the Beasts of Battle are used in the poetry as representatives of fate. See *wyrd* in Joseph Bosworth and T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 751.

To understand the elegiac quality of these passages, it is important to ask how this atmosphere is created, and, in the particular case of the Beasts of Battle, the elements of which it is comprised. ‘Elegy’ itself is a difficult term with a long and varied history in Western literature.⁸³ The lyrical Old English usage of the genre as a vehicle for lamenting loss while imparting wisdom strayed a long way from the original Ancient Greek usage, and further still from the Roman interpretation of the genre. The elegies of 18th-century English poets such as Thomas Gray moved our understanding of the term to that of a sombre meditation,⁸⁴ as opposed to the plaintive atmosphere of elegiac poems within the Anglo-Saxon corpus including *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife’s Lament* and *The Husband’s Message*.⁸⁵

We can break down the factors that lend an elegiac or mournful effect to the poetry as follows: the fundamental linkage of the beasts with slaughter and death; the importance of the placement of the beasts, which led to their being credited with prescience and becoming harbingers of doom; the link with *wyrd*; the physical characteristics and behaviour of the beasts – that is, their appearance (including colour) and the sounds we are told they make; the fact that the beasts appear regardless of the outcome of battle – they generally do not take sides, but circle with equal enthusiasm around the carcasses littering, for example, the battlefield of Brunanburh (in which the Anglo-Saxon defenders were victorious) and Maldon (in which the Anglo-Saxons were defeated).

To begin with, it is useful to explore the beasts in their fundamental role which in all likelihood led to their original association with slaughter and death. To do so it is necessary to attempt to trace the theme back to its rawest state – a poetic description of real-life carrion beasts feasting in the aftermath of a battle.

The ‘naturalistic’ placement of the beasts

To treat this topic chronologically is problematic and compounded by the difficulty scholars have faced in dating the surviving Old English poems. As noted in the introduction to this

⁸³ For the purposes of this thesis, the term ‘elegiac’ refers to both an attitude and a poetic genre.

⁸⁴ See Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

⁸⁵ Both *The Wife’s Lament* and *The Husband’s Message* are deemed to be representative of elegy, yet the former is dark and brooding while the latter carries a positive tone, the period of hardship, loss and isolation now being in the past. Consequently, they are usually paired in critical discussions and often treated as complementary, or two parts of a whole. Thus both positive and negative elegy is possible, and we should expect dichotomies with an elegiac poem such as loss and recovery, death and life, sadness and happiness, or distancing and reunion. The most skilful *scops* play against the tensions inherent in generic classification to surprise their audience.

thesis, the first usages of the theme must be ‘lost in the abyss of time’⁸⁶ – that is, the continental Germanic past. We can only assume that the theme originated through observation of a natural event – bodies left unburied being devoured by scavengers. Bonjour writes that it was thus ‘probably first used by *scops* in order to add a harsh and realistic note to the descriptions of battles and their sequels.’⁸⁷ Hall takes this discussion further by arguing the reality of the Beasts of Battle scavenging on ancient European battlefields means that we do not need to look to the folklore or ‘cultic beliefs’ of Germanic peoples to explain the origin and use of the theme,⁸⁸ but it could be argued that this statement constricts rather than enriches our understanding of the theme. Even if we could be one hundred per cent sure of the realistic/naturalistic origin of the theme (we cannot), this does not preclude a folkloric or cultic tradition around the wolf, raven and eagle that influenced the emergence of the Beasts of Battle theme.

The poems in which the beasts appear *after* battle can be seen as relaying a believable series of events, and generating what might be labelled the earliest associative effect of the Beasts of Battle – realism.⁸⁹ Interestingly, only four of the fourteen surviving passages place the beasts after the conflict – *The Battle of Brunanburh* 60a–5b, *Genesis A* 2087b–9a and 2159b–61b, and *Judith* 292b–6a.⁹⁰ Honegger, who describes this placement as a ‘naturalistic approach’,⁹¹ criticises the *scops* of *Brunanburh*, *Genesis A* and *Judith* for unimaginative usages of the

⁸⁶ Bonjour, ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle’, 565.

⁸⁷ ‘We may surmise that it started from a striking and well-attested fact, namely, that the corpses of warriors fallen in battle were subsequently eaten by ravens and wolves, if left exposed on the *wælstow*. This little zoologic datum thus became associated with the unpleasant and grim aspect of warfare, just as we now associate death and buried bodies with maggots’, (Ibid., 565).

⁸⁸ J. Hall, ‘Exodus 166B, CWYLDROF; 162–167, The Beasts of Battle’, *Neophilologus* 74 (1990): 115. Griffith writes that ‘the actions of the beasts may well have begun as nothing more than a particularly morbid and macabre observation of real events’, (Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality’, 184). Thompson argues that being eaten by scavengers ‘was a part of life which needed to be confronted in a society that perceived itself as violent and lived very close to the food chain. Deaths like these form part of the fate of *ecghefe* [‘sword-hatred’] and as such the [theme of the Beasts of Battle] was a reminder to warriors to keep their souls in good order’, (Thompson, ‘Death in England’, 76–7).

⁸⁹ Honegger writes that the beasts ‘had the actual habit of frequenting places of carnage; this ... must have created strong associative ties with death and destruction’, (‘Form and Function’, 291). Meaney similarly writes that the beasts would have been a usual sight in Anglo-Saxon England: ‘... we can be sure that since wolves, ravens and eagles were still numerous in 1066 ... their presence would be noticeable at any Anglo-Saxon battle’, (‘Woden in England’, 112).

⁹⁰ A note about the dangers of statistical analysis: the body of surviving Old-English poetry is not large and what has survived has done so by chance, so conclusions based on such evidence must always be drawn with caution. Presumably there existed lost poems, perhaps never written down, pre-dating the surviving Beasts of Battle passages and also treating the beasts in this naturalistic manner. Renoir writes, ‘Considering the pitifully diminutive size of the surviving Old-English poetic corpus, we may assume that the three Beasts of Battle appeared in many poems long since lost and that the audience was thoroughly familiar with their meaning’, (Alain Renoir, ‘*Judith* and the Limits of Poetry’, *ES* 43 (1962): 152).

⁹¹ Honegger, ‘Form and Function’, 291.

theme – more specifically, for leaving the beasts in their natural position at the aftermath of battles:

The feeling conveyed by these lines [*Brunanburh* 60a–5b] can best be characterised as morbid melancholy in the aftermath of doom, drained of the expectation which elsewhere accompanies the appearance of the Beasts of Battle before the fight ... The influence [of the beasts] is limited to the ‘battlefield-tableau’ and extends neither into the future nor into the past. The poet alters little of what he finds in battlefield reality, and does not remove the Beasts of Battle from their natural surroundings to reinforce and to make better use of their poetic potential, as most other poets did.⁹²

It could be argued that realism can go hand-in-hand with symbolism, allegory and originality, yet Honegger makes a valid point that the earliest form of the theme has a basic pattern which is diverged from by later *scops* (with subsequent associative consequences) but conformed to in the four passages listed above. These poems present the Beasts of Battle in their fundamental form, providing a convincing explanation for their strong and lasting association with slaughter and death. Appearing in the aftermath of conflict, the beasts’ function seems clear – they are drawn to the battlefield for the purpose of consuming the human dead. The theme is an effective device used by *scops* to give poetic depth to the description of a carrion-covered battlefield,⁹³ adding a gruesome touch of realism to the scene.

The creatures in the poetry may have furthered these violent associations with the Anglo-Saxons’ conception of real-life beasts – for example, an audience member who had just heard a poetic rendition of the aftermath of the battle of Brunanburh may have made a strong associative connection with battles, slaughter and death at the sight of a raven perched in a tree, while the howl of a wolf may have been more chilling to someone familiar with the theme than their companion who had not heard the relevant poetic passage.

Realistic cooperation of the wolf, raven and eagle

Interestingly, the fact that the beasts often operate as a duo or trio in the poetry also appears to have a basis in reality – according to the PBS documentary *The Bird in Black*, ‘... ravens have been observed to manipulate others into doing work for them, such as by calling wolves to the site of dead animals. The canines open the carcass, making it more accessible to the birds.’⁹⁴ Old Norse poetry contains at least one explicit reference to this practice in a Beasts of Battle

⁹² Ibid., 291–2.

⁹³ Ibid., 291.

⁹⁴ PBS Nature: ‘The Bird in Black,’ <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/ravens/ravens.html> (accessed 7/6/2009).

passage from *Eiríksflokkur*: ‘There was crash of swords on the sea / The eagle tore at wolf’s food. / The excellent leader of warriors fought / Many a troop fled’.⁹⁵ Ravens still follow hunting carnivores such as wolves, bears and humans as they know they will lay open large carcasses (particularly frozen ones) that would otherwise be impenetrable.⁹⁶ Observation of kleptoparasitism among modern-day ravens thus provides tantalising clues to the origins and details of the Beasts of Battle theme.⁹⁷

Significance of the placement of the beasts

The placement of the Beasts of Battle in the narrative – that is, before, during or after a battle – is one of the most important factors to consider when analysing these passages. This decision on the part of the *scop* has the effect of lending the theme differing sets of associative power. The beasts appear as follows in the fourteen passages under analysis: *Finnsburh* 5b–6a: before battle (described in a speech); *Finnsburh* 34b–5a: during battle; *Genesis A* 1983b–5a: during battle; *Genesis A* 2087b–9a: after battle; *Genesis A* 2159b–61b: after battle (described in a speech); *Elene* 27b–30a: before battle; *Elene* 52b–3a: during battle; *Elene* 110b–13a: just before the onset of battle; *Judith* 205b–12a: during battle; *Judith* 295–6a: after battle; *Exodus* 162–8: before battle (predicted but not eventuating); *Battle of Brunanburh* 60a–5a: after battle; *Battle of Maldon* 106a–7b: just before the onset of battle; *Beowulf* 3024b–7b: before battle (predicted but not eventuating in the poem).

Although all fourteen passages bring with them an elegiac atmosphere, a conflicting set of associations – a feeling of scorn or exultation – can be attributed to those passages where the beasts appear in the aftermath of battle, such as *Brunanburh* 60a–5a. This association is explored further in chapter two. For the purposes of this chapter, we must necessarily focus on those passages where the beasts appear *before* battle, as it is in this position that they possess their full power of association with prophetic doom.

Beasts as prophets

The association with augury is created when the beasts appear before battle – although the change in narrative sequence detracts from the realism of the theme, it is more than compensated for by the associative possibilities to which this gives rise. As the beasts move

⁹⁵ Trans. Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 252.

⁹⁶ Graeme Gibson, *Beside Book of Birds: An Avian Miscellany* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005) 112–3.

⁹⁷ Gibson writes, ‘Ravens, or “wolf birds” as they are sometimes called, not only follow hunting carnivores; there’s good reason to believe they actually collaborate, by leading them to prey. Ravens are very intelligent birds; as they are capable of spotting quarry from far above their earthbound partners, it’s likely that, over the long years, they figured out a way of bringing predator and prey together’ (Ibid., 113).

backwards in the narrative, the strong connection with slaughter and death moves with them, despite the absence of carrion in their new position. The beasts' presence alerts the audience that slaughter and death is soon to follow – no longer 'drained of expectation',⁹⁸ the theme now generates a strong anticipation of violent events to follow and the beasts consequently can be read as harbingers of doom.⁹⁹ Bonjour demonstrates the effectiveness of positioning the beasts just before the onset of battle, noting that firstly, placing the beasts thus 'endows [them] with a kind of prescience'. Secondly, this makes the theme 'more sophisticated since it casts the shadow of death and slaughtered corpses in advance'.¹⁰⁰ Thirdly, the appearance of the beasts 'adds to the sinister touch of the warriors' corpses eaten by the scavenger beasts a lurking sense of the inexorability of fate'.¹⁰¹

Rather than suffering by losing its 'naturalistic' realism, the theme retains its strong associations with death and slaughter and gains a heightened effect wherein the beasts now predict, rather than respond to, violent conflict. The theme ably fulfils two functions, as Honegger writes: 'On the one hand, it is used as a device to announce imminent slaughter and death; on the other, it is still linked with its place of origin in the real world, the corpse-littered "*wælstede*"'.¹⁰² From being creatures that were simply acting out their natural roles in the aftermath of battles, the beasts that appear before battles are now in possession of prescience

⁹⁸ Honegger, 'Form and Function', 291–2.

⁹⁹ Prescience among certain beasts has a long tradition – the classical raven was linked to both augury and scavenging. The latter was seen to naturally follow on from the former, as the cry of a raven was often interpreted as a sign that slaughter and corpses would soon follow. For example, in Aesop's fable 'The Coward and the Ravens', a soldier marching to war drops his arms and freezes in fear at the croak of some ravens, and in the 'Lion and the Wild Boar' these two animals cease their life-and-death struggle when they notice some birds of prey waiting nearby, saying 'It would be better to become friends than serve as food for vultures and ravens'. See Robert and Olivia Temple, eds., *Aesop: The Complete Fables* (London: Penguin, 1998) 37, 203. Similarly, when the fleet sets forth for Troy in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, two eagles of Zeus (representing the kings Menelaus and Agamemnon), fly overhead to the right of the ships – the spear-hand side, and omen of victory for the fall of Troy. Robert Fagles, ed., *The Oresteia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 107.

¹⁰⁰ Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 565–6.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 566. Bonjour also notes that 'the motif often appears together with a reference to the *fæge men* ('doomed men'), used, as it were, like an accompanying theme'. Honegger similarly writes of the effectiveness of moving the appearance of the beasts to just before a battle: '[This is] the conscious use of the theme as a poetic device outside its natural, realistic surroundings, in order to produce a heightened and additional effect not inherent in the 'naturalistic' application of the theme. This possibility, once known to the poets and the audience, was frequently exploited in the heroic conventional poetry not only of the Anglo-Saxons, but also of the Scandinavian people. As carrion beasts, the raven, eagle and wolf must have acquired such strong associations with death and slaughter that the poet was able to transfer them from their original place on the battlefield after a fight to a position in the poem before the battle, without destroying their associative value' (Honegger, 'Form and Function', 293).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 292.

and are much more chilling as a result of the *scop* ‘exploiting their associative value of impending doom’.¹⁰³

This is not to say that the beasts appearing before battle lack a naturalistic element as well. In the 15th century, Edward Duke of York described the habit of wolves following an army, the creatures seemingly aware that an army on the march means a strong likelihood of carrion, as the wolves feasted on dead horses and men. Edward warned that a wolf can acquire a taste for human flesh and subsequently become a much greater threat to humans:

When [wolves] feed in a country of war ... they eat of dead men ... and man’s flesh is so savoury and so pleasant that when they have taken to man’s flesh they would never eat flesh of other beasts, even though they should die for hunger; for many men have seen when they have lost the sheep they have taken and eaten the shepherd.¹⁰⁴

An interesting point to note from the passage above is Edward’s specifying that this behaviour applies to wolves ‘in a country of war’, suggesting that a peacetime wolf would not carry these associations with slaughter and doom. Applying this to the Old English corpus raises the question of whether the associations discussed in this chapter would pertain to a wolf that appears outside of a battle narrative, such as the ‘wolf’ that carries the ‘whelp’ to the forest in *Wulf and Eadwacer*. The majority of wolf appearances in Old English poetry, however, are found in battle narratives.

The 14th-century French *Hunting Book of Gaston Phébus* also describes the habit of wolves following armies, eating human flesh ‘on battlefields or in places of execution’.¹⁰⁵ Like Edward Duke of York, Gaston Phébus is concerned that the beasts’ consumption of bodies on the battlefield leads to a preference for human flesh. The idea that the wolves will become seasoned man-eaters after their first taste of humans adds a new level of horror to the theme. For the purposes of this chapter, the point to take from the two passages is that the idea of beasts anticipating carrion does actually have a basis in reality. Gaston Phébus writes:

There are two reasons why [wolves] attack men: one is that they are unable to carry off their prey when they are too old and lose their teeth and their strength. The other is that they have become inured to the taste of human flesh on battlefields or in places of

¹⁰³ Honegger, ‘Form and Function’, 298.

¹⁰⁴ See Joyce Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), 69–70.

¹⁰⁵ Wilhelm Schlag, ed., *The Hunting Book of Gaston Phébus* (Paris: Harvey Miller, 1998), 28.

execution. They will also follow armies and, in winter, droves of cattle coming down from mountain pastures so as to feed on the carrion of perished horses and livestock.¹⁰⁶

Ravens were also known to perch on gallows or other places of execution whether there is a body present or not, as they know this is where a carcass will be. Examples of ravens present at gallows include *Beowulf* 2444a–8a, where Hrethel mourns his son Herebeald's execution, and a corpse is similarly torn by the raven in *Fates of Men* 33–42. The association between ravens and scenes of execution is further discussed in chapter two – see p.84 and p.85 for these passages in Old English and translation.

Whether the relocated beasts have a basis in reality or not, they undeniably bring a higher level of meaning to poetic descriptions of battle. Their appearance not only anticipates doom for the belligerents, but informs an audience that this is to be a momentous event – a device to alert us to what is coming and perhaps even to re-engage the listeners' attention with the warning (and promise) of violent conflict to come.

Associative connections across the poems

Being such a recurrent trope, it seems likely that Anglo-Saxon listeners came to be familiar with the prophetic implications of the beasts' appearance. An audience member who has heard an account of the Beasts of Battle appearing before, for example, the conflict in *The Battle of Maldon* 106a–7b and understood that they were there to herald the carnage that followed, might very well think of this passage when confronted with *Beowulf* 3024b–7b. If the beasts act as heralds of slaughter before one battle, then presumably they are there for the same reasons before another.

The associative power of the beasts is such that their intention to feast on the dead can be apparent to an audience even when the *scop* has not made clear their (the beasts') designs. For example, in *Exodus* 162a–8b the *herefugolas* ('war birds') scream *hilde grædige* ('greedy for battle'); the wolf in *Elene* 27b–30a *wælrune ne mað* ('did not hide the "slaughter secret"' or intent to consume the battlefield dead); but the *Finnsburh* beasts' intentions are not explicitly revealed. Lines 5b to 6a merely describe the sounds they make (*fugelas singað, gylleð græghama* – 'the birds sing, the grey-coated one howls'), while lines 34b–5a (*hræfen*

¹⁰⁶ Schlag, *Gaston Phébus*, 28. The 14th-century *Peterborough Bestiary* contains a similar behavioural description of vultures: 'Vultures are accustomed to foretell the death of people by certain signs. On this evidence certain people are taught and instructed and, when they are preparing for a lamentable war between themselves and an opposing army, many of the said birds may follow the troops and indicate to them that large numbers of people are to fall in the battle and to become food for the vultures' (fols. 189–210v, Cambridge, Corpus Christi Library, MS 53).

wandrode, / *sweart and sealobrun* – ‘the raven circled, black and glossy’) are similarly unrevealing without prior associative knowledge of the theme. Yet a listener who is aware of the *wælrune* of the beasts from *Elene* and other poems would naturally attribute the same intentions to the *Finnsburh* beasts.¹⁰⁷

The beasts’ promise of battle is effective even where battle fails to occur, namely in *Exodus* 162a–8b and *Beowulf* 3024b–7b. The sense of expectation is so strong that one cannot help being surprised that the battle does not eventuate. Conflict seems imminent as the Egyptian army bears down inexorably on the fleeing tribes of Israel, the sense of expectation intensified by the gathering of the beasts *æt es on wenan* (‘in anticipation of the feast’). The audience is thus moved to a state of anticipation for bloodshed, yet, as we know, the tribes of Israel are able to make good their escape. Presumably the beasts are sated by the many carcasses resulting from the closing of the Red Sea over the Egyptian troops.

The conflict alluded to in *Beowulf* 3024b–7b is different from the other passages in that we are told the battle will occur in the future, beyond the confines of the poem. The messenger predicts that the beasts will appear to celebrate the wholesale slaughter of the Geats and what will presumably be a surfeit of carrion. Again, associative connections with other poems suggest to the audience that if the beasts are going to be present, then there will certainly be slaughter and doom in the future for the now-leaderless Geats. This passage is analysed in pp.56–60, but for the purposes of tracing a possible development of the theme, it is useful to first discuss some of the more traditional usages of the beasts before concluding with the unconventional treatment in poems such as *Exodus* and *Beowulf*.

The poems are discussed below in an approximation of order from the most ‘conventional’ usage of the theme to the most ‘creative’, although categorising and ordering the poems in this way is contentious and a highly subjective exercise. Bonjour, Honegger and other scholars have used stronger language in labelling the most conventional usages of the theme as ‘hackneyed’ and ‘mechanistic’.¹⁰⁸ Honegger writes:

The ‘Beasts of Battle’ appear, rather unsurprisingly, as soon as the preparations for a battle are described – often with formulaic expressions, too – or immediately before or at the time

¹⁰⁷ The intentions of the *Finnsburh* beasts are discernible contextually, as they appear in the midst of the conflict (lines 34b–5a).

¹⁰⁸ Honegger, ‘Form and Function’, 296–7.

of the actual clash of the armies. ... In many of the poems, they are the faithful companions of either army, and their appearance has no specific foreboding quality.¹⁰⁹

This level of criticism seems unjustified and caution should be used when linking conventionality with a lack of artistic merit. To start, then, with what could arguably be labelled two of the most ‘conventional’ of the passages, we shall examine appearances of the Beasts of Battle in *The Finnsburh Fragment* lines 5b–6a and 34b–5a.

The Fight at Finnsburh 5b–6a

The beasts in *Finnsburh* 5b–6a appear before battle, suggesting that the main purpose for their inclusion was the anticipation of slaughter. Criticism of this passage has centred around its mechanistic application – scholars have commented that the *Finnsburh scop* seems to have brought the Beasts of Battle into play automatically as a precursor to battle, with very little development of the basic formula. This passage is only two half-lines in length:

<i>fugelas singað,</i>	the birds sing,
<i>gylleð græghama.</i> ¹¹⁰	the grey-coated one howls.

The brevity of this passage and its lack of detail can be seen as contributing to the mystique surrounding the beasts. The audience is denied a proper glimpse until the raven appears in 34b–5a, blurring the trio’s outlines and presenting only a hazy impression of the carrion-eaters.¹¹¹ This is done in three ways. Firstly, only the noise of the beasts is described – moments before battle the speechmaker (Hnæf) describes the eerie howl of a wolf and *singað* (‘singing’) of the birds, a powerful addition to the rising anticipation of conflict. Secondly, the eagle and raven are not explicitly named in the passage, but labelled only as *fugelas* (‘birds’). *Fugelas* is expanded upon in other poems to create more informative descriptors such as *herfugolas* (‘war-birds’)¹¹² or *nefuglas* (‘carrion-birds’), even when they are not named specifically as the eagle and raven. The description of the birds’ noise as *singað* seems to be something of an understatement, as their sound is described elsewhere as *gol* (‘screeching’) or *hreopon* (‘screaming’).¹¹³ Lastly, the poet’s choice of metaphor for the wolf, *græghama* (‘the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 295.

¹¹⁰ See Appendix B for critical text editions used for the Beasts of Battle passages.

¹¹¹ See chapter five for a discussion of how the lack of detail contributes to the beasts’ association with mystery and fear.

¹¹² Literally, ‘pillage-birds’.

¹¹³ Griffith (‘Convention and Originality’, 186) writes that ‘a number of [descriptive] details are not at all surprising: ravens *are* dark, no doubt wolves are usually to be found in the forests and it does not require a remarkable flight of fancy to suppose that animals might enjoy their food; but some are unusual. One does not normally think of eagles as dewy-feathered, nor of animals singing’. The *scops*’ choice of the term ‘singing’ was likely a technique to personify the beasts, but may also have

grey-coated one'), adds to the mystique of the beasts, and makes the wolf something of a sinister figure, difficult to glimpse like a dark-cloaked thief lurking in the shadows. Yet despite their hazy appearance, or possibly due to this, the beasts in *Finnsburh* 5b–6a still come with their full associative effect of bringing an atmosphere of doom to the narrative and adding to the anticipation of battle. This suggests that the associative connection with impending conflict was so well-established that the *scop* needed only to refer to the theme with a scant two half-lines rather than explicitly evoke the wolf, raven and eagle for his audience.

The beasts are part of a longer passage (5b–9b) that is elegiac in tone, especially in comparison with the passage that follows (10a–12b). Hnæf's short speech can be divided into two parts – the first an elegiac warning of the carnage and woe to come, and the second a positive exhortation to action.

<i>... fugelas singað,</i>	...the birds sing,
<i>gylleð græghama, guðwudu hlynned,</i>	the grey-coated one howls, the war-wood resounds,
<i>scyld scefte oncwýð. Nu scyneað þes mona</i>	the shield answers the shaft. Now the moon shines,
<i>waðol under wolcnum; nu arisað weadæda</i>	wandering beneath the clouds; now woeful-deeds arise,
<i>ðe ðisne folces nīð fremman willað.</i>	which will advance the hostility of this people.
<i>Ac onwacnigead nu, wigend mine,</i>	But awake now, my warriors,
<i>habbað eowre linda, hicgeap on ellen,</i>	hold your linden-shields, think about courage,
<i>winnað on orde, wesað on mode.</i>	fight in the vanguard, be resolute in spirit.

Particularly elegiac imagery in lines 5b–12b includes the birds, the wolf and the moon poetically *waðol under wolcnum* ('wandering beneath the clouds'), and the coming to pass of *weadæda* ('woeful-deeds'). The passage is trance-like in tone, the speechmaker weaving a dream-like picture for his warriors to create an unreal setting in which the beasts seem quite at home. Yet lines 10a–12b are positive in tone, as if Hnæf abruptly snaps out of his reverie and strives to quickly dispel the atmosphere of gloom that he has created. At the words *ac onwacnigead nu* ('but awake now'), Hnæf's warriors, along with the *scop*'s audience, are flung back into reality. The elegiac images (the Beasts of Battle and the wandering moon) suddenly vanish, and events escalate very quickly from this point.

something to do with the Anglo-Saxons living closer to the animal world than we do. Francois Leydet, writing of the traditions of rural Mexico, notes similar terminology is used by the *Vaquero* to describe the sounds of a coyote: 'English speakers living with the coyote seldom refer to his voicing as "singing"; to them it is "yelping", "howling", "barking"; but to the Vaquero people it is nearly always *cantando*', Francois Leydet, *The Coyote* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977). It is possible, therefore, that the *scops* really did mean 'singing' when they wrote *singað*, and editors may have been over-zealous in translating the word as 'howling'.

Finnsburh 34b–5a

Finnsburh 34b–5a describes the appearance of the raven divested of its two companions. It is, as mentioned above, the first firm description we have in this poem of any of the beasts, described in vague terms in the previous passage. The raven appears during the fight, after Garulf and other thanes have already fallen, and as such does not demonstrate the prophetic power possessed by the beasts in 5b–6a. The passage is similarly brief:

<i>Hræfen wandrode,</i>	The raven circled,
<i>sweart and sealobrun.</i>	black and glossy.

The circling motion, so familiar to anyone who has seen birds of prey in their natural environment, is particularly chilling when one realises the object of the raven's interest is a human carcass. This time, the raven makes no sound (possibly because it has nothing to herald) and appears to be silently intent on the prize below. The raven is *sweart* ('black') and *sealobrun* ('glossy') – although this is a dark bird,¹¹⁴ it shines rather than melds into the background. The *scop* takes the time to draw the audience's attention to the raven, and its glossy brilliance may have caused the combatants to look up, notice the bird, and understand why it was circling. *Brun* has been translated in the past as 'brown' but this seems unlikely, given that the raven has no brown feathers, and does indeed have a sheen to it when seen in the right light. In his discussion of Old-English colour words, Lerner notes that *brun* is used to describe a number of 'glossy' objects that shine in the light:

A study of Anglo-Saxon colour words in their contexts will show ... that the authors were much more interested in brightness than we are ... *brun* is used of a helmet, a sword-edge, the waves of the sea, the feathers of the Phoenix and an Ethiopian (*brune leode*). It obviously cannot mean brown: the only thing in common between these objects is that they flash in the sunlight. *Brun* would seem to indicate brilliance.¹¹⁵

It is interesting that Lerner mentions the helmet and sword-edge in his list of shining objects – critics have noted that when used conventionally, the Beasts of Battle merely function as symbols for battle in the same manner as the mention of armour or weaponry. Bonjour, for example, writes that the beasts are at times used only as part of the 'paraphernalia of warfare'¹¹⁶ that is applied at the meetings of armies, 'like the raising of a battle standard, the

¹¹⁴ See chapter five pp.159–62 for a discussion of the use of darkness and its associative connections in Beasts of Battle descriptions.

¹¹⁵ L. Lerner, 'Colour Words in Anglo-Saxon', *MLR* 46 (1951): 247. *Brun* also has the same root as 'burnish'. See also *brun* in Bosworth-Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 108.

¹¹⁶ A phrase used by Honegger, 'Form and Function', 294.

clash of arms, and the usual noise of battle'.¹¹⁷ If the raven's appearance is read with this in mind, Bonjour appears to have a strong point – the light would have flashed from helms, shield-edges, from the jewellery of the *goldhladen ðegn* ('gold-laden thane'), and from the glossy-black feathers of the raven itself,¹¹⁸ reducing the raven to the level of other battle-gear and therefore losing some of its associative potential. Honegger also includes the *Finnsburh* Beasts of Battle as examples of mechanistic (and formulaic) usages of the theme, commenting that in this and other poems:

... the function of the theme is limited to adding ornamental touches to the already rather conventional account of the preparations for war ... to overstate things a little, the 'Beasts of Battle' are of no greater poetic value than the swords, shields, banners and all the other paraphernalia of battle.¹¹⁹

The beasts of *Finnsburh* 5b–6a, in common with *Beowulf* 3024b–27b and *Genesis A* 2159b–61b, are referred to in speeches; more specifically, by Hnæf to the Danes at *Finnsburh*, by the messenger to the Geats after Beowulf's death, and by Abraham to the King of Sodom after the defeat of the Elamites.¹²⁰ This places the beasts at something of a distance – they are once-removed from the audience, part of a speech within a narrative. Like the *scops* themselves, the speechmakers take the opportunity to embellish their description of battles by evoking the wolf, raven and eagle. Griffith points out that two of these poems (*Finnsburh* and *Genesis A*) contain repetitions of the Beasts of Battle theme, serving to authenticate the words of the messengers.¹²¹ For example, the noise of the carrion-eaters in *Finnsburh* 5b–6a is predicted by Hnæf, with the raven's appearance confirmed in 34b–5a and conveyed directly to the audience by the *scop* without the use of an intermediary.

Similarly, the third appearance of the beasts in *Genesis A* 2159b–61b is not an excessive over-use of the theme, as (Honegger writes) the description of bloodied and glutted carrion birds 'proves Abraham's victory to the king, who need not now fear renewed assault'.¹²² The audience has already had the proof of Abraham's victory in the description of the birds tearing at carcasses in 2087b–9a, but now the king must be informed.

¹¹⁷ Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 570.

¹¹⁸ The 'flash' of the raven's feathers is followed by a final gleam of light, that of the *swurdleoma* ('sword-light'), that flashes *swylce eal Finnsburuh fyrenu wære* ('as if all Finnsburh were in flames').

¹¹⁹ Honegger, 'Form and Function', 295.

¹²⁰ Griffith, 'Convention and Originality', 195.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 195.

Genesis A 1983b–5a, 2087b–9a and 2159b–61b

Much like *Finnsburh*, at least one of the relevant passages from *Genesis A* has been criticised for being uncreative and mechanistic, but upon close study the passages all have interesting idiosyncrasies and possible associative connections.

Genesis A 1983b–5a

<i>Sang se wanna fugel</i>	The dark bird sang
<i>under deoreðsceaftum, deawigfeðera,</i>	amid the spear-shafts, dewy-feathered,
<i>hræs on wenan.</i>	in anticipation of carrion.

Genesis A 2087b–9a

<i>Wide gesawon</i>	Far and wide amid the sword-slaughter
<i>freora feorhbanan fuglas slitan</i>	they saw birds tearing apart the bodies
<i>on ecgwale.</i>	of those enemies of free men.

Genesis A 2159b–61b

<i>... ac nefuglas</i>	... but the blood-stained birds of prey
<i>under beorhhleoþum blodige sittað</i>	are resting on the mountain-slopes,
<i>þeodherga wæle þicce gefylled.</i>	glutted with the slain of the armies.

Critics including Honegger have identified the first of the three passages above as being a mechanistic application of the theme.¹²³ This is an understandable interpretation, given that the beasts appear immediately after the *wælherigas* ('slaughter-hordes') come together in the battle for Sodom. The beasts are not employed as prophets, but as one of the set-pieces the audience would expect to hear in a description of battle.¹²⁴

Although not explicitly identified as the *hræfn* ('raven') or *earn* ('eagle'), it seems likely that the *scop* is referring to the former, as the bird is *wanna* ('black' or 'dark').¹²⁵ The evocative description *deawigfeðera* ('dewy-feathered') is also used to describe the plumage of an

¹²³ Honegger, 'Form and Function', 295.

¹²⁴ Bonjour reads this passage in a similar light, noting that the dark bird 'somewhat mechanically pops out upon the mere mention of enemy armies drawing together for a fight which is itself briefly described and in a highly conventional way.' 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 568.

¹²⁵ *Wann* 'always refers to a dull colour – the raven, waves (presumably on a dull day), night, armour (chain-mail, not a polished surface), a height above the sea. It does not mean "pale"; and this modern meaning is very apt to mislead us when reading Anglo-Saxon'. Lerner, 'Colour Words', 248. See also *wann* in Bosworth-Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 741.

unspecified war-bird (eagle or raven) in *Exodus* 163, and is akin to the adjective *urigfeðera* used specifically for the eagle in *Judith* 210, and *Elene* 29 and 111.¹²⁶

This appearance of the carrion-bird at the start of the battle is followed 32 lines later by a metaphorical description of the victorious Elamites as *herewulfas* ('war-wolves').

<i>We þæt soð magon</i>	We can relate that true history further,
<i>secgan furður, hwelc siððan wearð</i>	as to what was the fate of the
<i>æfter þæm gehnæste herewulfa sið,</i>	war-wolves after the battle,
<i>para þe læddon Loth and leoda god,</i>	who carried off Lot and the goods of the people,
<i>suðmonna sinc, sigore gulpon.</i>	the treasures of the Southmen, and exulted in victory.

The substitution of *herewulfa* for the Elamites raises the interesting possibility of a connection with *The Battle of Maldon*, where the Norse attackers are named *wælwulfas* ('slaughter-wolves') in line 96. As discussed in chapters four and five, this technique invests the attackers in both poems with the fearful associations ascribed to the wolf. A further possible association between the two poems is that the invading Elamites are referred to as *norðmonna* ('Northmen') in lines 1977, 2068 and 2159. Taken literally, the kingdom of the Elamites is situated to the north of Sodom while the defenders march to battle from the south, but the *scop* may have intended to make this geographically-distant battle more relevant for his English audience by identifying the attackers with marauding Norsemen and the *suðmonna* ('Southmen') defenders with Anglo-Saxons.¹²⁷ Commenting on another poem (*Elene*), Diamond writes that the *scop*'s description of battle is 'detailed, but the details are not specific to [the Biblical] campaign, [they] come into any Anglo-Saxon battle poem'.¹²⁸ This applies equally to the battle-formulas of *Genesis A*, where the *scop* has moved away from a direct translation of the Vulgate to instead style his battle-scenes in language and imagery to which his Anglo-Saxon audience could relate.

In his letter to Higbald in 793, consoling him for the sack of Lindisfarne, Alcuin parallels the calamity with the sacking of Jerusalem and Rome:

Jerusalem, the city loved by God, perished with the temple of God in the flames of the
Chaldeans. Rome, encircled by a crown of holy apostles and innumerable martyrs, was

¹²⁶ It is possible that *deawigfeðera* is an understated reference to gore on the carrion-birds' feathers. The raven and eagle are not particularly dainty eaters, and they are explicitly described as *blodige* ('blood-stained'/'gore-spattered') later in the poem (2160b). See Griffith, 'Convention and Originality', 190.

¹²⁷ Vikings are described as *norðmonna* in *The Battle of Brunanburh* 32 and elsewhere.

¹²⁸ Robert Diamond, 'Theme as Ornament in Anglo Saxon Poetry', *PLMA* 76 (1961): 462.

shattered by the ravages of pagans, but by the pity of God soon recovered. Almost the whole of Europe was laid desolate by the fire and sword of the Goths and Huns; but now, by God's mercy, it shines adorned with churches, as the sky with stars, and in them the offices of the Christian religion flourish and increase.¹²⁹

A typological interpretation of Alcuin's parallel has Jerusalem as the type, with Rome and Lindisfarne as antitypes. All three events involved Judeo-Christian inhabitants of southern cities (or monasteries) breaking their covenant with God, and subsequently being devastated by ravaging pagans from the north. In his letter to Elthered in the same period, Alcuin again associates the north with disaster, writing of a portent before the sacking of Lindisfarne:

Truly signs of this misery preceded it, some through unaccustomed things, some through unwonted practices. What portends the bloody rain, which in the time of Lent in the church of St Peter, Prince of Apostles, in the city of York, which is the head of the whole kingdom, we saw fall menacingly on the north side [of] the summit of the roof, though the sky was serene? Can it not be expected that from the north there will come upon our nation retribution of blood, which can be seen to have started with this attack which has lately befallen the house of God?¹³⁰

It is likely that any Christian *scop* writing about the Vikings would have been aware of the correlation between the north and disaster, giving the word *norðmonna* associations as violent as those accorded to the wolf, raven and eagle.¹³¹

Lines 2014–18 suggest that the behaviour of the Elamite *herewulfas* is similar to that of their animal namesakes – they scavenge the carcasses (for booty) and exult in the carnage. Human scavenging on the battlefield and its similarity to the behaviour of the Beasts of Battle is discussed further in chapter five.

An interesting image conjured by the *scop* in lines 1983b–5a is the dark bird's singing *under deoreðsceaftum* ('under/amid the spear-shafts'). Rather than circling high above, the bird is right down at battle-level, darting amid the flying spears or possibly even situated on the ground, although the words *hræs on wenan* ('in anticipation of carrion') suggest there are not yet carcasses on which to perch. This behaviour seems unrealistic, as the bird would surely

¹²⁹ Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents Volume One c.500–1042* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955) 842–7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 842–7.

¹³¹ The Anglo-Saxons were similarly compared to the ancient Israelites in the writings of Pope Gregory. See Flora Spiegel, 'The *Tabernacula* of Gregory the Great and the conversion of Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 36 (2007): 2–3.

stay clear of flying spears and trampling boots until the aftermath of battle. One possible reason for the *scop*'s inclusion of *under deoreðsceaftum* is conceivable when reading the passage with Norse associations in mind – according to Ryan, pagan Norsemen would ‘dedicate’ an enemy to Odin by throwing a spear over the opposing body of troops.¹³² If we can imagine a spear being thrown up and over the enemy in a high trajectory, it seems more believable that the bird would be able to fly ‘under’ this dedicatory shaft. Furthermore, if we can assume the *wanna fugel* was a raven and not an eagle, this could be another link in the Norse connection as the raven was known as one of Odin’s companions. Again, the reason for the inclusion of Scandinavian imagery such as this might have been that the *scop* wished his audience to be able to relate to the battle by associating the Elamites with Scandinavians and their heathen battle-practises such as the dedicating of enemy hosts to Odin.¹³³

Genesis A 2087b–9a is the most violent description of the feasting Beasts of Battle across the fourteen passages identified in this thesis. Rather than simply ‘exulting’ in the carnage, the birds are described as actively *slitan* (‘tearing apart’) the dead bodies. This is due in part to the birds’ appearance during rather than before battle, but mid- or post-battle appearances in other poems (such as *Brunanburh* 60a–5a and *Judith* 205b–12a) only describe the beasts as ‘enjoying’ or ‘exulting’ in the carnage without going into such grisly detail. Much like lines 1983b–5a, this would seem to be somewhat closer in character to the Norse Beasts of Battle, which are more often than not portrayed actively feeding on the slain.¹³⁴

Lines 2159b–61b are, as noted by Griffith, narrated by Abraham to the king to reassure him that there is no danger of further attacks.¹³⁵ The audience already knows what has happened in the battle, which gives this passage the feel of a boast – unnecessarily repetitive yet satisfying for the audience to relive the victory in this manner. The same sort of repetition or re-living of victory is found in *Beowulf* 958a–79b and 1651a–76b where the hero details his two victories to Hrothgar despite the audience already knowing what happened in the fights.

The beasts of lines 2159b–61b are transformed from a symbol of doom into a symbol of victory, with Abraham proudly noting his small army has slaughtered so many of the *norðmonna* that the birds are not only *blodige* (‘blood-stained’) but *gefylled* (‘glutted’) with carrion. These birds are not circling in the air or darting about the battlefield – they are so

¹³² Ryan, ‘Othin in England’, 474–5.

¹³³ Possible Norse associations with the Beasts of Battle in *Genesis A* and other Old English poems are explored in detail in chapter four.

¹³⁴ See chapter four.

¹³⁵ Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality’, 195.

heavy that they *sittað* ('rest') on the mountain slopes. Like the previous passage (2087b–9a), these birds are particularly grisly, the dew on their feathers now replaced with human blood. The violence, the focus on their gluttonous state and the grisly aspect of these birds all enhance the function of the Beasts of Battle as symbols of victory, devoid of associations with doom and lacking an elegiac tone. Similar usage of the beasts can be found in other poems (such as *The Battle of Brunanburh*) and the association with scorn, victory and exultation is explored further in chapter two.

***Elene* 27b–30a, 52b–3a and 110b–13a.**

Like *Genesis A*, Cynewulf's *Elene* has a rich crop of Beasts of Battle passages:

***Elene* 27b–30a**

<i>Fyrdleoð agol</i>	The wolf in the forest sang a
<i>wulf on wealda, wælrune ne mað.</i>	war-song; it did not hide its slaughter-secret.
<i>Urigfeðera earn sang ahof,</i>	The dewy-feathered eagle raised up its song
<i>laðum on laste.</i>	in the wake of the hostile ones.

***Elene* 52b–3a**

<i>Hrefen uppe gol,</i>	The raven shrieked above,
<i>wan ond wælfel.</i>	dark and slaughter-fierce.

***Elene* 110b–13a**

<i>Hrefn weorces gefeah,</i>	The raven rejoiced in its work,
<i>urigfeðra, earn sið beheold,</i>	the dewy-feathered eagle watched the manoeuvres,
<i>wælhreowra wig. Wulf sang ahof,</i>	the battle of the hostile slaughterers. The wolf raised
<i>holtes gehleða.</i>	up its song, the companion in the forest.

Of the passages above, the first two occur as the Roman and Hun armies are drawing together but not yet in combat, while the third appearance of the beasts takes place at the very onset of battle. The association with doom and slaughter is therefore used very effectively when the *scop* brings the beasts into play as the tension and certainty of bloodshed rises dramatically. The beasts are a part of a battle which Cynewulf handles 'in a manner much more expanded than the essential story demands'¹³⁶ – the battle is drawn out, giving the *scop* an opportunity to bring a whole sequence of battle formulas into play, of which the Beasts of Battle are just one instance. The entire battle scene is heavily formulaic and the usage of the beasts is no

¹³⁶ Diamond, 'Theme as Ornament', 462.

exception.¹³⁷ Although Cynewulf was conventional in his placement of the beasts, the three passages contain some interesting language and characteristics unique to *Elene*.

Lines 27b–30a contain what could be seen as the opposite of the human/wolf metaphorical juxtaposition in *Genesis A* 2016b and *The Battle of Maldon* 96a. Here in *Elene*, the wolf does not make its usual animal howl but instead *fyrðleoð agol* (‘sang a war-song’). The ‘war-song’ is most likely a poetic description of the wolf’s howl, but the choice of language is interesting. The wolf here could be read as behaving like one of the human soldiers, echoing the singing of the marching troops and encouraging them into combat. Anthropomorphism of the beasts can also be found in *Beowulf* 3024b–27 and is further explored in chapter two.

The other notable phrase from lines 27b–30a, unique to this appearance of the Beasts of Battle, is *wælrune ne mað* (‘it did not hide its slaughter-secret’). This could be read in a variety of ways – does the wolf reveal its ‘secret’ foreknowledge of the impending slaughter, or does it *ne mað* its intent to feast upon the slain? It seems likely that *wælrune ne mað* is an amplification of *fyrðleoð agol*; the wolf is howling (or singing) in the forest and as such has chosen to reveal its ‘secret’ presence and intentions, rather than remaining a silent shadow. The eagle also *sang ahof* (raised up its song), joining the wolf in vocalising its intentions and contributing to the atmosphere of gathering doom.

The *Elene* Beasts of Battle are less violent than the blood-stained, corpse-rending beasts of *Genesis A* – in all three passages above, they are described as only watching and singing, always keeping their distance. This is the associative power of the beasts at work – Cynewulf did not have to spell out their intentions, but needed only to place them at the periphery of the battle for his audience to know what their purposes were and what they signified.¹³⁸

The second Beasts of Battle passage in *Elene* (lines 52b–3a) can be seen as a continuation of the first. It occurs a mere 22 lines later, and details the arrival of the raven to complete the trio of scavengers. Like the wolf and eagle, the raven is shrieking its excitement over the battle

¹³⁷ Ibid., 462. Bonjour criticises Cynewulf’s usage of the theme, noting that the beasts are the obvious heralds of a storm and as such are used in a very conventional manner. He writes that in *Elene*, the theme of the Beasts of Battle ‘seems to be automatically applied with reference to the raising of enemy armies ... as well as with reference to the first meeting of those armies’. ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle’, 571.

¹³⁸ The idea of anticipation (as opposed to actual plundering) of carrion in the Beasts of Battle passages is communicated in the following phrases: *sang se wanna fugel ... hræs on wenan* (*Genesis* 1983b–5a); *wistan begen [wulf and hrefn] þæt him ða þeodguman þohton tilian fylle on fægum* (*Judith* 207b–9a); *sceal ... se wonna hrefn fus ofer fægum fela reordian* (*Beowulf* 3021–5); *hremmas wundon, earn æses georn* (*The Battle of Maldon*, 106a–7b). See Fred Robinson, ‘Notes on the Old English *Exodus*’, *Anglia* 80 (1962): 367(n).

which has still not commenced. The tension and anticipation by this point have risen dramatically, yet it will be another 50 lines before the Romans and Huns actually come together with *borda gebrec ond beorna geprec* ('a shattering of shields and a mingling of men'). The raven is described as *wan ond wælfel* ('dark and slaughter-full'). The literal translation 'slaughter-full' is problematic, as the battle has not commenced so the raven cannot yet be glutted with corpse-carrion. The raven may be *wælfel* from a previous battle, which would suggest that this adjective is used much in the same way as *wann* or *urigfeðera*, making *wælfel* a characteristic of the raven regardless of whether or not it has recently feasted on carrion.¹³⁹ In the context of *Elene* 52b–3a, however, it seems more likely that *wælfel* should be read as 'slaughter-fierce'; that is, greedy for corpses or eager for battle. *Wælfel* might also mean 'full of the knowledge of slaughter to come', much like the wolf in line 28 is full of the knowledge of the *wælrune* ('slaughter-secret').

The final *Elene* Beasts of Battle passage occurs at the very onset of battle (110b–13a). The scavengers' function as heralds has subsequently moved from predicting that the battle will occur in the future to announcing that the conflict is just about to commence. The raven thus *weorces gefeah* ('rejoices in the work') while the eagle watches the strife from above. The wolf is described as *holtes gehleða* ('the companion in the forest'), the term 'companion' presumably referring to the other two beasts rather than the wolf being a companion of the doomed men. *Wulf sang ahof* ('the wolf raised up its song') is a realistic description, reflecting the manner in which wolves raise their snouts to the sky when howling. It is possible that this particular wolf 'raises up' its song in order to call or communicate with its winged companions circling above.

Lines 110b–13a contain one of the few appearances of all three beasts together. They are by no means inseparable, although the mention of one beast may have led the audience to expect the prompt appearance of the other two. The three carrion-eaters also appear together in the *Judith* battle scene, discussed below.

***Judith* 205b–12a and 295a–6a**

Judith is another adaptation in which the *scop* has chosen to expand the battle-descriptions to a higher level of detail than the Deuterocanonical source. Renoir writes that the *Judith* poet 'keeps only two of the many characters – Judith and Holofernes – and retains and expands

¹³⁹ In this sense *wælfel* functions as an epithet, raising associations of slaughter even though the raven has not yet feasted on the slain. To take an example from the classical tradition, this is similar to Achilles being described as 'fleet-footed' even when he is standing still.

dramatically only a few select passages from the original.¹⁴⁰ The expanded passages include the gruesome beheading of Holofernes and the battle-imagery in the lead-up to the clash of the Hebrew and Assyrian armies – imagery including helmets, shields, ash-spears and the Beasts of Battle themselves. The purpose of the expanded battle-imagery (which begins over 30 lines before the commencement of conflict) is to generate audience anticipation. As Renoir writes, the presence of the beasts in *Judith* must have ‘served to elicit a conditioned response in the form of anxious expectation of slaughter.’¹⁴¹

In this case, however, the expectation is not accompanied by a feeling of elegy or impending doom for the Hebrew warriors. By the time the beasts appear, Holofernes is dead, Judith is safe behind the walls of Bethulia and the momentum is with the Hebrew army rather than with the Assyrians. The tone of the Beasts of Battle passages is consequently quite upbeat, with the audience relatively confident of a Hebrew victory.¹⁴² This is not to say that ‘doom’ or the concept of fate is completely absent in this passage. The beasts intend to consume *fylle on fægum* (‘their fill of the doomed ones’), which labels the Assyrians as men fated to die and gives the audience a strong indication of the outcome of the upcoming battle.

Judith contains two Beasts of Battle passages, the first occurring in the lead-up to battle and the second (much shorter) passage taking place during the rout of the Assyrian camp.

***Judith* 205b–12a**

<i>þæs se hlanca gefeah</i>	At that, the lean one rejoiced,
<i>wulf in walde ond se wanna hrefn,</i>	the wolf in the forest and the dark raven,
<i>wælgifre fugel; wistan begen</i>	the slaughter-greedy bird; both knew that
<i>þæt him ða þeodguman þohton tilian</i>	the men of that nation meant to provide them with
<i>fylle on fægum. Ac him fleah on last</i>	their fill of the doomed ones. But in their wake flew
<i>earn ætes georn, urigfeðera;</i>	the eagle, eager for food, dewy-feathered;
<i>salowigpada sang hildeleoð</i>	the dark-plumaged one sang a battle-song,
<i>hýrnednebbæ.</i>	horny-beaked.

***Judith* 295a–6a**

<i>wulfum to willan ond eac wælgifrum</i>	[the enemy soldiers hacked down by swords] as a
<i>fuglum to frofre.</i>	treat for wolves and as a pleasure for slaughter-greedy birds.

¹⁴⁰ Renoir, ‘*Judith* and the Limits of Poetry’, 146.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁴² The function of the Beasts of Battle as symbols of victory is examined in chapter two.

The beasts of 205b–12a fulfil a prophetic role, adding to the expectation of battle (and in this case, the expectation of victory) for the audience. The wolf and raven *wistan begen* ('both knew') they would be eating their fill of carrion in the near future, the knowledge presented as a certainty. The manner in which this is written has something of a Norse style – the beasts fulfil a skaldic role by acting as a means to praise the battle-prowess of warriors and leaders who have 'fed' a great deal of enemy corpses to the Beasts of Battle. For example, the protagonist of Skallagrimsson's *Hofuðlausn* is lauded with the phrase, 'The prince reddened the blade – there was food for the ravens ... Eirik offered corpses to the wolf by the sea.'¹⁴³ *Judith* 205b–12a differs from this pattern in that a large group of warriors, rather than an individual hero, will 'provide [the beasts] with their fill of the doomed ones'. As such, this passage cannot properly be labelled 'skaldic', but it certainly has similarities with the Norse tradition, examined in detail in chapter four. The same idea is used in lines 295a–6a, written in a way that makes it seem the reason for cutting down the Assyrian host was to create a 'treat' for wolves and a 'pleasure' for birds. The warriors fulfil the prediction made in the first passage by carrying out their intent to feed the beasts in the second.

Other hints of the feast to come that add to the audience's expectation of slaughter include the description of the *hlanca* ('lean') wolf rejoicing (presumably because shortly it will no longer be so lean), the explicit description of the raven as *wælgifre* ('slaughter-greedy'), and the *hýrnednebba* ('horny-beaked') eagle, this detail bringing to mind a cruel beak capable of rending human flesh. Similar to its equivalent in *Elene* 28, the *Judith* eagle is personified through the act of singing a battle-song (211b).

The first appearance of the beasts (lines 205b–12a) occurs as the Hebrew army issues forth from Bethulia. Bonjour's observation that the theme appears to be 'automatically applied with reference to the raising of ... armies'¹⁴⁴ can be said to apply here. The beasts are absent during Judith's call to war (lines 190b–4a), although the heroine's speech is liberally peppered with battle imagery such as *linde*, *bord for breostum ond byrnthomas*, *scire helmas*, *fagum sweordum* ('shields, boards before breasts, coats-of-mail, bright helmets, shining swords'). Only when the Hebrew army is actually formed and *stopon heaðorincas* ('the heroes stepped forth') do the beasts appear, as if they require a firmer commitment to battle than mere speech-making. Yet there seems little doubt that the beasts are an integral part of this list of battle-gear, part of a group of formulas brought into play to set the scene for an upcoming conflict

¹⁴³ Egill Skallagrimsson 'Hofuðlausn 10–12' in Örnólfur Thorsson, ed., *The Sagas of the Icelanders* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

¹⁴⁴ Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 571.

and to build audience anticipation.¹⁴⁵ The purpose of the beasts in both *Judith* passages, as Griffith comments, is ‘thematic reinforcement’¹⁴⁶ – that is, of the theme of battle.

In *Judith*, as in *Elene* and *Exodus*, the beasts appear to echo or respond to the noise of battle gear, in this case *dynedan scildas, hlude hlummon* (‘the shields made a din, loudly resounded’). The noise of the shields is followed immediately by the rejoicing (howling) of the wolf and the singing of the eagle. Griffith suggests that the clamour of the beasts is triggered by the noise of battles they attend: ‘... an analogue, or a repercussion, of the immediately preceding noise of the armies’.¹⁴⁷

***Exodus* 162a–168b**

The beasts of *Exodus* can also be read as responding to the noise of battle. The lines *hreopon herefugolas* (‘war-birds screamed’) and *wulfas sungan* (‘wolves sang’) are immediately preceded by *byman sungon* (‘trumpets sang’), making it seem likely that one ‘song’ is answered by the other. As in *Judith* 205b–12a, all three beasts are present, making this one of the most ‘complete’ examples of the theme across the corpus. *Exodus* 162a–8b contains language unique among the Beasts of Battle passages:

<i>Hreopon herefugolas hilde grædige,</i>	The war-birds screamed, greedy for battle,
<i>Deawigfeðere ofer drihtneum</i>	dewy-feathered above the troops,
<i>wonn wælceasega. Wulfas sungon</i>	the dark chooser of the slain. Wolves sang
<i>atol æfenleoð ætes on wenan,</i>	a horrid evening-song in anticipation of the feast;
<i>carleasan deor, cwyl drof beodan</i>	brazen beasts, bold at nightfall, they awaited
<i>on laðra last leodmægnes fyl.</i>	in the wake of the hostile ones the fall of the mighty host.
<i>Hreopon mearcweardas middum nihtum.</i>	The border-guardians screamed in the middle of
	the nights.

The passage has an elegiac tone and a strong suggestion of impending doom for the people of Moses – a doom that ultimately fails to come about.¹⁴⁸ The beasts appear before the expected

¹⁴⁵ For an explanation of the similar usage of formulas as applied to the theme of exile, see Greenfield, ‘Theme of “Exile”’, 200–6.

¹⁴⁶ Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality’, 195. Honegger writes that ‘the main focus is on the action of flight and pursuit. The corpse-strewn battlefield, including the carrion beasts, merely provides the background for the glorious deeds of the inhabitants of Bethulia’. See Honegger, ‘Form and Function’, 291–2.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 189. The significance of the various sounds produced by the beasts is further examined in chapter two.

¹⁴⁸ Due to conjectural reconstructions of missing words, early translations incorrectly describe the birds circling over dead bodies where none exist, giving the impression that a battle actually took place. The error was generally ascribed to an artistic blunder on the part of the *scop* until the passage was re-

battle, immediately after a description of the Egyptian army advancing with a forest of spears and gleaming shields, seemingly following this host in the hope that the soldiers will soon provide them with a feast. Having the beasts attendant upon the enemy army – following *on laðra last* ('in the wake of the hostile ones'), rather than the fleeing tribes of Israel, certainly increases the anticipation of doom for the latter group.¹⁴⁹

Thirteen lines after this passage (181a) the Egyptian soldiers are referred to as *hare heorowulfas* ('hoary sword-wolves'), investing the enemy with the terrible associations of the Beasts of Battle and intimating that they share the intentions of the wolves from lines 164–8. This technique is also used in *Genesis A* 2015b and *The Battle of Maldon* 96a, discussed below.

The evocative vocabulary in lines 162a–8b also intensifies the atmosphere of doom and elegy. *Beodan*, translated above as 'they awaited', more literally means 'bode' – that is, the beasts bode (foretold) *leodmægnes fyl* ('the fall of the host'). Darkness is used to enhance this effect, with repeated references to darkness and night such as *wonn wælceasega* ('the dark chooser of the slain'), *cwyldrof* ('bold at nightfall'), *æfenleoð* ('evening-song') and lastly, *middum nihtum* ('the middle of the nights'). The culminative effect of such language is to make the beasts even more menacing and to intensify the feeling of dread. The use of the term *æfenleoð* (translated variously as 'evening-song', 'evensong' or even 'vespers') may have been deliberately employed to give the wolf a devilish aspect. Irving points out that earlier in the poem the Pharaoh is called *godes andsacan* ('God's enemy') and is thus identified with the devil;¹⁵⁰ therefore having the wolves sing *atol æfenleoð* may be a continuation of this idea.¹⁵¹ The line following the Beasts of Battle passage begins with the phrase *fleah fæge gast*, translated by Robinson as 'the doomed spirit fled' and dismissed as a general battle phrase.¹⁵² Irving, however, disagrees, translating the phrase as 'accursed one' and thus tying this reference to the

edited in 1962 by Robinson, removing the confusion and restoring the theme to its proper function as an anticipatory device. See Robinson, 'Notes on the Old English *Exodus*', 363–78 and Edward Irving, 'New Notes on the Old English *Exodus*', *Anglia* 90 (1972): 305. Breeze writes that the *scop* employs the beasts despite the fact that no battle eventuates '[to suggest] what would have happened but for God's Providence'. See Andrew Breeze, 'Habakkuk 1:8 as source for *Exodus* 161–69', *Neophilologus* 77 (1993): 161.

¹⁴⁹ Jorgensen writes, 'Although the biblical episode on which it is based contains no battle, *Exodus* is unambiguously a battle-poem. The march of the Israelites through the desert is depicted as the march of an army, the Egyptians' pursuit in terms of an approach to battle type-scene complete with Beasts of Battle'. Alice Jorgensen, 'The Trumpet and Wolf: Noises of Battle in Old English Poetry', *Oral Tradition* 24 (2009): 324–5.

¹⁵⁰ Irving, 'New Notes on the Old English *Exodus*', 305.

¹⁵¹ Grendel is also described as *godes andsaca* ('God's enemy') in *Beowulf* 1682b, adding a satanic element to his already monstrous character.

¹⁵² Robinson, 'Notes on the Old English *Exodus*', 365–6.

satanic Pharaoh, who may be flying toward rather than fleeing from the Israelite host.¹⁵³ This passage is discussed in the context of Christian associations in chapter three.

Three of the compounds above, *cwyldrof*, *wælceasega* and *drihtneum*, have attracted considerable attention from scholars including Frank¹⁵⁴ and Hall¹⁵⁵ who view this particular passage as written in the Norse style, suggesting (as Frank writes) that the Anglo-Saxon audience had a taste for Scandinavian poetry, or a ‘skaldic tooth’.¹⁵⁶ These compounds, and the northern connection at which they may hint, are examined in detail in chapter four.

Another fascinating term found in the *Exodus* passage and absent in other Beasts of Battle passages is *mearcweardas* (‘border guardians’ or literally ‘march-wards’).¹⁵⁷ The *scop* stresses that the beasts are denizens of areas outside of human control, appearing only during the hours of darkness with the intent to do harm. These beasts have much in common with human outlawry and forced exile, particularly the outlaw monster Grendel, as examined further in chapter five. The idea of the beasts coming from the borderlands could possibly be linked to the mention in lines 54a–62a of the hostile lands that Moses skirts as he leads his people out of bondage, including *land and leodweard laðra manna, enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad* (‘lands of many hostile men, by narrow, lonely paths and unknown ways’). The tribes of Israel *wiston him be suðan Sigelwara land, forbærned burhhleoðu*, (‘knew that southward lay the Ethiop’s land, parched hill-slopes’). The *scop* alerts the listener to the bad-lands surrounding the fleeing host; the beasts, coming from these border-realms, are one of the many dangers surrounding the Israelites.

The Battle of Brunanburh 60a–5a

As discussed above, the *Brunanburh* beasts provide an example of a ‘naturalistic’ placement of the theme, as their post-battle appearance is chronologically realistic. The *scop* commemorates in this poem a coastal clash in which the Anglo-Saxon defenders successfully fought off the Viking raiders – in this case a combined force of Norse and Scottish seamen. The Anglo-Saxon victory is overwhelming and the enemy dead are listed with pride, including five young kings, seven earls and countless seamen. The Norse account of the battle, as chronicled in *Egils saga*

¹⁵³ Irving, ‘New Notes on the Old English *Exodus*’, 305. Irving notes that devils are called *fæge gæstas* in *Christ III* 1533 and *Guthlac* 560.

¹⁵⁴ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 350.

¹⁵⁵ Hall, ‘*Exodus* 166b, *CWYLDROF*; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle’, 113.

¹⁵⁶ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 350.

¹⁵⁷ The *scop* names the wolves *mearcweardas* immediately prior to labelling the Egyptians *mearcpreate* (‘frontier guard’), strengthening the association between the human and animal predators. See Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality’, 191.

Skallagrímssonar, gives a similar description of the slaughter and the large number of resultant corpses. As the sun *sah to settle* ('sank to rest') on the battlefield, King Æthelstan and his brother Edmund withdraw from the scene of carnage to celebrate their triumph, leaving behind them a perfect feast for the wolf, raven and eagle.

<i>Leton him behindan hræw bryttian</i>	They left behind them to share out the carrion
<i>saluwigpadan, þone sweartan hræfn,</i>	the dark-plumaged one, the black raven,
<i>hyrnednebban, and þane haswanpadan,</i>	horny-beaked, and the dusky-plumaged,
<i>earn æftan hwit, æses brucan,</i>	white-tailed eagle, enjoying the carcasses,
<i>grædigne guphafoc and þat græge deor,</i>	the greedy war-hawk and that grey beast,
<i>wulf on wealda.</i>	the wolf in the forest.

After the flurry of action and chaos of battle, the comparative calm of *Brunanburh* 60a–5a represents a 'battlefield tableau'.¹⁵⁸ For a space of five and a half lines, the only movement on the battlefield is that of the wolf, raven and eagle, while presumably the only sounds to be heard are those emitted by the beasts themselves, a sudden contrast to the tumult of the conflict raging earlier. The tableau can be read as elegiac in effect – even though the Anglo-Saxons are victorious, the *scop* pauses for a space and defers the final boastful body-count to present the audience with a scene of stillness and silence.¹⁵⁹ The theme of the Beasts of Battle itself carries associations with elegy and loss through its usage in poetic descriptions of battles with a less-positive outcome for the defenders, such as *The Battle of Maldon*. The beasts, after all, feast just as enthusiastically upon the Anglo-Saxon dead as they do upon enemy corpses.

A contrasting reading of the *Brunanburh* passage, however, works against the expectations of the traditionally elegiac Beasts of Battle theme. Chapter two argues that this usage of the theme has strong associations with victory and carries an undertone of scorn for the defeated – the context of triumph and the phrase *leton him behindan* ('they left behind them') signify the victors' scorn for the defeated as they literally turn their backs on the Beasts of Battle feasting upon the enemy dead. As such, the bulk of the analysis of this passage can be found in chapter two.

It is instructive to contrast this poem celebrating victory in battle with one commemorating a defeat – the tone pervading *The Battle of Brunanburh* is entirely different to that found in *The Battle of Maldon*, due in part to a significantly different usage of the Beasts of Battle theme.

¹⁵⁸ See Honegger, 'Form and Function', 291.

¹⁵⁹ The beasts are not described as making any sound, in contrast to many of the other Beasts of Battle passages.

The Battle of Maldon 106a–7b

The Battle of Maldon, composed shortly after the conflict it commemorates took place in 991,¹⁶⁰ contains a short Beasts of Battle passage just before the beginning of the battle proper (not counting an earlier skirmish on the bridge over the Panta estuary). The *Maldon-scop*'s usage of the theme is particularly notable for two characteristics: firstly, the very effective metaphorical substitution of wolves for Vikings in line 96a, and secondly, the strong feeling of fate that resonates throughout the poem and is particularly palpable in the Beasts of Battle scene.

<i>pær wearð hream ahafen, hremmas wundon</i>	A din was upraised there; ravens wheeled about,
<i>earn æses georn; wæs on eorðan cyrm.</i>	the eagle greedy for carrion. There was clamour
	on the earth.

Lines 106a–7b place the raven and eagle immediately before the onset of battle, taking advantage of their association with impending doom. At first glance the wolf appears to be absent, but a metaphorical description of the Vikings ten lines earlier provides an elegant substitution for the third carrion-beast.¹⁶¹ The technique is analogous to that employed to describe the Egyptians in *Exodus* 181a as *hare heorowulfas* ('hoary sword-wolves'), and the Elamites in *Genesis A* 2015b as *herewulfas* ('war-wolves'). In *The Battle of Maldon*, the Viking belligerents are animalised in line 96a with the evocative compound *wælwulfas* ('slaughter wolves'):

<i>'... God ana wat</i>	<i>'... God alone knows</i>
<i>hwa þære wælstowe wealdan mote.'</i>	<i>who will possess the slaughterfield.'</i>
<i>Wodon þa wælwulfas (for wætere ne murnon),</i>	The slaughter-wolves advanced (for they
	paid no heed to water),
<i>wicinga werod, west ofer Pantan,</i>	the Viking band, west over the Panta,
<i>ofer scir wæter scyldas wegon,</i>	over the shining water they carried their shields,
<i>lidmen to lande linde bæron.</i>	seafarers bore their shields to land.

The compound *wælwulfas* (referred to by Griffith as a 'transferred epithet')¹⁶² invests the Vikings with the menacing associations normally carried by the wolf¹⁶³ such as

¹⁶⁰ Edward Irving, 'The Heroic Style in The Battle of Maldon', *SP* 58 (1961): 459.

¹⁶¹ Harris suggests a similar substitution takes place in *Andreas* 371b–2a – *ond se græga mæw / wælgifre wand* ('and the grey seagull, greedy for carrion, circled') – although he describes this handling of the formula as 'malapropian' compared with the Beasts of Battle tradition elsewhere ('Beasts of Battle, South and North', 4). Neckel also highlights this passage as a possible reference to the theme ('Die Kriegerische Kultur', 17–44).

¹⁶² Griffith, 'Convention and Originality', 191.

bloodthirstiness and the inexorability of their presence on the battlefield.¹⁶⁴ Yet it is only when the raven and eagle appear that an audience is likely to have realised that this metaphorical Viking-wolf is actually a stand-in for the third member of the trio. Honegger writes of the associative effectiveness of thus splitting the beasts:

By breaking the mechanistic pattern, the poet not only varies the conventional theme on a stylistic level, but at the same time skilfully imbues it with an underlying foreboding of death and destruction, and thus exploits the sinister and ominous associations of the 'Beasts of Battle' to the full.¹⁶⁵

Britton theorises that the *Battle of Maldon* Vikings are meant to be seen as 'an unnamed threat, the more terrifying because the less human, the less defined. There must not be the least opportunity for us to identify with them as men.'¹⁶⁶ The Vikings are not in any way individualised, in contrast to the many individuals among the English troops who are identified, named (more often than not including their lineage) and their heroism celebrated before they are slain. The Vikings are almost always described as a group, and not even a human group at that.¹⁶⁷ As Britton concludes: 'the Vikings are consciously animalised: they are not human, but "wolves of slaughter"'.¹⁶⁸

Identifying the troops with wolves was also a way for the *scop* to place the Viking invaders in context for the late 10th-century Anglo-Saxon audience. By 991 the English had toiled for nearly a century to re-establish control of England after decades of Viking rapacity in the 9th

¹⁶³ Cavill writes that there is a strong 'animal and sub-human appetite that is focused upon in the word [*wælwulf*]' . Paul Cavill, 'Maxims in the Battle of Maldon', *Neophilologus* 82 (1998): 642. Honegger writes of this passage: 'The time is approaching when the doomed men are to meet their destiny – and considering the twofold characterisation of the Northmen as enemies and "*wælwulfas*", there can be little doubt as to who is going to provide the carrion on which the "*Beasts of Battle*" will feed', ('Form and Function', 298).

¹⁶⁴ Britton describes the feeling of relentlessness palpable in the approach of the Vikings as they ford the estuary, enhanced by the strong w- and l- alliteration in lines 96a–9b: '[the alliteration] adds its own powerful element to the force, unity and speed given to these lines by tight-bound syntactical structure of closely parallel phrases; the feeling is one of continuous and irresistible movement of these detestable and frightening beasts'. Britton also notes that the powerful alliteration and the unstoppable, inexorable approach of the Viking-wolves bears strong similarities to the approach of Grendel – discussed further in chapter five. From 'The Characterization of the Vikings', 86.

¹⁶⁵ Honegger, 'Form and Function', 298.

¹⁶⁶ Britton, 'The Characterization of the Vikings', 86.

¹⁶⁷ Cavill comments on the 'grisly savagery against human beings' expressed by the compound *wælwulfas* and notes the contrast between the behaviour of the slaughter-wolves and human piety of Byrhtnoð ('Maxims in the Battle of Maldon', 636).

¹⁶⁸ Britton, 'The Characterization of the Vikings', 86. The poetic depiction of animal behaviour among humans on the battlefield is discussed in chapter five.

century,¹⁶⁹ and the populace must have been both bewildered and fascinated by the *færsceaðan* or ‘sudden menace’ (*The Battle of Maldon* 142). The *scop* attempts to depict the attitude and personality of the Viking hordes by likening them to ravening wolves, creatures that the audience would have been familiar with both through observation of the natural world and through the Beasts of Battle theme in their poetic tradition.

Britton connects the *wælwulfas* of *The Battle of Maldon* 96a with the *ulfheðinn*, the ‘wolf/bear-coats’ or *berserkirs* of the Scandinavian sagas.¹⁷⁰ The *Maldon* Vikings may very well have donned wolf-skins to go into battle – their savagery is stressed by the *scop*, who describes them as *laðe gystas* (‘loathed guests’)¹⁷¹ in line 86. Wading through a freezing tidal estuary shows a ‘wild disregard for their own safety’,¹⁷² perhaps the first hint of the *berserkir* frenzy that the Vikings fall into as they are finally able to assail Byrhtnoth’s troops. The *berserkir* practice of fighting in an enraged state, so terrifying to the defenders, is evident in lines 295b–7a:

<i>Brimmen wodon,</i>	the seamen stormed,
<i>guðe gegremode; gar oft thurhwod</i>	enraged by the fight; the spear often pierced
<i>fæges feorhhus.</i>	the fated one’s life-house.

Old Norse (and particularly skaldic) connections with *The Battle of Maldon* and other poems are further examined in chapter four.

One of the associations engendered by labelling the Vikings *wælwulfas* is that of scavenging the dead. While the wolf and its companions tear at the corpses for meat, the victorious Vikings become animalised by scavenging the corpses for weapons and valuables, as described in lines 159a–61b:

<i>Eode þa gesyrwed secg to þam eorle;</i>	Then an armed man went towards the earl;
<i>he wolde þæs beornes beagas gefecgan,</i>	he wished to seize this warrior’s bracelets,
<i>reaf and hringas and gerenod sword.</i>	Take plunder and rings and ornamented sword.

¹⁶⁹ In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E), the language changes dramatically when the English come into violent contact with Viking invaders. In the references to raids at the beginning of the 9th century, we see vocabulary such as *wælstow* (‘place of slaughter’) for the first time. As the Viking attacks lessen towards the end of the century this term disappears (with the last usage in 871), yet reappears in 999 in conjunction with the renewed Viking invasions.

¹⁷⁰ Britton, ‘The Characterization of the Vikings’, 86.

¹⁷¹ The etymology of *gystas* gives meaning to this phrase; from the Latin *hostis*, originally ‘stranger’, or ‘enemy’ in classical use. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

¹⁷² Britton, ‘The Characterization of the Vikings’, 86.

Part of the terror inspired by the Viking-wolves is the idea that they do not only intend to take the lives of the English defenders; they intend to plunder and despoil their corpses as well. Their reason for raiding is, after all, for loot. The Viking messenger offers to take *feoh wið freode* ('money for peace') in line 39a. The attempted seizure of the earl's *beagas* ('treasures') in line 160b above echoes the messenger's phrase *beagas wið gebeorge* ('treasures for safety') in line 31a. If we can imagine the battlefield immediately after the cessation of hostilities, the Viking victors would be busy all over the *wælstowe* ('place of slaughter') stripping the English corpses of valuables, perhaps at the very same time as the raven and eagle of lines 106a–7b are tearing at the dead for their own purposes. This, in essence, is the main association that comes to mind through the identification of the *Maldon* Vikings with the Beasts of Battle wolf.

Scavengers are always the last creatures present on the battlefield – identifying the Northmen with wolves makes it seem inevitable that they would be the last (and therefore, the victors) at the place of slaughter. Byrhtnoth himself declares that only one group can win possession of the *wælstowe* (94b–5b). The wolf inevitably gets its meal after every battle, so it seems equally inevitable that the Viking *wælwulfas* will win their treasure after the battle at Maldon.¹⁷³

The feeling of inevitability described above is certainly not unique in this poem.¹⁷⁴ *The Battle of Maldon* has arguably the strongest recurring feeling of fate/doom of all the works examined in this thesis. *Fæge* ('fated men', or 'men doomed to die') are referred to in lines 54b–5a, 105b, 119b and again in 125a, while the *scop* has sown other hints of doom throughout the account. Byrhtnoth declares in lines 54b–5a '*feallan sceolon hæpene æt hilde*' ('you heathens shall fall in battle'), yet shows less confidence about the outcome in lines 94b–5b when he says '*God ana wat hwa þære wælstowe wealdan mote*' ('God alone knows who will possess the slaughterfield'). In lines 103b–5b the *scop* announces:

<i>þa wæs feohte neh,</i>	Then the fight was nigh,
<i>tir æt getohte. Wæs seo tid cumen</i>	glory in battle; the time was come
<i>þæt þær fæge men feallan sceoldon.</i>	that fated men should fall there.

This focus on fate is followed by the appearance of the eagle and raven, intensifying the atmosphere of impending doom and creating a strong association between the Beasts of Battle

¹⁷³ Other associations with scavenging raised by the Beasts of Battle passages are discussed in chapter five.

¹⁷⁴ The wolf's association with inevitability is enduring, as demonstrated by the well-known saying, 'In every story the wolf comes at last', attributed to Beatrice Webb (1858–1943), quoted in Gibson, Graeme, *The Bedside Book of Beasts* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2009) 85.

and *wyrd*. As Bonjour argues, when the motifs of *fæge men* and the Beasts of Battle are skilfully used together, ‘their total effect is much heightened’. He writes:

The underlying thought that the future victims of the imminent contest are predestined to fall ... finds its counterpart and confirmation in the picture of the congregating beasts, rejoicing in the foreknowledge that men who are yet living will soon cover the ground with their corpses.¹⁷⁵

In *The Battle of Maldon* the inevitability of death is stressed through many of the thanes’ final speeches,¹⁷⁶ but the Beasts of Battle have the strongest effect in this regard. They carry with them associations with the inexorability of doom, their apparent neutrality suggesting this doom might equally apply to all parties on the slaughterfield. Even if they are not killed at Maldon, every warrior is *fæge* (‘fated to die’) eventually. This leads us to the application of *wyrd* to the wider picture: the Beasts of Battle are a representation of the doom that will overtake not just the characters in the poetry but everyone, including the *scop*’s audience.¹⁷⁷

The idea of the beasts representing doom on a larger scale can also be found in the last poem to be discussed in this chapter, *Beowulf*. Much like the *Maldon* beasts, the *Beowulf* carrion-eaters are, as Bonjour describes, ‘the ultimate link in a whole concatenation of hints and forebodings’ of doom for the nation of the Geats.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Bonjour, ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle,’ 566. Bonjour points out that the Maldon *scop* skilfully builds up the idea of a fated end (*wyrd*) for Byrhtnoth and his warriors well before the explicit mention of *fæge* in line 105a and the subsequent appearance of the Beasts of Battle. Firstly, in line 14 he uses the formula *þa hwile þe he mid handum healdan mihte* (‘as long as he could hold [his weapon] in his hands’), implying that the warrior will soon be wounded or killed. Secondly, Byrhtnoth’s famous *ofermode* (‘over-pride’, 89b), comparable with the hubris of classical heroes such as Odysseus, seals his *wyrd* the moment he allows the Viking *wælwulfas* to cross the estuary. Thirdly, Byrhtnoth shouts to the Vikings *ofer cald wæter* (91b), chill water being an ill omen. The Vikings, furthermore, wade without a thought through the cold water, seeming unbothered and even at home in this ill-omened element. Lastly, Byrhtnoth says in lines 94b–5b that God alone knows the outcome of the fight, as discussed above. Bonjour comments that not only God, but we (the readers) know what the outcome of this historical battle will be, as did the *scop*’s contemporary audience.

¹⁷⁶ Irving writes of the ways in which the *scop* used language to increase the significance of events in *The Battle of Maldon*: ‘Epic diction becomes noticeably more frequent as the poem goes on, not only in set-pieces ... but also in the language of the speeches and particularly in the highly stylised way of describing the fighting [including the use of the Beasts of Battle theme]. This increasing use of epic diction is very much related to the meaning of the poem. A real historical event is being raised to a higher level of significance; the actions thus become increasingly symbolic; the ordinary identifiable men of Essex approach and enter the world of heroes, the world of legend.’ See Irving, ‘The Heroic Style’, 459–60.

¹⁷⁷ Bonjour writes: ‘In a way this image [the beasts] is a visible illustration of the haunting thought that death is foreordained for every man on earth’ (Ibid., 566).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 569.

***Beowulf* 3024b–7b**

The *Beowulf* Beasts of Battle passage has been applauded by scholars including Bonjour and Griffith for its originality, and placed at some distance artistically from the thirteen other usages of the theme. The *scop*'s skilful application of the theme enhances its prophetic effect. Bonjour writes:

[One difference] that distinguishes *Beowulf* from all the other analogues taken together is that in all the other instances, the Beasts of Battle appear just before the outbreak of a battle, or at the close of it – but only when actual fighting is just about to take place. In *Beowulf*, the theme is never used in connection with any of the numerous battlescenes which come into focus throughout the poem; and when it appears, there is only a passing reference to warfare, and a future warfare at that, still hidden in the haze and dream of things to come.¹⁷⁹

Two points to highlight from Bonjour's praise of the *Beowulf* passage are, firstly, that the *scop* has shown considerable restraint in 'saving' the Beasts of Battle for this final conflict (which is only predicted to occur), passing over 'ideal opportunities'¹⁸⁰ presented throughout the rest of the long poem to use the formula (for example, lines 1066b–159b and 2472a–508a). This restraint heightens the associative effect of the beasts when they finally appear in the messenger's epic prophecy. The structural forethought involved in reserving the beasts until the end of the poem raises questions about the singer theory (otherwise known as oral-formulaic theory, discussed in the introduction to this thesis pp.12–15), as applied to this particular work. If the *scop* was an unlettered singer composing 'on the spot', then he must have had uncommon structural forethought and abilities. It seems questionable whether a *scop* composing in the style described by Magoun (that is, drawing from a body of memorised formulas and bringing them into play to decorate or embellish a theme)¹⁸¹ would have passed over an opportunity such as lines 2472a–508a. This might be a significant clue to the question of whether *Beowulf* was composed by a lettered or unlettered *scop*.

Secondly, this is the only Beasts of Battle passage where the carrion-eaters do not appear just before, during or immediately after the actual conflict takes place.¹⁸² The beasts are evoked in one of the rare moments of peace in the narrative, with the future warfare mentioned only in passing and remaining, as Bonjour poetically writes, 'hidden in the haze and dream of things to

¹⁷⁹ Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 568.

¹⁸⁰ Honegger, 'Form and Function', 296–7.

¹⁸¹ Magoun, 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle', 81–90.

¹⁸² *Exodus* does not contain a battle as such, but (as discussed above) the Egyptian army meets its doom at the closing of the Red Sea, validating the beasts' presence.

come'.¹⁸³ There is thus a degree of uncertainty about the upcoming battle, and the audience is not satisfied as they are in other poems wherein the battle follows the appearance of the beasts.¹⁸⁴ Yet one thing the audience *can* be sure of is the atmosphere of doom generated by the presence of the chattering beasts. They, perhaps more than any other factor including the death of Beowulf himself, point firmly to impending doom for the Geats.

This brings us to the next notable difference in this episode, which is the scale of the doom predicted by the beasts. Here the prophecy is endowed with 'impressive significance ... with its haunting intimation of the sweeping catastrophe that lies in store for the Geats after the fall of their king and protector.'¹⁸⁵ Throughout the poetic corpus the beasts never predict doom for an individual, nor are they drawn to a battle between two individuals (such as *Beowulf* 720a–823a) – rather, they appear when two large bodies of belligerents clash. Reserving the beasts for significant battles only, when there is a strong likelihood that the *wælstede* will be littered with corpses, preserves their dramatic import and adds to the effect of their appearance. The *Beowulf scop* takes this one step further. The beasts at 3024b–7b are there to predict and celebrate the downfall of the entire Geatish nation, not just a body of troops. Although the details are hazy, we receive the impression that the enemy will sweep through and destroy the unprotected nation, leaving nothing but a glut of carrion for the beasts. Griffith writes that the beasts represent symbolically 'the promise of future exile and morning-cold spears, all of the miseries which the unnamed messenger ... fears will befall the Geats.'¹⁸⁶

The idea of doom on a nationwide scale can be found in *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (the 'Sermon of the Wolf to the English') written by Wulfstan Archbishop of York between 1010 and 1016.¹⁸⁷ Apart from making a play on the first element of his own name, Wulfstan may have used the image of the wolf for its association with slaughter and doom. The idea of a wolf delivering a doomsday sermon to the English nation is an evocative one, much like a vulture delivering a lecture to its intended meal. Doom on a nationwide scale would not have seemed so far-fetched at the turn of the first millennium, as writings from the time demonstrate an expectation of

¹⁸³ Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 568.

¹⁸⁴ Griffith writes: 'the straightforwardness of the relationship between the scene and its context varies. In *Maldon* and *Judith*, the sequence of ideas and the link between the picture and the narrative context is transparent, but this is not the case with the *Beowulf* passage.' From 'Convention and Originality', 196.

¹⁸⁵ Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 569.

¹⁸⁶ Griffith, 'Convention and Originality', 195. Ridsen theorises that the Beasts of Battle in *Beowulf* symbolise the theme of the apocalypse. 'The beasts are, in a sense, thieves of time; they steal time from us by driving us to apocalypse, the end of time, of a people, of one's own life. Their appearance in Christian or Germanic visionary literature signals immitigable end'. See Edward Ridsen, *Beasts of Time: Apocalyptic Beowulf* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 10.

¹⁸⁷ Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1977).

apocalyptic events 1000 years after Christ's birth. The nation was severely weakened by 30 years of successive Viking raids and crippling payment of the *Danegeld*, which Wulfstan ascribes to divine punishment for the Anglo-Saxons' ungodliness. Living as he did under the short reign of Sveinn Forkbeard, Wulfstan was very likely familiar with Norse mythology and beliefs – it is therefore possible that his *lupi* could also refer to Fenrir, the giant wolf of the Norse apocalypse (*Ragnarok*) destined to consume Odin and swallow the sun.¹⁸⁸

The Beasts of Battle in *Beowulf* 3024b–7b are there to create something of the same effect as Wulfstan's lecturing wolf. This seems appropriate; although the focus of *Beowulf* appears to be on heroes and kings such as Beowulf and Hrothgar, the poem is essentially a chronicle of the fate of nations, beginning with the development of the Scyldings and ending with the downfall of the Geats.¹⁸⁹ The messenger falls silent after evoking the beasts, giving the carrion-eaters the last word on the fate of the nation.¹⁹⁰

Critics have written much in praise of a third technique used by the *Beowulf scop* to enhance the feeling of doom – the contrasting of the beasts with the sound of the harp in lines 3021a–7b:

<i>Nu se herewisa hleahtor alegde</i>	Now the lord has laid aside laughter, mirth and revelry.
<i>gamen and gleodream. Forðon sceall gar wesan</i>	Therefore, many a morning-cold
<i>monig, morgenceald, mundum bewunden,</i>	spear shall be encircled by fingers,
<i>hæfen on handa, nalles hearpan sweg</i>	raised up by hands, nor shall the sound of the harp
<i>wigend weccan, ac se wonna hrefn</i>	awaken the warriors; instead, the dark raven
<i>fus ofer fægum fela reordian,</i>	eager over doomed men, shall relate many things,
<i>earne secgan hu him æt æte speow,</i>	telling the eagle how he prospered at his eating
<i>penden he wið wulf wæl reafode.</i>	while he, with the wolf, plundered the slain.

Bonjour describes the passage as 'a moving opposition to the motif of music and the harp as a symbol of life and rejoicings',¹⁹¹ while Honegger writes of the effect this has of enhancing the associative power of the beasts:

¹⁸⁸ *Ragnarok* and Norse doomsday mythology are further explored in chapter four.

¹⁸⁹ 'Behind the ominous dialogue of the Beasts of Battle there looms the shadow not only of the death of warriors, but of the bondage and death of a glorious people ... [The beasts] are briefly turned into a symbol of the ultimate triumph of death, the common destiny of dynasties, and the final fate of man'. Bonjour, 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 569.

¹⁹⁰ See Malcolm Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley*, ed. Malcolm Godden et al. (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 571.

This symbol of doom has an even greater impact than usual, since ... the motif of the harp, the embodiment of joy and life, is skilfully used to set off the sinister 'Beasts of Battle'. The poet thus converts the conventional theme, which is otherwise invariably linked with a fighting action that really takes place, into a symbol of great poetic beauty and emotional impact.¹⁹²

Placing the harp immediately before the Beasts of Battle does not have the effect of softening the theme's ominous impact. Rather, it 'sets off'¹⁹³ the carrion-eaters, throwing them into sharp relief after such a pleasant image is conjured for the audience. The harp represents everything the beasts do not – joy and life, society, culture, peace. The beasts symbolise the forces that will tear all of this apart, bringing war, bondage, exile, and the destruction of a nation with the music of the harp at its cultural heart. Not only is the image of the harp contrasted with the image of the three beasts, but the very different sounds they emit are contrasted too. The *scop* stresses the fact that these are noisy creatures, as they chatter among themselves and share their excitement at the slaughter-feast.¹⁹⁴ To switch abruptly from the shimmering of harp strings to the howling, croaking and screaming of the beasts makes an unpleasant shock indeed. This contrast is used with similarly powerful effect earlier in the poem (lines 86a–90a), where the music of the harp enrages the monster Grendel as he lurks in the darkness outside Heorot.¹⁹⁵

<i>Ða se ellengæst earfoðlice</i>	Then the powerful creature painfully
<i>þrage gepolode se þe in bystrum bad</i>	suffered for a time, he who dwelt in the shadows,
<i>þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde</i>	because every day he heard noise of revelry
<i>hludne in healle. þær wæs hearpan sweg</i>	loud in the hall. There was the music of the harp,
<i>swutol sang scopes.</i>	the clear song of the poet.

Bonjour describes Grendel's rage and subsequent attack as 'a vivid picture of the blind hostility of evil powers against human life and mirth.'¹⁹⁶ The 'evil' label cannot be so readily applied to the Beasts of Battle,¹⁹⁷ who, though sinister and laden with associations of doom, can be seen as personifications of the inevitability of death, much like the Grim Reaper is

¹⁹² Honegger, 'Form and Function', 296–7.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 296–7.

¹⁹⁴ The notion of the beasts 'talking' with each other and discussing the feast has excited some comment among critics. Jones writes, 'That animals and birds should think and talk and be causative in the life and thought of men was acceptable on both the natural and supernatural plane.' Jones, *Kings, Beasts and Heroes*, 87(n).

¹⁹⁵ Bonjour draws a connection between the two passages, pointing out that the motif of the harp had already been applied elsewhere in the poem 'with rare success as a foil to the powers of darkness'. 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', 571.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 570.

¹⁹⁷ See chapter three for a discussion of demonic associations in the Christian tradition.

commonly portrayed as a necessary and unbiased (though still frightening) servant of fate.¹⁹⁸ Other similarities, however, can be drawn between *Beowulf* 3024b–7b and 86a–90a. The monster is described soon after the harp and other images of revelry, the scene switching abruptly from indoors to outdoors, from light to dark. Grendel certainly brings with him an atmosphere of impending doom, intending to do similar acts of violence to Heorot that the beasts predict will be inflicted upon the doomed nation of the Geats. The *scop* skilfully draws out the approach of Grendel to ensure the audience is in a state of high anticipation by line 115a and aware that the coming of the monster means doom for the inhabitants of Heorot. Finally, similar to the way the sound of the harp is contrasted with the noise of the beasts in 3024b–7b, the music of the harp in lines 86a–90a is followed by the great *morgensweg* (‘morning-cry’, or lament) that is raised in Heorot at the discovery of Grendel’s misdeeds. All in all, the similarities between the two passages are striking, and it may very well be that the *Beowulf* *scop* intended the audience to associate the second harp/beast apposition with the first, with the particularly powerful effect of having the feeling of doom expand from encompassing the inhabitants of a hall to enveloping an entire nation.

Beowulf 3024b–7b is often viewed as the most unconventional of the instances of the Beasts of Battle across the corpus of Old English poetry. The *scop*’s creative departure from the conventional usage of the theme prompted Griffith to write:

Formalist analysis of conventions cannot, perhaps, adequately prepare us for this kind of free treatment. The intensity and the elegiac power of the end of *Beowulf* is rooted in the traditional, but this underlying structure has been radically transformed and the result is both poignant and extraordinary.¹⁹⁹

Such original treatment of the beasts, namely contrasting them with the sound of the harp and positioning them as augurs of the downfall of a nation, transforms the trio from mere predictors of doom to a ‘haunting symbol of human transitoriness.’²⁰⁰ As Bonjour concludes, the *Beowulf* *scop* ‘turns a highly conventional theme into a thing of arresting beauty and originality.’²⁰¹

The above analysis of the fourteen surviving Beasts of Battle passages has demonstrated that the primary function of the theme was to create an expectation of slaughter, give focus to the concept of *wyrd* and to generate an elegiac atmosphere. The beasts came to be associated with death and slaughter through what was probably their original placement in the order of events

¹⁹⁸ See chapter five for a discussion of the ways in which the Beasts of Battle personify Death.

¹⁹⁹ Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality’, 196.

²⁰⁰ Bonjour, ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle’, 570.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 571.

– at the aftermath of battle. This in turn was in all likelihood based on the observation of real-life events. The retention of this association when the beasts were positioned before the onset of battle granted them the ‘ability’ to predict slaughter and a new function as harbingers of doom. This concept is further strengthened by associative connections across the corpus. As discussed, *wyrd* often went hand-in-hand with an atmosphere of elegy, particularly palpable in those poems where doom resonates on a larger scale.

As detailed in the introduction to this chapter, the association with elegy and doom would appear to be the most likely reason for *scops*’ inclusion of the Beasts of Battle theme, a point on which the majority of scholars who have written on this trope agree. Any further associations are more of a matter of speculation, taking into account the changing circumstances of the Anglo-Saxons, from the rise of Christianity to the terrors of the Viking Age.

Original contributions to knowledge in this field throughout this chapter include strengthening the link between the Beasts of Battle and *wyrd* (‘fate’) through textual evidence, breaking down the elements that contribute to the elegiac atmosphere of the theme, laying out the reasons why the placement of the beasts before, during or after battle contributes to their associative effect, exploring the realistic basis of the theme including the cooperation of the wolf, raven and eagle in nature, and linking the theme with passages that lie outside of the tradition but contain similar elements, such as *Beowulf* 86a–90a and 2444a–8a, *Fates of Men* 33a–42b, *Genesis A* 2013b–17b and *The Battle of Maldon* 159a–61b.

The following chapter explores a number of positive associations that may have accompanied the Beasts of Battle in selected poems, existing (often paradoxically) side-by-side with the elegiac atmosphere that pervades the majority of the relevant passages.

Chapter 2

The final insult: associations with scorn and exultation

To continue exploring possible associations raised by the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon poetry, it is necessary to depart from the most likely usages of the theme covered in chapter one and venture into more speculative territory. Alongside the associations with slaughter and elegy lies a very different quality, more apparent in certain poems than others. A feeling of scorn or exultation in the victors is sometimes palpable, with the appearance of the beasts functioning as a ‘final insult’ for the fallen on the battlefield. Not only is this suggested in the linguistic subtleties of the descriptions, but the mere facts that are presented to us reflect this: the slain are left lying on the battlefield as nothing better than meat for the animals, seen as unworthy for the practice of burial or even cremation. Jesch, writing on the Norse Beasts of Battle tradition, comments that the carrion-eaters symbolise the ‘grim finality of human death, yet also the triumph of the victors, whose achievement is measured in the number of bodies they supply to the carrion-eaters’.²⁰² Although the beasts traditionally fulfil a eulogistic rather than elegiac function in Scandinavian battle-descriptions, their association with triumph can also be recognised in some of the parallel Anglo-Saxon passages.

This chapter explores the association with scorn by examining the appearance of the beasts after warfare and executions, focusing on relevant poems including *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Genesis A*, *Beowulf*, *Soul and Body*, *The Fates of Men* and *The Fates of the Apostles*. It argues that passages in these poems treat the human dead with scorn or have a feeling of celebration communicated through the use of the Beasts of Battle. This is brought about by having the beasts appear, in the main, after slaughter without their usual foreboding quality.²⁰³ The mood of the beasts is at times unexpectedly upbeat, signalling the *scop*’s intended purpose for their inclusion. The ‘blithe-hearted’ raven of *Beowulf* 1799a–1803a, for example, is examined as an instance of a carrion-eater contributing to a mood of exultation. Linked to the mood of the beasts are the noises they make, reflecting the action in the narrative and contributing to the level of excitement for the *scop*’s audience. Also discussed is the scornful treatment of carcasses as trophies of victory, and, by extension, the possible function of the beasts as trophies as well (in the manner described by Jesch, as quoted above).

The exploration of the scornful reduction of human beings to the level of carrion-food leads to a discussion of the predicament of the corpse in the grave, the consumption by worms below

²⁰² Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 251.

²⁰³ The importance of the placement of the beasts is discussed in chapter one.

ground paralleling the consumption by beasts on the *wælstede* ('place of slaughter'). Narratives touching on the fate of corpses after execution are examined, particularly those where the body is subsequently despoiled by the wolf, raven or eagle. The despoiling of a corpse by carrion-eaters is read in light of the Anglo-Saxon concern with the link between bodily preservation and the sanctity of the soul. This chapter concludes with a contrast between the humiliating non-burials discussed above and respectful treatment of the dead such as Beowulf's pyre and the elaborate burial of the Sutton Hoo king, to emphasise by contrast how humiliating the prospect of bodily despoilment by carrion-eaters was, particularly for members of a warrior culture.²⁰⁴

There are few circumstances in which a human corpse would have been left to the mercy of carrion-eaters, even in Anglo-Saxon England. Thompson writes that 'the predicament of the corpse in the grave is a common theme in Old English writing [and medieval Christianity]'²⁰⁵ yet any instance of the body being left unburied is notable. Beside the need to dispose of a corpse before it begins to decay, burial or cremation is seen as one final act of dignity, no matter how undignified the victim's manner of death may have been. The Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with burial is demonstrated in lines 81b–84a of *The Wanderer*, which describes the fates of various carcasses:

<i>Sumne fugel opbær</i>	One a bird bore away
<i>ofer heanne holm, sumne se hara wulf</i>	over the deep sea, one the grey wolf ripped
<i>deaðe gedælde, sumne dreorighleor</i>	apart in death, one a man sad of countenance
<i>in eorðscræfe eorl gehydde.</i> ²⁰⁶	has hidden in an earth-grave.

Maxims I 146–51 includes the line *græf deadum men* ('for the dead man [there must be] a grave') – the importance of this concept is demonstrated by the maxim being presented alongside other absolutes such as 'frost must freeze, fire must consume wood' and so on. The 'grey one' (the wolf) prowls around the grave, lamenting not for the dead man but for its own hunger.

<i>Gryre sceal for greggum, græf deadum men;</i>	There must be terror for the grey one, for the dead man a grave; it will mourn
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²⁰⁴ The prospect of one's body being consumed by beasts is used as a recurring threat in another heroic culture, that of Homer's Achaeans in *The Iliad*. For example, Agamemnon warns his soldiers, '... Any man I catch trying to skulk behind his long beaked ships, hanging back from battle – he is finished. No way for *him* to escape the dogs and birds!' Robert Fagles, trans., *The Iliad*, book 2, lines 465–8, (London: Penguin Books, 1990). Examples of disrespectful treatment of corpses, such as the hacking off of heads and despoiling of bodies, abound throughout *The Iliad*.

²⁰⁵ Thompson, 'Death in England', 161–2.

²⁰⁶ John C. Pope, ed. *Seven English Poems*, 2nd edition (New York and London: Norton, 1981), 28–32.

<i>hungre heofeð, nales þæt heafe bewindeð,</i>	for hunger, the grey wolf circles the grave.
<i>ne huru wæl wepeð wulf se græga,</i>	It does not weep for the slaughter, nor indeed for the
<i>morþorwealm mæcga, ac hit a mare wille.</i>	death of kings, but will always wish for more.

The burial/cremation tradition around the treatment of corpses is replicated across most world cultures and religions,²⁰⁷ with evidence of such locatable in sources as early as *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*.²⁰⁸ Circumstances in which a corpse would have been deliberately left to carrion-eaters can be divided into two categories: warfare and executions.

Scorn and exultation after warfare

The outcome of a battle lends a different set of associations to many of the phrases that are used in the poetry, meaning an identical formula can have positive associations in one poem and negative in another. The beasts are thus a terrifying image full of foreboding in an account of a military disaster such as *The Battle of Maldon*, yet they are an uplifting, celebratory sight in accounts of battles where the Anglo-Saxons were victorious, such as *The Battle of Brunanburh*.²⁰⁹

The Beasts of Battle passage in lines 60a–5a of *The Battle of Brunanburh* is particularly notable for its evocation of a feeling of scorn for the dead. After a conclusive victory, the Anglo-Saxon brothers Æthelstan and Edmund turn their backs on the carcass-strewn battlefield and leave the bodies to the carrion-eaters. Rejoicing in their success, they walk away with the full knowledge of what will happen to the unburied corpses (and, as suggested by Isaacs, perhaps rejoicing in this grisly knowledge as well).²¹⁰ Hostilities have ceased yet they have no intention of burying the unworthy dead, which have become, in essence, objects of contempt.

²⁰⁷ With the notable exception of the Parsee (Zoroastrian) practice of ritualistic exposure of corpses to carrion birds.

²⁰⁸ Odysseus rebukes Eurycleia for gloating over the bodies of the slain suitors: 'It is an impious thing to exult over the slain'. Emile Rieu, trans., *The Odyssey*, book 22, lines 411–15 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946). In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the helmsman Palinurus is washed overboard and left unburied until his shade is later encountered on the shores of the river Styx. Aeneas is told that 'no man may be ferried [across the Styx to the afterlife] until his bones are laid to rest. Instead they wander for a hundred years, fluttering round these shores...'. The shade of Palinurus begs Aeneas to find his body and throw some earth over the corpse, and is reassured that a burial mound will be raised in his honour. See David West, trans., *The Aeneid*, Book 6, lines 340–85. (London: Penguin, 1990).

²⁰⁹ Having a differing (or even contradictory) interpretation of a single phrase reflects Isidore of Seville's concept of *pro bono, pro malo*, wherein passages or imagery from scripture are interpreted both positively and negatively to explore all of their multiple meanings. For example, the snake is referred to in scripture as the most intelligent of creatures, yet is responsible for Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden and frequently linked with Satan – it is up to the reader to apply a positive or negative interpretation to this creature, depending on the meaning they are looking for. Isidore's writings are discussed further in chapter three.

²¹⁰ Isaacs, 'Battlefield Tour: Brunanburg', 242.

Campbell comments that the description of the beasts evokes ‘two feelings which breathe through the poem, scorn and exultation’.²¹¹ The phrase *leton him behindan* (‘they left behind them’) gives a strong indication of the mood of the victorious brothers. In lines 56b–65a we are given a series of descriptors that contrast the mood of the defeated raiders with the mood of the victorious defenders, starting with the Norsemen and Scots *dreorig daraða ... æwiscmode* (‘dreary, ashamed ... depressed in spirit’), the Anglo-Saxons *wiges hremige* (‘exulting in war’), and the eagle *æses brucan* (‘enjoying the carcasses’). The audience is thus given a series of hints as to how they should react to the grisly aftermath of this battle: not with sorrow or pity for the fallen as in other battle narratives, but with exultation.²¹²

Preceded by a description of the victors, the phrase *leton him behindan* also serves to draw the audience’s attention from Æthelstan and Edmund back to the battlefield. Isaacs writes that this phrase ‘serves as a transition from the victors back to the spoils which remain ... The attention of the poet and reader remains focused on the field where the traditional Beasts of Battle appear in order to complete what warriors and weapons had begun’.²¹³ Here Isaacs raises an important point – the victors may be leaving the battlefield with barely a thought for the fate of the corpses, but the *scop* wants the audience to linger and take in the full force of the victory (and tragedy) of this battle, enhanced by the presence of the carrion-eaters. Isaacs writes of the *Brunanburh* victors:

Primarily, they were leaving the corpses behind, knowing the scavengers would be there, and perhaps exulting in this aspect of the victory as well. But artistically, the poet (along with the brothers) is leaving both corpses and scavengers behind on the field for *us*. After all, that is where we are, and the poet stands there with us pointing out the sights and telling us causes and effects, historical background and significances.²¹⁴

Having redirected the audience to the battlefield, the *scop* chooses to concentrate attention upon the beasts rather than lingering on the corpses. He describes the colours of the trio’s feathers or coats, the curve of the raven’s beak, the splash of white on the eagle’s tail-feathers and the forest from which emerges the grey wolf. These details speak volumes by virtue of their associative powers, making a longer description of the aftermath of battle unnecessary.

²¹¹ Alistair Campbell, ed., *The Battle of Brunanburh* (London: Heinemann, 1938), 41.

²¹² *Egill’s Saga*, which tells the story of the clash at Brunanburh from the Norse perspective, puts the battle in context – the combined army of the Norse and Scots had already laid waste to Northumberland and humiliated Álfgeirr, who fled to Æthelstan for protection. The victory at Brunanburh would have therefore been all the more triumphant for the Anglo-Saxons.

²¹³ Isaacs, ‘Battlefield Tour: Brunanburg’, 241.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

Apparently, only enemy bodies litter the battlefield of *Brunanburh*, as we are told in lines 16b–19a:

<i>þær læg secg mænig</i>	There many men lay
<i>garum ageted, guma norþerna</i>	destroyed by spears, men from the north,
<i>ofer scild scoten, swilce Scittisc eac,</i>	shot over the shield, and Scots too,
<i>werig, wiges sæd.</i>	weary and sated with battle.

An Anglo-Saxon audience would have therefore greeted the appearance of the beasts in this instance without fear and perhaps even with satisfaction, even though they have known the beasts to feast on English dead in other accounts. The raven, eagle and wolf appear *after* the slaughter has occurred, which suggests they do not bring with them an atmosphere of doom (as discussed in chapter one) or the threat that Anglo-Saxon warriors may be slaughtered in the near future. Functioning as symbols of victory rather than playing out their traditional roles as symbols of elegy and doom, the beasts are a welcome sight that adds a final (gruesome) sweetness to the triumph of the defenders and the humiliation of the Norse and Scottish raiders.

Lack of impartiality

Across the body of poems the Beasts of Battle can usually be seen to maintain an unyielding impartiality which is generally absent in the Norse equivalent (discussed in chapter four). The beasts symbolise the wild, or areas outside of human control, and therefore maintain no allegiance to any human nation. This impartiality is demonstrated through the fact that they traditionally appear in their prophetic role before battles no matter which side is to prevail, screaming with equal zeal for carcasses from both sides. Yet, as noted above, the *Brunanburh* beasts are drawn to a battlefield full of enemy bodies only, and the Anglo-Saxons welcome their appearance (or at least are content to leave them to their meal). The usually unaligned beasts, in this particular instance, would have been regarded as on the Anglo-Saxon ‘side’. Niles writes of this imbalance in *Brunanburh*:

In most other instances in Old English the motif is introduced in anticipation of a battle. Usually it conveys an even-handed horror as the carrion creatures are imagined to feed on the slain of either side. Here, the only dead seem to be enemy dead. There are no regrets. The poet contemplates the fate of the corpses with the same grim equanimity with which he then takes pride in the body count.²¹⁵

Having the beasts aligned to the Anglo-Saxon defenders means they function not as an expression of elegy, but as part of the *scop*’s boastful summing-up of Æthelstan’s victory.

²¹⁵ John Niles, ‘Skaldic Technique in *Brunanburh*’, *SS* 59 (1987): 358.

Praising the victors

As mentioned above, the eulogistic usage of the beasts can lend a passage a skaldic feel, as evident in *The Battle of Brunanburh*. The beasts' function here appears to be praising victorious warriors rather than adding pathos to the description of the fallen.²¹⁶ In leaving behind corpses for the carrion-eaters to share and enjoy, the victorious brothers are, in essence, 'feeding' the Beasts of Battle. The skaldic technique of focusing on the creator of carrion rather than on the dead themselves (discussed in chapter four), however, cannot be said to wholly apply here, as the attention of the audience is deliberately drawn away from the victors and back to the battlefield dead.

The mood of the beasts

The feeling of exultation in *Brunanburh* and other poems is generated in part by the mood of the beasts, the portrayals of which contain a surprising amount of positive language for an essentially elegiac trope. This is in part due to the Anglo-Saxon love of litotes, or deliberate understatement. The *Brunanburh* beasts are *æses brucan* ('enjoying the carcasses'), sharing in and adding to the decisive victory of the Anglo-Saxons. The *fus* ('eager') *Beowulf* beasts (3024b–27b) excitedly chatter among themselves about how they fare at the eating, the *Elene* raven (110b) *weorces gefeah* ('rejoices in its work'), the *Exodus* war-birds (162b) are *hilde grædige* ('greedy for battle'), the wolf and raven in *Judith* (205b–12a) *gefeah* ('rejoice') while their companion, the eagle, is *ættes georn* ('eager for food'). Across the range of Beasts of Battle passages, the creatures are repeatedly referred to as 'eager' or 'greedy' for carrion.²¹⁷ As Renoir points out, the poets appear to go out of their way to describe the beasts' state of mind.²¹⁸ In most cases, the effect of the jubilant mood of the beasts would have served to add to the horror of their presence – as if their mere appearance and gruesome intentions are not enough, they display a dreadful delight and eagerness in anticipation of feasting on the dead. This contributes to the atmosphere of pathos and hopelessness following the majority of the passages – the tragedy of death and defeat is compounded by the idea that even denizens of the natural world, unaligned to any army or nation, are crowing with delight over the fallen warriors.

²¹⁶ Isaacs comments that 'the poem is clearly, at least on one level, a panegyric of Æthelstan'. 'Battlefield Tour: Brunanburg', 236.

²¹⁷ Griffith notes similar usage of the term *wælgifre* ('greedy for slaughter') and its cognates as applied to weapons (*The Wanderer* 100) and death (*Guthlac* 999, *The Phoenix* 486). Griffith, 'Convention and Originality', 190.

²¹⁸ Alain Renoir, 'Crist Ihesu's Beasts of Battle: A Note on Oral-Formulaic Theme Survival', *Neophilologus* 60 (1976): 459(n).

The reverse of this atmosphere, however, is generated in *Brunanburh* 60a–5a and *Genesis A* 2159b–61b, both of which describe the beasts feasting in the aftermath of a victory. Details of the beasts’ mood (such as *grædig* and *æses brucan*) increase the feeling of scorn for the defeated enemy and add to the exultation in victory.

***Beowulf*’s ‘blithe-hearted’ raven**

Beowulf lines 1799a–1803a contain one of the most uplifting scenes in the poem. Danger is past, and while the ‘great-hearted one’ (Beowulf) and his retinue enjoy a well-earned sleep, the raven croaks – not to augur slaughter or doom but to greet the dawn and ‘announce the joy of heaven’. Similar to the examples above, the raven is here reflecting and amplifying the celebratory mood of the Danes and Geats.²¹⁹

<i>Reste hine þa rumheort; reced hliuade</i>	The great-hearted one rested; the hall towered above
<i>geap ond goldfah; gæst inne swæf,</i>	wide-gabled and gold-adorned; the guest slept within
<i>op þæt hrefn blaca heofones wynne</i>	until the black raven, blithe-hearted,
<i>bliðheort bodode, ða com beorht scacan</i>	announced the joy of heaven when the bright light
<i>scima ofer sceadwa.</i>	dispersed the shadows.

The sleepers in the hall are awakened to enjoy a day of peace and celebration, a significant change to their horrifying awakenings the previous two evenings and to the Danes’ long series of frightful awakenings caused by Grendel’s night-raids. Hume writes:

Whereas it was Grendel and his mother who woke the men on two previous occasions, here the raven wakes them, and not to fight ... but to rejoice; that the men may thus sleep undisturbed until the raven wakes them demonstrates that Heorot is cleansed. The sun which the raven greets disperses the darkness and shadows associated with the monsters.²²⁰

The raven appears again at the end of the poem (lines 3024b–7b)²²¹ in its traditional role as a Beast of Battle. It is likely that listeners hearing of this second, bloodier, raven would be reminded of the first, as there are a number of parallels between the passages.²²² Both scenes occur in the morning; the first before a joyful dawn and the second in the presence of

²¹⁹ ‘The poet has projected their gratitude and gladness into the singing of the bird, making the raven an “objective correlative” for their emotions.’ Katherine Hume, ‘The Function of the “Hrefn Blaca”’: *Beowulf* 180’, *MP* 67 (1969): 61.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

²²¹ This passage is examined in detail in chapter one.

²²² ‘The repetition of a given word in various contexts in a poem deepens and modifies its meaning, and a coherent pattern of raven imagery emerges’, Sylvia Horowitz, ‘The Ravens in “Beowulf”’, *JEGP* 80 (1981): 502.

morgenceald ('morning-cold') spears. Both ravens awaken the sleepers – the croaking of the second raven replaces the sound of the harp, symbol of joy. As Harris writes of the latter passage, there is 'no sunrise and no hero here'.²²³

Hume notes that the raven, 'normally associated with darkness and evil, [is here] made into part of the pattern of light.'²²⁴ The colour-words used to describe the raven differ subtly – the blithe-hearted raven is *blaca*, while the carrion-eating raven is *wonna*.²²⁵ Hume points out that *blaca* means 'black' as expected, but may also be translated as 'bright' or 'shiny' – 'a shiny raven seems especially appropriate to the poet's picture of this particular dawn'.²²⁶ *Wonna* is often translated as 'dark' but usually denotes dullness, or an absence of light. While the blithe-hearted raven reflects the brilliance of the joyful dawn, the carrion-eating raven remains a shadowy figure.

Another such contrast can be found in the description of the raven's sound – the blithe-hearted raven *bodode* ('announced' or 'proclaimed') the joy of heaven, rather than croaking or screaming as the raven does throughout so many of the Beasts of Battle passages. Hume writes that these subtle differences in colour and sound serve to make this raven:

... reflect physically the characteristic of the morning, giving a traditional image ... a new dimension, and dislocating it from its normal patterns of association.²²⁷

Due to these 'patterns of association' (i.e. the raven's role as a Beast of Battle and its associative link with corpses and slaughter across the Old English corpus and later literary traditions), scholars have questioned its suitability as a bird of good omen. Hume comments that at first glance, 'the raven is associated so exclusively with ill omen and carnage that it is inappropriate in this joyful context',²²⁸ while Harris notes that even modern readers expect to encounter the raven 'melancholy upon a midnight dreary or else red in tooth and claw',²²⁹ yet we are surprised to discover it instead rejoicing at the coming of dawn.

²²³ Harris, 'Beasts of Battle, South and North', 13.

²²⁴ Hume, 'The Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 63.

²²⁵ See discussion of colour words in chapter one p.36. See also Angus Cameron, *The Old English Nouns of Colour: A Semantic Study* (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1968). It is likely that *blaca* ('black' and *blæcan* ('bleach') share the same root, denoting an absence of colour. See Bosworth-Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 95.

²²⁶ Hume, 'The Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 63.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

²²⁹ Harris, 'Beasts of Battle, South and North', 12.

When analysing the poet's choice of bird in a passage such as *Beowulf* 1799a–1803a, it is easy to forget a possibility often ignored by scholars who build arguments based on associative links – the raven may simply be a bird, devoid of associative meaning.²³⁰ It is an ornithological fact that ravens cry at daybreak, and this particular raven may be 'merely a bird whose cry pleases the man already pleased, or annoys the man already out of sorts.'²³¹ It may be simply filling the role of a barnyard rooster – one reason why this is appropriate in the context of *Beowulf* is that a rooster 'would not be in keeping with heroic decorum ... the raven [on the other hand] is a conventional denizen of the heroic landscape'.²³² Osborn suggests that the raven may have been chosen as it has a 'latent capacity for symbolism because it possesses characteristics that allow projection upon it of human attributes',²³³ such as its inquisitiveness, greed, and habit of mourning a dead mate.

The blithe-hearted raven does not appear to be in possession of its powers of augury, used so often across the Beasts of Battle passages. Hume writes that in parallel traditions the raven 'may signify either good or evil as circumstances demand', but this particular raven:

... is not, strictly speaking, a bird of omen at all. It appears *after* Beowulf's victories, and its joy at the sun's advent is *not prophetic*, but is merely a reflection of the happiness of the Danes and Geats.²³⁴

If we do allow the raven possession of its body of associations, the 'blithe-hearted' passage could be read as a nod towards the tradition around ravens and daybreak in Norse epic poetry, the combination of which can suggest that slaughter is imminent.

The Viking raven banner, examined in detail in chapter four, provides an example of the raven being associated with victory. The raven pictured on the standard is described as magically coming to life, flapping its wings when victory was assured and hanging limp when battle

²³⁰ See Alberto Manguel, 'Outside my window is a cardinal', in Gibson, *Bedside Book of Birds*, 17. Passage reproduced in full in the conclusion to this thesis, p.188.

²³¹ Hume, 'The Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 67.

²³² *Ibid.*, 62.

²³³ Marijane Osborn, "Domesticating the Dayraven in Beowulf 1801", from Helen Damico and John Leyerle, eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honour of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 313–30.

²³⁴ Hume, 'The Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 61. Treating a reference to Noah's flood on the hilt of Beowulf's magical sword (lines 1689–93) as a clue left by the *scop*, Horowitz suggests a connection between the blithe-hearted raven of *Beowulf* and the raven released by Noah after the flood, writing, 'The morning when Noah let loose his raven into the sunlight after all the descendants of Cain had been killed parallels the morning in *Beowulf* after the monsters have met their death ... [it is] the same bird in the same situation as Noah's raven'. Horowitz, 'The Ravens in "Beowulf"', 504. Noah's raven is discussed in detail in chapter three.

turned against the bearers.²³⁵ The reasons for the two birds' joy, however, are not quite parallel – the raven on the banner celebrates victory but is most excited at the subsequent feast of corpses. The blithe-hearted raven's joy is less grim – it is celebrating the advent of day, the end of conflict and the defeat of the two monsters, but there is no impression that it intends to feast on their corpses (it could not even if it wished to do so, as the corpses lie at the bottom of the mere). This peaceful raven's motives seem to be less selfish, celebrating Beowulf's victories even though the hero has not provided the bird with carrion.

The Eddic poem *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana onnor* (HHII) describes the Valkyrie Sigrun's joy at entering a funeral mound to meet her dead lover, comparing it with the joy of a raven at the prospect of carrion meat.²³⁶ The raven is equally excited at daybreak:

<i>Nú em ec svá fegin fundi ocrom</i>	Now I am so glad, at our meeting
<i>sem átfrekir Oðins haucar,</i>	as are the greedy hawks of Odin [ravens]
<i>er val vito, varmar bráðir,</i>	when they know of slaughter, steaming food,
<i>eða dogglitir dags brún síá</i>	or, dew-drenched, they see the dawn [brow of day]. ²³⁷

Here is evidence in a parallel literary tradition that ravens were excited by two prospects: imminent slaughter (as we know) and the coming of day. The raven's excitement at daybreak in *Beowulf* may very well have been an allusion to the Norse tradition.²³⁸ Harris notes three further parallels – firstly, Sigrun's joy is equated with that of the ravens, while the sleeping Beowulf's happiness would appear to be mirrored in the raven's joy (*rumheort* having *bliðheort* as its counterpart). Secondly, the feathers of both ravens shine (*blaca* and *dogglitir*) reflecting the brightness of dawn, and lastly the dawn itself is 'lightly personified' in both passages, with the 'brow of day' appearing in the Norse poem and a dawn that 'comes

²³⁵ See Asser's *Vita Alfredi Regis*, as quoted in Niels Lukman, 'The Raven Banner and the Changing Ravens: A Viking Miracle from Carolingian Court Poetry to Saga and Arthurian Romance', *Classica et Medievalia* 19 (1958): 141. See also the mention of a raven banner in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (E), year 878 in Michael Swanton, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1996). Hume suggests that the 'triumphant associations of the *hrefn blaca* may have been reinforced in the audience's minds' by knowledge of this banner. Hume, 'The Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 62.

²³⁶ Harris, 'Beasts of Battle, South and North', 11–12.

²³⁷ HHII 43, from C. Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 139.

²³⁸ It is possible that the name *Dæghrefn* (*Beowulf* 2501) also belongs to this tradition. Horowitz notes that the *Dæghrefn* character falls between the blithe-hearted raven and the carrion-eating raven: 'The poem moves from a morning raven, to a day-raven, to corpse-eating ravens, a progression that has something to do with the presence of death in the life of a young man, a middle-aged man, and a man who knows that he will die soon ... the happy, morning raven marks the entrance into worldly prosperity, God's reward for virtue; the names that are raven compounds, Ravenswood and Day Raven, mark the entrance into fratricidal power; and the corpse-eaters attend or foretell the final stage'. Horowitz, 'The Ravens in "Beowulf"', 507, 511.

hastening' in the Old English.²³⁹ All that is missing from the *Beowulf* passage is an overt connection between the blithe-hearted raven and carrion.²⁴⁰ In a way, it is notable by its absence, particularly if there were any listeners familiar with *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana onnor* who may have interpreted the *Beowulf* passage as a variation on the Norse tradition.²⁴¹

The raven passage of *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* (*HHI*), quoted in full in chapter four, contains the line *nú er dagr kominn* ('now day is come'), spoken by the raven in reference to the birth of the hero.²⁴² The hero is associated with daybreak, which is in turn linked with the joy of ravens and wolves at the prospect of the carrion Helgi will provide. The *Beowulf* scop thus presents a joyful raven at daybreak in line with the Norse tradition but stops short at the mention of carrion – as Harris writes, 'perhaps wishing to avoid the ungente implication that his hero will sate ravens'.²⁴³

To conclude our analysis of the blithe-hearted raven, it is helpful to note that it appears at a turning point in the *Beowulf* narrative. The monsters are dead and, for the first time, the night is undisturbed by horror. The raven reflects the lessening of tension and sets the celebratory mood for the day ahead. Hume writes:

Even as the night is no longer fearsome, the raven is no longer a harbinger of slaughter ...
Thus by altering a bird normally associated with carnage and ill omen to a bird of joy,
victory, and light, the poet has created a symbol which epitomizes this general change.²⁴⁴

The blithe-hearted raven is not elegiac, nor is it prophetic or in any way scornful. Rather, its purpose is to celebrate victory and vocalise the joy of the morning, a joy that is all the more effective since it comes from a surprising source.²⁴⁵

The din of the beasts

Closely linked to the mood of the Beasts of Battle is the fact that they are undeniably noisy – the wolf, eagle and raven between them generate a cacophony of screaming, screeching and

²³⁹ Harris, 'Beasts of Battle, South and North', 12.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 12.

²⁴¹ *HIII* is further examined in chapter four.

²⁴² *HHI*, lines 5–6.

²⁴³ Harris, 'Beasts of Battle, South and North', 13.

²⁴⁴ Hume, 'The Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 63.

²⁴⁵ We do not need to look far in Scandinavian culture to find an explanation for the blithe-hearted raven, with semi-domesticated 'home ravens' widely regarded as symbols of luck in Iceland. Osborn writes, 'the day raven, [or] home raven of Heorot, is being used in *Beowulf* as a symbol, like any farm raven, of the luck of the house, because this bird comes around squawking at dawn when times are good'. Osborn, 'Domesticating the Dayraven', 326.

howling in anticipation of the feast. The *Battle of Maldon scop* situates the eagle and raven between two reports of the commotion of battle – *þær wearð hream ahafen, hremmas wundon, earn æses georn; wæs on eorðan cyrm* ('a din was upraised there; ravens wheeled about, the eagle greedy for carrion. There was clamour on the earth').²⁴⁶ This last observation could refer to the noise made by the troops, that is, clashing shields and ringing swords, but it is likely that the beasts added their own voices to the *eorðan cyrm*.

Griffith notes that the birds speak or sing on fourteen occasions, which suggests that the *scops* felt this was an important detail to include when employing the Beasts of Battle theme.²⁴⁷ The din of the beasts is likely to have fulfilled several functions. Firstly, it effectively portrays their excitement and eagerness, almost always stressed by the *scops* and otherwise portrayed through descriptors such as 'eager' and 'greedy'.²⁴⁸ The excitement of the beasts is a valuable device for *scops* to build drama in the narrative as the battle approaches and generate a similar level of excitement in their audience. Jorgensen writes:

Referring to terrifying, overwhelming, or, conversely, thrilling or encouraging noises is a way that poets can convey the atmosphere of the battlefield and the mood of warriors ... Like the forward march and the hubbub of armies, the beasts create a sense of the mood of battle, a mood of excitement and terror. In this their noises play a key part.²⁴⁹

The beasts appear to provide a comment from nature itself that the transpiring (or upcoming) battle is indeed exciting. A similar effect can be found in the 11th-century Celtic account of the Battle of Clontarf, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* ('The war of the Irish with the foreigners'), where a mythical, bird-like figure (the *badb*) rises screaming above the battle and is joined by a host of supernatural beings that together raise an enormous din.²⁵⁰ While the Anglo-Saxon tradition shows the natural world commenting on the drama of the battle, the hovering beings at Clontarf provide a *supernatural* commentary on the excitement below.

The Celtic *badb* and the noisy Anglo-Saxon beasts fulfil a second, related function, which is to add to the general confusion and uproar of the slaughterfield. As mentioned above, the *scops*

²⁴⁶ *The Battle of Maldon* 106a–7b.

²⁴⁷ Griffith, 'Convention and Originality', 186.

²⁴⁸ See *Elene* 52–3, *Judith* 209–11 and *Genesis A* 1983–5. Jorgensen writes that 'noise is most directly associated not so much with violence itself as with its psychological conditions: the Beasts of Battle are images of bloodlust ... noise lends a psychological depth and realism to battle-description, helping to convey elements such as excitement, courage, terror and ... suffering'. Alice Jorgensen, 'The Trumpet and Wolf', 322.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 320, 322.

²⁵⁰ *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* is examined in chapter four.

layer and raise the noise level in the lead-up to battle as an effective way to build drama and excitement. *The Battle of Brunanburh* lines 48a–51b contain an example of this technique, with the striking of standards, the mingling of spears, the meeting of men and the clashing of weapons all building drama and leading to the climactic arrival of the beasts.

The clamour described in these passages adds a realistic touch to the poetry – after all, such battles would have been chaotic, confusing and undoubtedly deafening, and the beasts would have contributed to the cacophony in no small measure. The formula is somewhat misleading in that it usually refers to a single member of each species – presumably ‘the raven’ and ‘the eagle’ refer to large flocks of birds, while ‘the wolf’ refers to an entire wolf pack, as observed in the wild.²⁵¹ A flock of ravens, in particular, creates an incredible din, particularly when they are feeding.

As discussed in chapter one, Griffith (who describes the beasts’ attitude as one of ‘expectation and noisy exultation’)²⁵² suggests that the clamour of the beasts is triggered by the noise of battles they attend: ‘The noise of the beasts seems ... to be an analogue, or a repercussion, of the immediately preceding noise of the armies’.²⁵³ Interestingly, this response to the clamour of battle can occur in anticipation, that is, the beasts are screaming in response to the slaughter that they augur. The beasts appear in *Elene* 27b–30a, for example, as the Roman and Hun armies are drawing together but not yet in combat. Their howling and screeching is soon followed by *rand dynede, campwudu clyned* (‘the rattling of shields and clanging of war-wood’, 50b–51a).

Griffith further comments that the vocal beasts, in responding to the trigger of human noise, ‘seem like the warriors and, vice-versa, warriors in the poetry are often made to seem beast-

²⁵¹ Shepard writes of the human preference to envisage beasts as individuals rather than realistically treat them as members of a group: ‘No one thinks of a herd of bears, a drive of tigers, or a flock of eagles. Our image of these animals is as individuals, as part of a singular grandeur, whose uniqueness of powers and spirit would be degraded by their gathering in crowds.’ A *wælstowe* littered with corpses would have attracted a large number of scavenging beasts and birds, including the wolf which habitually travels in a pack. See Paul Shepard, *The Tender Carnivore and The Sacred Game* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1973).

²⁵² Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality’, 189.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 189. Jorgensen notes that *wulfas sungon* (‘wolves sang’) of *Exodus* 164b is answered by *byman sungon* (‘trumpets sang’) five lines later. She writes ‘while the trumpets, alongside the gleam of equipment and ranks of spears, suggest the ordered strength of the Egyptian force, the wolves signal the chaos that comes in their wake ... The harmonious notes of the trumpet, the extension of the leader’s voice communicating his commands [is] associated with courage, movement, and moral initiative. Discordant clamour, whether the howling of the beasts, the mourning of the terrified Israelites, or the weeping of the dying Egyptians ... evokes fear and lack of faith; it drives out speech and at last brings silence.’ Jorgensen, ‘The Trumpet and the Wolf’, 325, 327–328, 330.

like'.²⁵⁴ Indeed, in the majority of the poems, a running thread of anthropomorphism is discernible in the *scops*' descriptions of the clamour of the beasts. Although they do on occasion make the sounds one would expect – screaming, shrieking or howling – the wolf, raven and eagle are also described as making very human noises. For example, the wolf in *Elene* 27b–30a *fyrðleoð agol* ('sang a war-song'), while the eagle *sang ahof* ('raised up its song'), as does the wolf in line 112b of the same poem. The wolf in *Judith* 211b *sang hildeleoð* ('sang a battle-song'),²⁵⁵ and the wolf in *Exodus* 165a *sungon atol æfenleoð* ('sang a horrid evening-song'), often translated by scholars as 'evensong', lending a demonic twist to the wolf's howl.²⁵⁶

There is no suggestion that the songs *sang ahof* by the beasts are meant to be pleasant – their chilling war-songs are a far cry from birdsong.²⁵⁷ Like the human warriors on the battlefield, the beasts sing to strike fear, not in their enemies, but in the *scop*'s audience.²⁵⁸ There is an element of horror in the inference that the personified beasts are intelligent and deliberate in their actions, rather than being drawn to the battle by animal instinct only.

Overall, the noise of the beasts can be said to reflect and enhance the mood which the *scop* is trying to create with their appearance – that is, anticipatory horror as reflected in the screaming *Exodus* war-birds, excited battle-lust reflected in the *Judith* eagle's 'battle-song', or elegiac mourning in the case of the howling *Finnsburh* wolf. Where the mood is positive and victory is assured, the beasts can be seen as adding their voices to the celebration of victory and to the *scop*'s scornful commentary on the vanquished army.

²⁵⁴ Griffith, 'Convention and Originality', 190.

²⁵⁵ Comparable with the *gryreleoð galan ... sigeléasne sang* ('terrible war song ... song of defeat') howled by the stricken Grendel in *Beowulf* 786a–7a.

²⁵⁶ The *atol æfenleoð* may also be an echo of the same phrase in *Exodus* 201, referring to the frightened weeping or vespers of the Israelite camp the evening before. Again, the *scop* is playing with the 'call and answer' technique of repetition. See Jorgensen, 'The Trumpet and the Wolf', 327.

²⁵⁷ Griffith notes that mailcoats also 'sing' in *Beowulf* (lines 226, 322–3 and 327). 'Convention and Originality', 190. Jorgensen comments that the howls of the Beasts of Battle suggests that the battle-narrative is a 'testing encounter with the forces of chaos, the frightening non-human zone represented in the beasts and their howls' ('The Trumpet and the Wolf', 332). Neville similarly writes of the natural world in Old English poetry 'symbolising the forces ... capable of destroying human society'. Jennifer Neville, 'Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry', *CSASE* 27 (1999): 55. The association of the Beasts of Battle with the belligerent natural world or areas outside of human control is explored in depth in chapter five.

²⁵⁸ Jorgensen writes, '...often [the beasts'] cries are presented in terms of song or even speech ... the song of the beasts represents an inversion of and threat to human language; they point to the silencing of human voices and the destruction of human bodies, which they hope to dismember and eat'. Jorgensen, 'The Trumpet and the Wolf', 323.

Corpses as trophies of victory

Although it is an undeniably elegiac image, a *wælstede* strewn with enemy dead is likely to have also been viewed as a display of the victors' prowess in battle. The *Brunanburh scop*, for example, precedes the Beasts of Battle passage with a boastful body-count, pointing out the impressive number of Norse and Scottish corpses and noting the kings and earls among them.

Brunanburh 28b–32a

<i>Fife lægun</i>	Five youthful kings
<i>on þam campstede cyningas giunge,</i>	lay on the battlefield,
<i>sweordum aswefede, swilce seofene eac</i>	put to death with swords, as well as seven
<i>eorlas Anlafes, unrim heriges,</i>	earls of Anlaf, a countless number of the enemy
<i>flotan and Sceotta.</i>	seamen and Scots.

Brunanburh 65b–68a

<i>Ne wearð wæl mare</i>	Never yet has there been greater slaughter
<i>on þis eiglande æfre gieta</i>	of people cut down on this island,
<i>folces gefylled beforan þissum</i>	of people felled
<i>sweordes ecgum.</i>	by the edges of swords.

The corpses, along with the carrion-eaters that are drawn to them, function here as trophies of war, adding to the exultation over victory notable in the Beasts of Battle passages in *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *Genesis A*.

Human warriors are often represented as animals or birds of prey in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic poetry – whether through having an animal name such as Beowulf ('Bee-wolf')²⁵⁹ or because they are metaphorically described as such by the *scops* for associative effect.²⁶⁰ Before being picked over by the Beasts of Battle, the Anglo-Saxon dead in *The Battle of Maldon* would have been 'picked over' in a different sense by the aptly-named Norse *wælwulfas*, who would have stripped the corpses of valuable weaponry, armour and gold as plunder or trophies of war. In this way, the human victors function as scavenging carrion-beasts.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds. *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 464.

²⁶⁰ Compound names featuring *wulf* were very common in Anglo-Saxon England. A brief scan of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (E)* reveals its popularity among royalty and the clergy, namely *Ceolwulf*, *Botwulf*, *Seaxwulf*, *Wulfhere*, *Cynewulf*, *Eadwulf*, *Oswulf*, *Ealdwulf*, *Baldwulf*, *Eardwulf*, *Cenwulf*, *Wulfred*, *Beornwulf*, *Æthelwulf*, *Wulfheard*, *Beorhtwulf*, *Wulfhelm*, *Wulfstan*, *Wulfgar*, *Ordwulf*, *Wulfgeat*, *Wulfheah*, *Wulfnoth*, *Wulfric*, *Wulfsige* and *Wulfwold*.

Animal names carried by Norse and Celtic warriors are further discussed in chapter four.

²⁶¹ The attempt to strip Byrhtnoth of his valuables is described in chapter one, p.53.

Gatch comments that in Anglo-Saxon England the practise of trophy-taking extended to the decapitation of enemy bodies and retaining the heads as trophies of victory.²⁶² The removal of a head was the ultimate form of bodily despoilment (arguably more extreme than leaving a corpse to carrion-eaters) and was therefore a powerful indicator of scorn for the dead. Historical sources include the *Liber Eliensis* account of the Battle of Maldon²⁶³ which describes the decapitation of Byrhtnoth by the Vikings, who took his head back to their homeland. The Abbott of Ely later went to the field with some of his monks, took up the hero's body and buried it in his church with a round lump of wax in place of the head.²⁶⁴ The wax head was a poor attempt at dispelling the insult done to the noble Byrhtnoth, and an indication of the importance of a body remaining whole, even after death. Other sources include cap. iii of the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*, in which the heads of the suitors are displayed above the gate.²⁶⁵ Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* iii.6, 12 and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* xxvi both describe the defiling of Oswald's body in 641.²⁶⁶ Ælfric writes that the heathen king commanded his soldiers to strike off Oswald's head and right arm, and *settan hi to myrcelse* ('set them up as a token') on a pike. Oswald's brother Oswy later rescued his brother's head from the pike and took it 'with reverence' to Lindisfarne. Across a number of sources a pattern can be observed wherein after a decapitation or another form of bodily despoilment, an effort is made to bring the body back to wholeness again. A similar account can be found in Ælfric's *The Passion of St Edmund*, wherein the followers of St Edmund search for and recover the saint's decapitated head (which was being protected by a wolf). The miracle of St Edmund's corpse is further discussed in chapter three.²⁶⁷

The pattern of dismemberment followed by recovery can also be found in *Beowulf*. The hero tears off Grendel's arm (817) and presents it to Hrothgar as a trophy of battle. The monstrous arm is displayed in a place of honour in Heorot until Grendel's grief-maddened mother raids the hall to retrieve the trophy (1303) and takes it back to her den, presumably to bring the dismembered corpse of Grendel back to wholeness and lessen her offspring's humiliation. Upon arrival at the monsters' mere, Beowulf and his retinue are distressed at the sight of the decapitated head of Æschere (1420), who was killed in the raid. Æschere's decapitation is

²⁶² Milton Gatch, 'Noah's Raven in Genesis A and the Illustrated Old English Hexateuch', *Gesta* 14 (1975): 15.

²⁶³ Ernest Blake, ed., *Liber Eliensis* (Royal Historical Society, Camden 3rd Ser. Vol. 92, 1962), 136.

²⁶⁴ Eric Gordon, ed., *The Battle of Maldon* (London: Methuen & Co, 1937), 8.

²⁶⁵ Peter Goolden, ed., *Apollonius of Tyre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 4.

²⁶⁶ From Gatch, 'Noah's Raven in Genesis A', 15. Recovered a year later by Oswiu, Oswald's head was later associated with relics of Cuthbert (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 111.6, 12, ed. Chas Plummer, *Bedae opera historica* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1896); Ælfric, *Lives of Saints* xxvi. 162–8 and 256–68, ed. Walter Skeat, *Early English Text Society* 76, 82, 94, 114.

²⁶⁷ Skeat, 'Ælfric's Lives of Saints', 314–35.

avenged in lines 1588b–90b, in which the hero *becearf* (‘severed’) the already-slain Grendel’s head. Beowulf is able to swim with the head back to the surface of the mere, and the impressive size of the grisly trophy is emphasised by the *scop*’s description of four retainers carrying the head back to Hrothgar *on þaem wælstenge* ‘on a spear-shaft’ (1638). The head is carried into Heorot by the hair, a manner of presenting the trophy that further debases the vanquished enemy.²⁶⁸

Two surmises can be drawn from these accounts – firstly, that it was seen as vitally important that separated body parts should be brought together to return a corpse to a state of wholeness, and secondly, these grisly body parts were in effect treated in the same way as battle standards – invested with a great deal of importance, they were seen as trophies which warriors would often go to extraordinary lengths to capture or recover.²⁶⁹

The above descriptions suggest that human bodies after death in battle were objects of significance, even to the extent where body parts were removed and taken home as trophies. Corpses in the poems are described and counted, functioning as trophies in praise of the victor. The Beasts of Battle are, by association, also trophies of victory, their very presence signalling the victors’ prowess and scornful disregard for the corpses of their enemies.

Warriors as carrion-food

Another element which may have contributed to the association between the appearance of the beasts and a feeling of scorn for the enemy dead was the deliberate reduction of human beings to the level of carrion-meat. The dead, in being denied burial or cremation, suffer the final indignity of being *slitan* (‘torn apart’) and picked over by the beasts.²⁷⁰ The *Lex Burgundionum*, a set of laws compiled at the turn of the 6th century, reflects the indignity of becoming food for animals – falcon thieves are ironically punished by becoming food for the very bird they were attempting to steal. The falcon is fed six ounces of meat which are placed on the restrained thief’s breast or head.²⁷¹ Salisbury expands on the intended humiliation inherent in this punishment:

Falcon’s grip with their talons to eat, so the guilty party would have been damaged during this process. In fact, the individual would have been reduced to animal food, both

²⁶⁸ Gatch, ‘Noah’s Raven in Genesis A’, 15.

²⁶⁹ A similar level of concern about retrieving a corpse from one’s enemies can be found in Priam’s ransom of Hector’s body in book 24 of *The Iliad*.

²⁷⁰ Another level of insult is discernible in the beasts being labelled ‘unclean’ in the Judeo-Christian tradition (further discussed in chapter three.)

²⁷¹ Katherine Drew, trans., *The Burgundian Code: Book of Constitutions or Law of Gundobad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972).

symbolically by the falcon eating from his/her body, and actually, because of the probability that the falcon would include some of the human flesh in its meal. This reduction of human to animal food was ... a humiliation.²⁷²

In her exploration of death in Anglo-Saxon England, Thompson notes that there are little or no references to bodily decay across the Old English canon. The breaking-down of the human body after death is instead expressed 'in terms of eating', as a punishment wherein the sinful body is consumed by beasts, birds or worms. Dead bodies in Anglo-Saxon writings tend to be broken down in the food chain as quickly as possible.²⁷³ In *The Fates of Men*, two of the nine different deaths involve becoming food for animals, firstly being devoured by a wolf, and secondly becoming food for the black raven after death by hanging.²⁷⁴ The raven *nimeþ heafodsyne* ('steals the hanged man's eyes'),²⁷⁵ a habit that can be observed in raven attacks on livestock. There is a sense that these two deaths are not only the most gruesome, but also the most humiliating of the nine ways of being killed. Raw notes that although death in heroic poetry is often 'a splendid thing', there is no glory in being devoured by animals, as described in *The Fates of Men* and the fourteen Beasts of Battle passages examined in chapter one. She writes that 'here [death] is a sign of failure and humiliation'.²⁷⁶

Even a Christian burial (so often denied to fallen warriors on the *wælstede*) would not protect the body from the transformation into food. Sources describe the body being punished for its sinful nature while the soul remains free from such attacks. Thompson highlights relevant passages from *Vercelli Homily IV*, in which the soul berates at length the sinfulness of the human body, calling it 'God's enemy'²⁷⁷ and 'you chewed thing of worms and bitten thing of wolves and torn thing of birds'.²⁷⁸ Similar imagery is employed in *Soul and Body II*:

The Body is referred to as *wyrma gyfl* (titbit of worms, l. 22b and l. 124b), *wyrmum to wiste* (pleasure for worms, l. 25a), dismembered inch by inch and digested by armies of mould-worms, *moldwyrmes manige*, led appropriately by *Gifer* (Gluttony) with needle-sharp teeth.²⁷⁹

²⁷² Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 40.

²⁷³ Thompson, 'Death in England', 110.

²⁷⁴ This passage is further examined p.85.

²⁷⁵ *Fates of Men*, 36b.

²⁷⁶ Barbara Raw, *The Art and Background of Old English Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), 73–4.

²⁷⁷ Donald Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 265.

²⁷⁸ Thompson, 'Death in England', 76–7.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 90. Ryan writes that the language of *Soul and Body* is 'a little highly coloured when ... the body is told: "many earthworms shall gnaw thee, dark creatures, ravenous and greedy, grievously rend

The soul in the same poem (lines 53a–5b) further taunts the body after death:

... ne eart ðu þon leofra nænigum lifigendra	... nor are you more desired as a companion
men to gemæccum ne meder ne fæder	by any man among the living, by mother
ne nænigum gesybban þonne se sweart hrefen.	or by father, nor by your kinsman,
	than you are by the black raven.

That is, no human love can equal the delight of the raven as it feasts on the sinful carcass. This passage incorporates several of the characteristics previously examined – a Beast of Battle is employed to heighten an atmosphere of scorn, a corpse is despoiled, and the celebratory mood of the raven is at odds with the gruesome act being portrayed.

Thompson notes two passages where the consumption of corpses by worms is linked to spiritual punishment. *Christ III* (1250b–1a) reminds Christians that damned souls will suffer in hell the same agony that their corpses experience in the grave: *wyrma slite / bitrum ceaflum* ('the bite of worms with sharp teeth').²⁸⁰ In *Vercelli Homily IX*, burial is similarly likened to being punished in hell, as the body sleeps with 'three bedfellows ... dust and mould and worms'.²⁸¹

A connection can be drawn between the devouring worms described above and the Beasts of Battle, despite the fact that the beasts devour the corpse as it lies above ground (or hangs from the gallows), while the worms devour the body while it lies in the grave. Both attacks have a sense of inevitability about them, and both are linked to punishment or scorn (examples being the scorn of the victors in *The Battle of Brunanburh*, and the scorn of the soul for the body in *Soul and Body*). Lines 91b–5b of *The Fates of the Apostles* perhaps come closest to offering a discernible link between the two motifs. Cynewulf dwells on the indignity and gruesomeness of the death of the body in an effort to provide a stronger contrast with the soul's eternal reward.²⁸²

<i>Hu, ic freonda beþearf</i>	Indeed, I will have need of friends,
<i>liðra on lade, þonne ic sceal langne ham,</i>	of kind ones on the voyage, when I must seek alone
<i>eardwic uncuð, ana gesecan,</i>	the long home, the unknown abode,

thee"; or when "zealous worms strip the ribs; thirsty for blood they drink the corpses in swarms". Ryan, 'Othin in England', 478–9.

²⁸⁰ Bernard Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, Vol.1 (University of Exeter Press: Exeter, 1994), 92.

²⁸¹ Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies*, 168. Thompson writes: 'Punishment here takes the form of appropriate mutilation ... decay is not something intrinsic to the body: it is only visualised in terms of external attack, penetration and punishment' ('Death in England', 90).

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 115.

*lætan me on laste lic, eorðan dæl,
wælreaf wunigen weormum to hroðre.*

and leave behind me my body, this bit of earth,
mortal spoil, for the pleasure of worms.

Cynewulf stresses the indignity of death through the phrase *weormum to hroðre*, variously translated as ‘pleasure of worms’ or ‘sport for worms’. Like the wolf, raven and eagle, the worm takes pleasure in devouring the human body, a detail that adds horror and humiliation to the descriptions of such irreverent treatment of human carcasses.

While *The Fates of the Apostles* describes the gruesome consumption of the bodies of holy men in order to provide a stronger contrast with the reward for their souls, accounts can be found in the Anglo-Saxon canon of the bodily corruption of those whose souls are doomed to eternal punishment. Thompson writes that the ‘absolute corruption’ of King Herod results in his body coming under attack from devouring worms even while alive, giving him ‘a foretaste of the experience of the corpse in the grave ... and of the pains of hell to be suffered by his soul’.²⁸³ Ælfric writes of Herod:

*... and eac geswutelode on hwilcum suslum he moste æfter forðsiðe ecelice cwymlian. Hine gelæhte unasecgendlic adl: his lichama barn wiðutan mid langsumere hætan, and he eal innan samod forswæled wæs and toborsten. Him wæs metes micel lust, ac ðeah mid nanum ætum his gyfernesne gefyllan ne mihte ... Wæterseocnesse hine ofereode beneoðan þam gyrdle to ðan swiðe þæt his gesceapu maðan weollon, and stincende attor singallice of ðam toswollenum fotum fleow ...*²⁸⁴

... and it was also revealed which torments he would suffer for all time after his death. Unspeakable disease took him: the outside of his body burned with long-lasting heat and within he was altogether burning up and bursting. He had a great desire for food, but nothing he ate there could sate his greed ... water-sickness (dropsy) overcame him below his girdle to the extent that his being welled with worms, and stinking poison flowed constantly from his swollen feet.

The soul of Holofernes in *Judith* is described sinking down to hell and undergoing various torments, including being ‘entwined with worms’ and having no hope of escape from ‘that worm-hall’. After describing the horrific decapitation at the hands of Judith, the *scop* goes into detail about Holofernes’ eternal agony (111b–21b):

²⁸³ Thompson, ‘Death in England’, 119–20.

²⁸⁴ Peter Clemons, ed., *Catholic Homilies: The First Series. EETS*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 221.

<i>Læg se fula leap</i>	The foul corpse lay behind, lifeless,
<i>gesne beæftan, gæst ellor hwearf</i>	the spirit went elsewhere, deep beneath
<i>under neowelne næs ond ðær genyðerad wæs,</i>	the earth, and there it was oppressed,
<i>susle gesæled syððan æfre,</i>	bound in torment for ever after,
<i>wyrmum bewunden, witum gebunden,</i>	entwined with worms, bound with tortures,
<i>hearde gehæfted in hellebryne</i>	severely imprisoned in hellfire after his
<i>æfter hinsiðe. Ne ðearf he hopian no,</i>	journey hence. He would never have need to hope,
<i>þystrum forðylmed, þæt he ðonan mote</i>	engulfed with darkness, that he might
<i>of ðam wyrmsele, ac ðær wunian sceal</i>	escape from that worm-hall, but there
<i>awa to aldre butan ende forð</i>	he shall stay for ever and a day without end
<i>in ðam heolstran ham, hyhtwynna leas.</i>	in that dark home, destitute of the hope of joys.

The *scop* makes a point of noting Holofernes *genyðerad wæs* (‘was oppressed/disgraced’), further linking bodily consumption with humiliation. Gruesome punishments such as those of Herod and Holofernes are satisfying to read – the audience of these passages would have been pleased that the villains get their comeuppance. The extravagant detail of the descriptions adds to the indignity of the tyrants’ deaths – there is no hero’s death at the forefront of battle for the likes of Herod or Holofernes.

In contrast to the above accounts of bodily corruption stands the incorruptibility of the bodies of saints. Thompson comments that sources such as *Soul and Body* tell us that the two entities ‘remain linked even after separation: the body continues to reveal the state of the soul long after the two have gone their separate ways’.²⁸⁵ Miraculous preservation is further discussed in chapter three.

If the Christian audience of a Beast of Battle passage were aware of the link between bodily preservation and the soul’s immortality, the description of corpses being defiled by carrion-eaters on the battlefield would possibly have been interpreted as an indication of the state of (or lack of) the warriors’ souls. This would have been particularly relevant in the case of heathen attackers, that is, the corpse of a Norseman is fittingly devoured, as it is tied to his heathen soul which would have been regarded as damned (or non-existent) by the Christianised defenders.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ ‘Bodily preservation betokens the soul’s sanctity, as evidenced by the incorruption of St Cuthbert, the miraculous post mortem healing of St Æthelthryth’s tumour or the continuing vitality of St Edmund’s hair and nails in Ælfric’s *Lives of the Saints*.’ Thompson, ‘Death in England’, 84.

²⁸⁶ The beasts themselves would have been regarded as having no souls – Ælfric wrote that God *ne sealde nanum nytene ne nanum fisce nane sawle* (‘gave no soul to animals or fish’) – it seems appropriate, therefore, that the heathen or ‘soulless’ warriors are devoured by soulless beasts.

A Christian belief disseminated from the pulpit in Anglo-Saxon England held that the body and soul were under attack by both earthly and spiritual forces during the lifetime of a soldier of Christ (i.e. of a devout Christian). As discussed above, the Vercelli version of *Soul and Body* suggests that this assault does not cease with death and the parting of the two. Thompson writes:

Even after death and separation, soul and body continue to undergo parallel experiences of assault by enemies who penetrate and invade their sacred space, the devils' arrow-showers matched by the armies of worms that menace the corpse ... This convention adds to the impression that sin, dying, death and decay were perceived as a continuum of violent assault from without on the vulnerable and sentient body and soul.²⁸⁷

The Beasts of Battle, then, can be seen as a part of this attack, comparable with the worms that assault a corpse in a grave and paralleling physically the spiritual attack on the warrior's soul.

Corpses consumed by beasts after execution

Another circumstance in which bodies would have been scornfully left to be consumed by beasts was after executions, which were carried out on conquered enemies and criminals alike. An execution is a public demonstration of the executioners' scorn for the condemned – Ström describes hanging as 'a form of humiliating reprisal used against conquered enemies'.²⁸⁸ Ironically, although the defeated soldiers may be spared the ignominious attentions of the beasts on the *wælstede*, they may nevertheless end up as carrion-meat for the Beasts of Battle.

An execution of an enemy or criminal was primarily about punishment, and secondly a demonstration to discourage others from committing a similar offence.²⁸⁹ The beasts that consume the executed corpse are an important part of this demonstration – even after the gruesome spectacle of the execution itself, the corpse is maltreated further through being denied burial and protection from carrion-eaters.

Descriptions of hangings which involve the raven can be found in *Beowulf* 2444a–8a and *Fates of Men* 33a–42b. The *Beowulf* passage compares Hrethel's grief over one of his sons

²⁸⁷ Thompson, 'Death in England', 76.

²⁸⁸ Folke Ström, *On the Sacral Origin of the Germanic Death Penalty* (Stockholm: Wahlstrom and Widstrand, 1942), 122–3.

²⁸⁹ 'Experiences like execution, mutilation and trial by ordeal should ... be understood as public performances, designed not only for the criminal but also for the spectators. The punished body incorporates wider lessons for the onlookers to take to heart.' Thompson, 'Death in England', 80–1.

accidentally killing another to the sorrow of a father over the execution of his son:

<i>Swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle</i>	Thus it is a grievous thing for an old man
<i>to gebidanne, þæt his byre ride</i>	to endure, that his young son should swing on
<i>giong on galgan, þonne he gyd wrece,</i>	the gallows. Then he will utter a dirge,
<i>sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað</i>	a mournful song, when his son hangs
<i>hrefne to hroðre...</i>	at the pleasure of the raven ...

Ryan suggests a possible Norse connection in the heathen practice of offering a human sacrifice to Odin, with hanging being one of the forms this sacrifice could take.²⁹⁰ *Beowulf*'s antiquity allows the hanging passage to be read in light of this interpretation, although the practice would almost certainly have disappeared long before the poem was written down.²⁹¹ Other connections, however, can be made between the Norse deity and execution by hanging – in *Hávamál*, Odin hangs on the gallows for nine nights and nine days to increase his *ásmegin* ('divine power'),²⁹² part of which was his prescience. Such foreknowledge has been attributed to ravens, which were without doubt a familiar sight at gallows. It is possible that the presence of ravens at gallows contributed in a small way to the development of a link between hangings and the Norse god, who was accompanied by two information-gathering ravens, Huginn and Muninn.

Meaney suggests (as do Ström and Whitelock) that the hanging in *Beowulf* 2444a–8a was more likely to have been a legal one than a sacrifice.²⁹³ Hrethel's grief is compared to that of the old man not only because they have both lost a son, but because they are both powerless to take vengeance:

... neither was able to execute the vengeance which would have brought emotional relief –
Hrethel because he could not take vengeance on one son for the accidental killing of

²⁹⁰ Ryan writes: 'it is ... clear from the story of King Vikar in *Gautreks Saga* that hanging was a form of sacrifice to Othin. 'Othin in England', 475.

²⁹¹ In *Hamðismál* ('The Lay of Hamthir') Randvér hangs from the *vargtré vindköld* (wind-cold wolf-tree, a kenning for the gallows). 'Still further they fared on their fateful path / till their sister's stepson they saw on the gallows, / the wind-cold wolf-tree, to the west of the castle, / by the crane's-food becrept – uncouth was that sight'. Sonja Daniëlli, trans., 'Wulf, min Wulf: An Eclectic Analysis of the Wolf-Man', *Neophilologus* 91 (2007): 505–24.

²⁹² Ryan, 'Othin in England', 475.

²⁹³ Meaney writes: 'it is unlikely that [the] poets or hearers would imagine a society much unlike their own ... for them, the misery of a man whose son had been hanged for a crime would be far more understandable than that of one whose son had been chosen for human sacrifice'. 'Woden in England', 115.

another; the father of the hanged youth because it was a well-recognized principle of Anglo-Saxon law that one could not take vengeance for an executed criminal.²⁹⁴

With the focus on the father's mourning rather than on the executioner, this passage is more elegiac in tone than scornful. The raven takes joy in the corpse, adding to the suffering of the old man and strengthening the demonstrative power of the execution to deter others from whatever crime the son committed.

In *The Fates of Men*, a corpse is similarly torn by the raven in lines 33a–42b:

<i>Sum sceal on geapum galgan ridan,</i>	One shall ride the wide gallows
<i>seomian æt swylte, oppæt sawlhord,</i>	hanging at death until his soul-hoard,
<i>bancofa blodig, abrocen weorþeð.</i>	his bloody bone-dwelling, has disintegrated.
<i>þær him hrefn nimeþ heafodsýne,</i>	There the dark-plumaged raven will pluck out
<i>sliteð salwiggpad sawelleasne;</i>	the eyes from his head and tear at the soulless body –
<i>noþer he þy facne mæg folmum biwergan,</i>	he cannot fend off from its treachery
<i>laþum lyftsceapan, biþ his lif scæcen,</i>	the loathsome foe of the air. His life has departed
<i>ond he feleleas, feores orwena,</i>	and, devoid of feeling, beyond hope of life,
<i>blac on beame bideð wyrde,</i>	pallid upon the beam he suffers his fate, covered
<i>bewegen wælmiste. Bið him werig noma.</i>	with the mist of death. His name is cursed.

The description *abrocen weorþeð* refers to the practice of allowing the corpse to hang until it decomposed, which would very likely have attracted ravens to the gallows. The carrion-eater adds to the humiliation of the execution, the shame of which is otherwise made apparent in the final line *bið him werig noma* ('his name is cursed', alternatively translated as 'his name is damned'). The man is dishonoured firstly by this manner of death and secondly by his body becoming food for ravens, and the disgrace to his name extends to the parents who raised him, referred to in the opening of the poem.

The presence of *wyrd* is very apparent in this passage – the victim cannot fend off the raven from plucking his eyes out and tearing at his body, but must accept his fate. The raven itself is a manifestation of fate through the associative connection with its role as a Beast of Battle in other poems.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 112–13.

Ideal treatment of a corpse

The horror and indignity of being left unburied is more apparent when contrasted with a respectful burial (or cremation), of which there are various descriptions in Anglo-Saxon sources. Historical sources such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *The Encomium Emmae*, *Vita Eadwardi* and *The Abbotsbury Guild Statutes* all demonstrate the Anglo-Saxons' fascination with mortality, funerals, and the poetic commemoration of the deaths of kings,²⁹⁵ also evident in literary sources such as *Beowulf*. A telling comparison can be made between the magnificent funeral of a hero such as Beowulf and the treatment accorded to the enemy dead on battlefields such as Brunanburh. Wiglaf gives instructions for the treatment of Beowulf's corpse and the erection of a memorial barrow:

Beowulf 3137a–48a

<i>Him ða gegiredan Geata leode</i>	Then the people of the Geats prepared for him
<i>ad on eorðan unwaclicne,</i>	on the ground a splendid funeral-pyre,
<i>helmum behongen, hildebordum,</i>	hung about with helmets and war-shields
<i>beorhtum byrnum, swa he bena wæs;</i>	and bright mail-coats, as he had requested;
<i>alegdon ða tomiddes mærne þeoden</i>	then, heroes lamenting, they laid the mighty
<i>hæleð hiofende, hlaforð leofne.</i>	chieftain in the midst of it, their beloved lord.
<i>Ongunnon þa on beorge bælfyra mæst</i>	Then the warriors kindled the hugest of balefires
<i>wigend weccan; wudurec astah,</i>	on the hill. Black wood-smoke rose
<i>sweart ofer swioðole, swogende leg</i>	over the fire, the roaring flame blended
<i>wope bewunden (windblond gelæg),</i>	with weeping (the blowing wind died down)
<i>oð þæt he ða banhus gebrocen hæfde,</i>	until the fire had broken the bone-house,
<i>hat on hreðre.</i>	hot in the breast.

Beowulf 3156a–72b

<i>Geworhton ða Wedra leode</i>	The people of the Weders wrought there
<i>hleo on hoe, se wæs heah ond brad,</i>	a barrow on the headland that was high and broad,
<i>wægliðendum wide gesyne,</i>	visible to ocean-farers from afar,
<i>ond betimbredon on tyn dagum</i>	and they built in ten days' time a beacon
<i>beadurofes becn, bronda lafe</i>	of the war-renowned man. Around the pyre
<i>wealle beworhton, swa hyt weorðlicost</i>	they made a wall, the worthiest ever
<i>foresnotre men findan mihton.</i>	built in a way devised by the wisest of men.
<i>Hi on beorg dydon beg ond siglu,</i>	They placed in the barrow rings and jewellery,
<i>eall swylce hyrsta, swylce on horde ær</i>	all such treasures hostile men
<i>niðhedige men genumen hæfdon,</i>	had seized from the hoard,

²⁹⁵ Thompson, 'Death in England', 36.

<i>forleton eorla gestreon eorðan healdan,</i>	placing treasure of earls into the earth's keeping,
<i>gold on greote, þær hit nu gen lifað</i>	gold in the ground, where it still lies
<i>eldum swa unnyt swa hit æror wæs.</i>	as useless to men as it was previously.
<i>þa ymbe hlæw riodan hildedeore,</i>	Then the men brave in battle rode about the barrow,
<i>æþelinga bearn, ealra twelfe,</i>	sons of princes, twelve in all, they wanted to
<i>woldon ceare cwiðan ond kyning mænan,</i>	utter their sorrow, mourn their king,
<i>wordgyd wrecan ond ymb wer sprecan.</i>	chant his story, and speak of their lord.

Beowulf is venerated in a number of ways – his choice of location for his *bælfyr* ('balefire') and *hleo* ('barrow') is honoured; the warriors weep as he is cremated with a mound of battle-spoils; ten days are taken to erect a barrow which is filled with further treasure; twelve noble warriors ride around the barrow chanting a dirge. As Thompson notes, the king's barrow becomes part of the terrain, a landmark by which seafarers can navigate (line 2802). Beowulf's barrow is 'the most visible and enduring part of an extended and complex funeral ritual'.²⁹⁶ The cremation protects Beowulf's body from the indignity of the worm-ridden grave – although he died after battle with a (presumably carnivorous) dragon, his corpse is in no danger of being consumed by carrion-eaters. As examined in chapter one, in lines 3024b–7b we are given a foreshadowing of the fate of the Geats now that their protector is dead, with the poem's only true appearance of the Beasts of Battle. The warrior-corpses that will provide a meal for the eager beasts will be afforded none of the respect granted to their king – they will be consumed where they lie and no barrows will be constructed to their memory.

Another reason Beowulf's body is in no danger of being eaten after his battle with the dragon is because the beasts never appear during or after battles between individuals. They are summoned by the clash of armies or large bodies of men (the smallest group being the belligerents of *The Fight at Finnsburh*). The beasts consume nameless hosts of men – becoming carrion-meal is thus the common soldier's lot, not that of notable warriors or kings who are specifically identified by the *scops*. The beasts in *Beowulf* 3024b–7b are there to consume the nation of the Geats – now that the king is dead and has been given a hero's funeral, the trio can move in to tear at the nameless and faceless soldiers of whom his nation is comprised.

The Norse poetic tradition also contains examples of heroic cremations. *Sigurdarkvida in skamma* ('The Short Lay of Sigurd') contains instructions for a pyre to be built and the hero

²⁹⁶ Thompson, 'Death in England', 134.

cremated surrounded by shields, hangings, weapons, hawks and even live slaves.²⁹⁷ The *Lay of Sigurd* contains the Valkyrie's advice to Sigurd on the respectful treatment of corpses:

I advise you ... that you bury corpses where you find them on the ground, whether they are dead of sickness or else drowned, or men killed by weapons. A warm bath shall be made for those who are departed; hands and head be washed, combed, and dried before they go in the coffin, and bid them sleep blessedly.²⁹⁸

Examples of respectful burials, usually involving nobles, heroes or kings, serve to reinforce the indignity of the unburied corpses found in the Beasts of Battle passages.²⁹⁹ An Anglo-Saxon audience, aware of the ideal treatment of a corpse and believing there is a link between body and soul even after death, would have felt the full impact of the scornful lack of respect for the dead displayed by the victors of *The Battle of Brunanburh* and other poems.³⁰⁰

This chapter has explored the possibility of the Beasts of Battle being associated with scorn and exultation, a significantly dissimilar set of associations to those of elegy and doom explored in chapter one. Examples of scorn and exultation after warfare and executions have shown that the theme of the beasts was used in ways very different to its original purpose, demonstrating a development and changeability in a theme that has been criticised as overly conventional.

Original contributions to research in this chapter include the argument that the Beasts of Battle may have carried an association with scorn that contradicts their traditional association with doom and elegy. The scornful treatment of human corpses has been explored through two main streams, warfare and execution, bringing together a wide range of primary sources including *Maxims I*, *The Wanderer*, *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *Soul and Body*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *The Fates of Men*, *Ælfric's Homilies*, and *Judith*. This chapter contributes to the understanding of the association with scorn by examining the beasts' impartiality (or lack thereof), their 'mood' and the noises they make. A connection with skaldic praise-poetry is also raised (discussed in detail in chapter four) and a further connection between *Beowulf* and the Norse tradition is suggested through linking the 'blithe-hearted raven' of Heorot with the Scandinavian raven banner. This chapter also interprets the Beasts of Battle as trophies of

²⁹⁷ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 190–1.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁹⁹ The discovery of a ship-burial at Sutton Hoo in 1939 provides an historical example of the Anglo-Saxon veneration of a royal corpse. The body, most likely that of a 7th-century East-Anglian king, was buried with royal regalia including treasure, weaponry, household goods and textiles.

³⁰⁰ See Caroline Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1335* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

victory, suggesting they function in the same way as other battle-trophies such as the trappings or even severed limbs of a defeated enemy. It seeks to understand what it would have meant to the Anglo-Saxons when a human body is reduced to the level of carrion, linking the Beasts of Battle with the corpse-devouring worm. Finally, accounts of consumption by carrion-eaters (that is, any of the passages containing the Beasts of Battle) are compared with accounts of honourable burials or cremations to improve our understanding of how degrading non-burial was in Anglo-Saxon culture, particularly when compared with an example of an ideal treatment of a corpse.

Perhaps the most significant influence that would have determined the development of the Beasts of Battle theme (and the interpretation of the beasts themselves) was the Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxons, discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Diabolical beasts and miraculous obedience

One of the most significant events to affect the development and understanding of the Beasts of Battle theme was the conversion of England, which began in earnest with the arrival of Augustine at Canterbury in 597. By the time the poems containing Beasts of Battle passages were penned, the church wielded significant influence among the Anglo-Saxon populace and had considerable control, through its near-monopoly of literacy, over the very narratives that make up a cultural identity.³⁰¹ Yet the theme of the Beasts of Battle has its roots in a pagan continental past,³⁰² and is likely to have been passed down through the oral tradition more or less in its current format until it was finally written down. Post-conversion England witnessed the storytelling traditions of the Germanic past being rapidly cross-pollinated with the robust new literature of the church and its huge body of inherited meaning and symbolism. A Beasts of Battle passage, therefore, would have been understood differently by Christianised Anglo-Saxons to their pre-conversion forebears. Pagan associations and symbolism would have been marginalised or lost, to be replaced by a new body of imagery and interpretation regarding these beasts that was endorsed by the church.

The differences between the Anglo-Saxon and Norse traditions, both of which stem from a common Germanic source, would suggest that Christianity did indeed have an effect upon the theme. The Anglo-Saxon tradition is subtler, less graphic, and more reliant upon its associative connections than the Norse equivalent. Gustav Neckel, as quoted in the introduction to this thesis, points to a 'profound Christianisation of thought and emotion' evident in Anglo-Saxon poetry and particularly notable in descriptions of battle.³⁰³

Outside of the Beasts of Battle tradition there is no lack of mention of the wolf, raven and eagle in biblical and other ecclesiastical sources. We can assume there was something of a dialogue between these beasts from the imported Christian tradition and those from the Germanic oral tradition. This chapter examines the ways in which the three beasts were

³⁰¹ Osborn warns against 'importing meanings into a poem, especially Christian meanings, which are alien to the cultural context, or simply exaggerated or overdetermined. Such meaning is usually imported to fill a lack, in response to our need to make sense when an interpretive gap appears.' See Osborn, 'Domesticating the Dayraven in *Beowulf*', 313. It could be argued, however, that by the time the poems in question were written down, the influence of the church and its interpretive traditions concerning animals would have been so pervasive that it would in fact be difficult to exaggerate its potential influence on pre-conversion oral-formulaic themes such as that of the Beasts of Battle.

³⁰² As explored in the introduction to this thesis.

³⁰³ See introduction, p.11.

represented outside of the tradition by the Church, and how the ecclesiasts that penned the Beasts of Battle passages (and the audiences for whom they were intended) might have connected these differing portrayals.

This chapter will begin by examining how the wolf, raven and eagle were represented in scripture, starting with their traditional role as scavengers or as agents of divine punishment. The concept of the beasts as ‘unclean’ creatures will also be touched upon. In contrast to these negative associations, positive accounts of carrion-eaters involving saints and miracles will be explored, focusing upon the way in which such miracles were made more surprising by the traditionally negative portrayals of the beasts. Biblical representations of the three beasts will then be examined in turn, beginning with negative accounts of the wolf (such as its association with the diabolical) and positive accounts involving miraculous obedience to holy figures such as St Edmund and St Columban. The raven’s rich corpus of biblical allegory will be examined, along with similar accounts of miraculous obedience to saints. The discussion of the raven will conclude with the fascinating story of Noah sending a raven before the dove, and how this account can be reconciled with the many other portrayals of the raven. The eagle carries more positive associations in scripture than the other three beasts, yet has its own body of negative portrayals. All of these scriptural accounts of the three beasts will be examined in light of the Beasts of Battle tradition, questioning how the Christian associations may have affected the Anglo-Saxon response to the beasts, and vice-versa.

Association with divine punishment in scripture

The naturalistic aspect to the Beasts of Battle (as discussed in chapter one) is reflected in scripture. For example, birds and beasts of prey appear in Deut. 28:26; Jer. 15:3, 16:4, 34:20; Psalms 79:1–3; Ez. 39.4, 39:17–19; and Rev. 19:17–21.³⁰⁴ Such usage is very similar to that of the Beasts of Battle theme in its most basic and non-descriptive form. The biblical scavengers tend to be invoked in the form of a threat or prophecy, as is evident in the following examples:

Deut. 28:26 ‘And be thy carcass meat for all the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the earth, and be there none to drive them away.’

Jer. 15:3 ‘And I will visit them with four kinds, saith the Lord: the sword to kill, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy.’

Hall points out that in almost all of these passages, the beasts are ‘directly associated with divine punishment ... They are not presented as sacred to God but as an instrument of God’s

³⁰⁴ Hall, ‘Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle’, 113.

wrath, a realistic embellishment of the lesson that all-consuming disaster awaits those who thwart the divine will.³⁰⁵ The same goes for the Anglo-Saxon battle passages – the appearance of the beasts adds realism and even certainty to the threat of battle. The scavengers also bring a feeling of scorn to the threats: not only will the enemies of God be slain, but their corpses will be despoiled. This threat is demonstrated in Jer. 16.4:

Jer. 16:4 'They shall die by the death of grievous illnesses: they shall not be lamented, and they shall not be buried; they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed with the sword, and with famine: and their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of the air, and for the beasts of the earth.'

'They shall be as dung' again demonstrates the intention of scorn and insult in leaving a corpse unburied as food for scavengers. The following passages all include the threat of violent death followed by non-burial:

Jer. 34:20 'I will give them into the hands of their enemies and into the hands of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat to the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the earth.'

Psalms 78:1–3 'O God, the heathens are come into thy inheritance, they have defiled thy holy temple; they have made Jerusalem as a place to keep fruit. / They have given the dead bodies of thy servants to be meat for the fowls of the air: the flesh of thy saints for the beasts of the earth. / They have poured out their blood as water round about Jerusalem and there was none to bury them.'

Ez. 39:4 'Thou [the army of Gog] shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel, thou and all thy bands, and thy nations that are with thee; I have given thee to the wild beasts, to the birds, and to every fowl, and to the beasts of the earth to be devoured.'

God gives instruction that the people of Israel were to act as scavengers themselves and 'despoil those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them'.³⁰⁶ They were then to spend seven months searching out and burying the bones of the invading army of Gog 'in order to cleanse the land'.³⁰⁷ It is notable that the carrion beasts were apparently unable to fulfil this cleansing function and a final burial is required before the land is cleansed. Ez. 39:17–19 presents a carrion-meal as a sacrificial feast:

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 115.

³⁰⁶ Ez. 38.10.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 38.12.

‘And thou, O son of man, saith the Lord God, say to every fowl, and to all the birds, and to all the beasts of the field: “Assemble yourselves, make haste, come together from every side to my victim, which I slay for you, a great victim upon the mountains of Israel: to eat flesh, and drink blood ... you shall be filled at my table with horses, and mighty horsemen, and all the men of war”’.

This passage has something of a Norse skaldic tone, in that there is a boast that the Israelites will feed the carrion-beasts with their enemy dead.³⁰⁸ The language is certainly a lot more bloodthirsty and descriptive than the other passages quoted above, sharing similarities with the following apocalyptic passage from Revelations 19:17–18.

‘And I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that did fly through the midst of heaven: “Come, gather yourselves together to the great supper of God: / That you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of tribunes, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all freemen and bondmen, and of little and of great”’.

Both passages humanise the scavengers’ actions with phrases such as ‘you shall be filled at my table’ and ‘supper of God’. The Anglo-Saxons made use of this technique in *Beowulf* 3026 and *Exodus* 165, where the beasts anticipate the feast (*ættes on wenan*).

Unclean animals

The Judeo-Christian tradition of ‘unclean’ animals includes the raven and eagle (mentioned explicitly in Lev. 11:15 and Deut. 14:14), and the wolf (referred to implicitly as ‘that which walketh upon hands [paws] of all animals which go on all four’).³⁰⁹ The reasons for their categorisation are many, but their affiliation with carcasses and the ‘unclean’ practice of scavenging is certainly a major factor. The fact that the three Beasts of Battle were regarded as unclean adds to the horror and ignominy of a corpse being devoured by one such beast.

The Beasts of Battle were ‘unclean’ on a second level, as the consumption of human flesh and the drinking of blood from any creature are specifically prohibited in Ez. 5:10 (‘The fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and I will scatter thy whole remnant into every wind’) and in Gen. 9:3–4 (‘Every thing that moveth and liveth shall be meat for you: even as the green herbs have I delivered them all to you: / Saving that flesh with blood you shall not eat’). This contributes to

³⁰⁸ See chapter four for a discussion of skaldic poetry involving the Beasts of Battle.

³⁰⁹ Lev. 11:27. See also Ralph Bulmer, ‘The Uncleaness of the Birds of Leviticus and Deuteronomy’, *Man* 24 (1989): 434–53.

the distastefulness of any personification of the beasts (such as the Viking-wolves in *The Battle of Maldon* or Ez. 39:17–19, quoted above) – the creatures, through their depiction as humans dining at a table, are accorded an association with cannibalism. Grendel’s attacks on Heorot are similarly horrifying because, firstly, he is personified throughout the poem and we are never entirely sure whether he is a monster or a twisted human, and secondly, his devouring of human flesh and blood is so relishingly described in *Beowulf* 739a–45a:

<i>Ne þæt se aglæca yldan þohte</i>	Then the adversary did not think to delay,
<i>ac he gefeng hraðe forman siðe</i>	but he quickly grasped, at the first opportunity,
<i>slæpendne rinc slat unwearnum</i>	a sleeping warrior, unrestrainedly tore him apart,
<i>bat banlocan blod edrum dranc</i>	bit into his bone-locks, drank blood from his veins,
<i>synsnædum swealh sona hæfde</i>	swallowed sinful morsels; soon he had
<i>unlyfigendes eal gefeormod</i>	eaten the dead one entirely,
<i>fet ond folma ...</i>	feet and hands ...

Not all references to the wolf, raven and eagle in scripture were negative. Their multi-layered allegorical nature meant that positive associations could exist alongside negative portrayals such as those touched upon above.³¹⁰

Sanctity of holy figures

One of the most notable recurring Christian tropes concerning the beasts is the miraculous power of saints to make these wild creatures do their bidding or act against their nature. The best-known biblical example of this type of miracle is Daniel in the lions’ den. Other examples include St Thecla, who was miraculously protected by a lioness from male lions and other savage beasts,³¹¹ while a raven guarded the corpse of St Vincent of Saragossa from other scavengers.³¹² Wolves did not harm the defenceless St Columban, who also had the power to make bears obedient to his will, ordering one to abandon a cave and taming another in order to yoke it to a plough.³¹³

Savage beasts are compelled by the sanctity of holy figures (often hermits) to refrain from scavenging or are sent by God to feed holy figures. Ælfric wrote in his *Homily for the Feast of the Circumcision* (lines 178–82):

³¹⁰ See note on Isidore of Seville’s concept of *pro bono, pro malo*, p.64.

³¹¹ Montague James, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 38.

³¹² M. Egan, trans., ‘The Poems of Prudentius’ in *Fathers of the Church* Vol.43 (Washington: CUA Press, 1962). For visual representations of this tale see the illustrations of the raven driving other beasts away from St Vincent’s corpse in the *Breviary of Jean sans Peur* and the *Belles Heures of Jean de France, Duc de Berry*.

³¹³ Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 172.

*Oft halige men wunedon on westene butwux repum wulfum and leonum: betwux eallum deorcynne and wyrmcynne. And him nan ðing derian ne mihte: ac hi totæron þa hyrnedan næddran mid heora nacedum handum: and þa micclan dracan eaðelice acwealdon buton ælcere dare þurh Godes mihte.*³¹⁴

Often holy men dwelt in the wilderness among fierce wolves and lions; among all kinds of beasts and serpents. And nothing was able to harm them, but rather they slew the horned viper with their bare hands, and by the power of God's might they easily killed the great dragon without harm to themselves.

As pointed out by Thornbury, this invulnerability stands in contrast to Ælfric's description of the trials (predominantly involving dangerous beasts) awaiting Adam and Eve after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden:

*God hi ða adræfde ut of ðære wununge fram ðære myrhðe mid micclum geswincum, and hi on yrmðe leofodon heora lif syððan. Hi mihton ða syððan seocnysse ðrowian, and hine byton lys and lyftene gnættas and eac swylce flean and oðre gehwylce wyrmas, and him wæron dæregendlice dracan and næddran and ða reðan deor mihton derian his cinne, ðe hine ealle ær arwurðodon swyðe.*³¹⁵

God then expelled them from their abode, away from that happiness with great affliction; and they henceforth lived their lives in great hardship. Then, they could suffer the pain of sickness, and lice and flying gnats bit them, and also many fleas and other kinds of worms; and they had to beware dangerous dragons, serpents and savage beasts that could harm their kin, which previously had all revered them greatly.

Safety from savage beasts was only one of the benefits of paradise withdrawn after the Fall, yet in hagiography some individuals were once again granted the ability to live in harmony with dangerous animals.³¹⁶ According to Bede and Ælfric, the foundation of human sanctity in the natural world is obedience. Thornbury writes:

³¹⁴ Benjamin Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* Vol. 1 (London: Richard and John Taylor, 1844), 102–3.

³¹⁵ S.J. Crawford, ed., 'The Old English *Hexameron*', *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Prosa* 10 (1921): 67–8.

³¹⁶ The relationship between Celtic saints and animals was closer still. Saints and heroes in the Celtic tradition often acknowledge an animal kinship, such as St Ailbe who was suckled by a wolf and St Ciwa, who was called 'the wolf girl'. From Jones, *Kings, Beasts and Heroes*, 87(n).

... where man is obedient, the lesser creation also obeys, as saints' miracles show: thus, Ælfric's account of the Desert Fathers' power over beasts is an almost exact inversion of his description of the curse upon the first humans.³¹⁷

Thornbury describes voluntary obedience as a 'chain linking beasts to man to God'.³¹⁸ These miracles are part of the tradition of Christian animal lore which so fascinated Ælfric and was the subject of works such as the *Physiologus* and the bestiaries, in that the miraculous beasts could be seen as both realistic and allegorical.³¹⁹ Beasts were often used as symbols of moral and metaphysical truths, or mirrors for human society. For example, St Ambrose used wild animals to describe the state of mankind before Christianity: 'We, then, were wild animals ... but now through the Holy Spirit the madness of lions, the spots of leopards, the craftiness of foxes, the rapacity of wolves have passed away from our affections'.³²⁰ The description of the charging Vikings in *The Battle of Maldon* line 96a as *wælwulfas* ('slaughter wolves') links these attackers to this concept.

Works such as the *Physiologus* created an opportunity to turn the savage nature of such beasts into a Christian teaching tool. As Wirtjes writes, 'nature [became] a metaphor, a book to be studied by all good Christians'.³²¹ Similarly, Houwen notes that 'The *Physiologus* and the bestiaries which it inspired reflect this to the extent that they lift the natural world to a higher plane with their moralisations'.³²² This changed the way nature was regarded, making it more than likely that no Anglo-Saxon educated by the Church would regard a raven (for example) as simply that; a raven. They would have belonged to a tradition of viewing the bird from a theological perspective, with symbolism and allegorical meaning attached to its every characteristic (such as its black feathers) and trait (such as its raucous call). This is not to say there was a set meaning attached to every creature; as Thornbury writes, 'The openness of the symbolism allows for a multitude of interpretations or non-interpretations'.³²³

This idea of a dual audience for Ælfric's writings on animals is very relevant to our conjectures on the connections and associations that may have been made by an Anglo-Saxon audience:

³¹⁷ Thornbury, 'Ælfric's Zoology', 148.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 152.

³¹⁹ 'Ælfric drew upon his studies of animals to understand why saints – and not ordinary people – had power over the natural world, and also to help his audience separate the miraculous from the merely exotic when trying to understand Biblical narratives or saints' lives.' Ibid., 141.

³²⁰ Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 176.

³²¹ Hanneke Wirtjes, ed., *The Middle English Physiologus* (London: EETS 299, 1991), lxi.

³²² L. Houwen, 'Animal Parallelism in Medieval Literature and the Bestiaries: A Preliminary Investigation', *Neophilologus* 78 (1994): 483.

³²³ Thornbury, 'Ælfric's Zoology', 146.

Ælfric's interest in animals ... was twofold. He was clearly well-read in texts detailing the symbolic significance of animals, especially those named in the Scriptures, and was often ready to explain the allegorical meanings of various creatures. But perhaps equally often, he used animals as more ambiguous exemplars: beings which were both real and symbolic. It is possible that in these cases, and especially in his saints' lives, Ælfric was catering to a dual audience, one in which some members could 'read' the spiritual meaning of the animals, which others would be content to perceive a simple demonstration of holy power.³²⁴

The creatures identified as Beasts of Battle in the fourteen passages listed in Appendix B never act against their nature and there is no account of a miraculous intervention to save warrior corpses from scavengers in the aftermath of a battle.³²⁵ These beasts serve to reinforce the image of 'normal' savage behaviour, making any deviation from this norm seem even more unusual. It is possible therefore that an audience member reading or hearing of a 'beast miracle' involving a wolf, raven or eagle (particularly common in the *vitae* of early Insular saints) would have compared this to their 'natural' savage behaviour, as exemplified in the Beasts of Battle passages.

The wolf in scripture

Arguably the most enduring and frequently employed use of the wolf in scripture is its appearance as an allegorical predator (or devil) seeking to destroy the Christian 'flock'.³²⁶ The wolf stands here in contrast to the Shepherd, who represents all that is good, holy and (most importantly) the figure that will protect the flock from the wolf. Positioning the wolf as the devil also moves the image of an attack on the flock of Christ from without to a spiritual attack from within. Christ says in Lk. 10:3 'Behold, I send you as lambs among wolves', and in Mt. 7:15 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves'. Paul warns in Acts 20:29 'I know that, after my departure, ravening wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock'. Furthermore, in Ez. 22:27 we find: 'Her princes in the midst of her are like wolves ravening the prey to shed blood, and to destroy souls, and to run after gains through covetousness', while Zeph. 3:3 contains 'Her judges are evening wolves, they left nothing for the morning'.³²⁷ The description of the rulers of

³²⁴ Ibid., 148.

³²⁵ A fascinating 15th-century example of divine intervention to save warriors from scavenger beasts (a wolf and eagle) can be found in Lydgate's *Life of Saint Alban and Saint Amphibal* (see pp.183-4).

³²⁶ *Plurimos lupos habet diabolus, quos ad Christi oves dirigit* ('The devil has many wolves, which he directs against the sheep of Christ'). Ambrose, *De Patriarchis* 12. 57, quoted in Irving, 'New Notes on the Old English *Exodus*', 305.

³²⁷ Hall points out that the term 'evening wolves' is a common one in scripture, in which the prowling beasts are often associated with nightfall (Gen. 49:27; Sop. 3:3; Jer. 5:6; Hab. 1:7-8). 'Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162-67, The Beasts of Battle,' 112.

Jerusalem as ‘evening wolves’ brings to mind the term *cwyldrof* from the *Exodus* Beasts of Battle passage (166b), translated by Tolkien as [wolves] ‘bold at nightfall’.

Thus we find that the Christian wolf symbolises death and destruction, in common with the Beasts of Battle representation of wolves. More than this, however, it symbolises the diabolical. In the Anglo-Saxon corpus, the word *wulf* is also often used as a metaphor for the devil or devilish human being. Daniëlli points out that in *Christ* 256, *se awyrgda wulf* (‘the cursed/diabolical wolf’) refers to the devil and in the *Martyrology*, St Babylas calls the heathen emperor Numerianus *a deofles wulf* (‘a devilish wolf / wolf of the devil’).³²⁸ King Eormanric in *Deor* is described as having a *wylfenne gepoht* (‘wolfish mind’).

Blake notes that many of the terms used to describe the Viking attackers in *The Battle of Maldon* label them as devilish, both implicitly and explicitly. As discussed in chapter one, the *scop* depicts the *Maldon* Vikings as wolves through the use of descriptive language and the fact that only the eagle and raven are present, substituting the attackers for the third Beast of Battle. Alongside the term *hæðene* (‘heathens’, lines 55 and 181), the *Maldon scop* labels them *færsceaðan* (‘the sudden enemy’, line 142), comparable to *helsceaðan* (‘the devils of hell who afflict a man’s soul’, line 180).³²⁹ Blake accordingly translates *Færsceaðan* as ‘devils who afflict men’s bodies by sudden attacks in this world’. He also links *wælwulfas* (‘slaughter-wolves’, line 96a) to the terms *hare heorowulfas* (‘hoary sword-wolves’, *Exodus* 181) and *wulfheort* (‘wolf-hearted’, *Daniel* 246), all terms with which evil warriors or kings are described as ‘wolfish’. *Wælwulfas* is also used to describe the cannibalistic enemies of Matthew and Andreas (see *Andreas* 149). Most relevant to the discussion above, however, is Blake’s description of *wælwulfas* as ‘the wolves that try to destroy God’s sheep’.³³⁰ The Vikings in *The Passion of St Edmund* are also described as *hæðen* five times, along with *wælhreow* (‘slaughter-cruel’, 95), *arleas* (‘impious’, 97, 106, 119) and *reðe* (‘savage’, 58, 90), words frequently employed in other sources to describe the devil or persecutors of Christians. In line 39 the Danes come *færlice swa swa wulf* (‘suddenly like a wolf’), again attacking like (devilish) wolves to devour the flock of God.³³¹

Devils are portrayed as gripping damned souls like greedy wolves in Saint Paul’s vision of Hell in *Blickling Homily XVII (To Sanctae Michaelis Mæssan)*:

³²⁸ Daniëlli, ‘*Wulf, Min Wulf*’, 506.

³²⁹ Blake, ‘*The Battle of Maldon*’, 333.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 334.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 335.

Swa Sanctus Paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard, þær ealle wætero niðergewitað, 7 he þær geseah ofer ðæm wætere sumne harne stan; 7 wæron norð of ðæm stane awexene swiðe hrimige bearwas, 7 ðær wæron þystro-genipo, 7 under þæm stane wæs niccra eardung 7 wearga. 7 he geseah þæt on ðæm clife hangodan on ðæm isgean bearwum manige swearte saula be heora handum gebundne; 7 þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnisse heora gripende wæron, swa swa grædig wulfl 7 þæt wæter wæs sweart under þæm clife neoðan. 7 betuh þæm clife on ðæm wætre wæron swylce twelf mila, 7 ðonne ða twigo forburston þonne gewitan þa saula niðer þa þe on ðæm twigum hangodan, 7 him onfengon ða nicras. Dis ðonne wæron ða saula þa ðe her on worlde mid unrihte gefyrenode wæron 7 ðæs noldan geswican ær heora lifes ende.³³²

So Saint Paul was looking to the northern part of the earth, where all the waters flow down, and he saw there above the water a hoary stone. North of that stone there had grown very frosty woods, and there were dark mists, and under the stone was the habitation of water-monsters and wolves. And he saw many black souls hanging from that cliff near those woods, bound by their hands, and devils in the guise of water-monsters were gripping them like greedy wolves. The water underneath the cliff was black, and between the cliff and the water there were as many as twelve miles, and when the branches broke, the souls who hung from those branches went down and the sea-monsters seized them. These were the souls of those who had sinned unjustly in this world and would not cease from it before the end of their lives.

In contradiction, having the attributes of a wolf in battle was seen as desirable and was frequently praised in scripture. For example, when Jacob lists the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 49:27), he says of his youngest son ‘Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil’.

Wolves displaying miraculous obedience

The concept of wolves and other savage beasts miraculously acting against their ferocious nature is again envisaged in Is. 11:6: ‘The wolf shall dwell with the lamb: and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: the calf and the lion, and the sheep shall abide together, and a little child shall lead them’. The beasts that carry associations of death and evil (wolf, leopard and lion) are placed next to symbols of innocence and good (lamb, kid, calf, fatling and little child).

³³² R. Morris, ed. ‘The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century.’ *EETS* 58, 63, 73 (London: Trübner, 1880).

Ælfric's *Passion of St Edmund* (lines 233–250)³³³ gives an excellent description of a wolf miraculously acting against its own nature. In 870 St Edmund was tortured and decapitated by Vikings of 'The Great Heathen Army' who hid the head in some brambles before fleeing.³³⁴ The survivors searched the forest for the head only to find a miracle:

Hwæt ða se flothere ferde eft to scipe, and behyddon þæt heafod þæs halgan Eadmundes on þam þiccum bremelum þæt hit bebyrged ne wurde. Þa æfter fyrste, syððan hi afarene wæron, com þæt landfolc to þe þær to lafe wæs þa, þær heora hlafordes lic læg butan heafde, and wurdon swiðe sarige for his slege on mode, and huru þæt hi næfdon þæt heafod to þam bodige. Þa sæde se sceawere þe hit ær geseah þæt þa flotmen hæfdon þæt heafod mid him, and wæs him geðuht swa swa hit wæs ful soð þæt hi behyddon þæt heafod on þam holte forhwega. Hi eodon þa secende ealle endemes to þam wuda, secende gehwær geond þyfelas and bremelas gif hi ahwær mihton gemeton þæt heafod.

Then the seamen returned to their ship, and concealed the head of the holy Edmund in some dense brambles so that it could not be buried. Then, after a while, after they had departed, the folk of that country who were still left there came to where their master's body lay without his head, and were very sorrowful because of his murder, especially because they did not have the head with the body. Then the observer who had previously seen it said that the seamen had the head with them, and it seemed to him (as was indeed the truth) that they had hidden the head in the forest somewhere. Then they all searched in the wood together, looking everywhere among the thickets and brambles to find the head.

Wæs eac micel wundor þæt an wulf wearð asend, þurh Godes wissunge to bewerigenne þæt heafod wið þa opre deor, ofer dæg and niht. Hi eodon þa secende, and symle clypigende, swa swa hit gewunelic is þam ðe on wuda gað oft, "Hwær eart þu nu gefera?" And him andwyrde þæt heafod, "Her, her, her"; and swa gelome clypode andswarigende him eallum, swa oft swa heora ænig clypode, oppæt hi ealle becomen þurh ða clypunga him to. Þa læg se græga wulf þe bewiste þæt heafod, and mid his twam fotum hæfde þæt heafod beclypped, grædig and hungrig, and for Gode ne dorste þæs heafdes abyrian, and heold hit wið deor.

It was also a great wonder that a wolf was sent, directed by God, to guard the head both day and night from other beasts. The people were searching and continually calling out (just as those who often go into the woods usually do): 'Where are you now, friend?' And the head answered them, 'Here, here, here!' and continued calling out, answering them

³³³ Skeat, 'Ælfric's Lives of Saints', 323–7.

³³⁴ See Thompson, 'Death in England', 127 for an analysis of the martyrdom of St Edmund.

whenever any of them called to it, until they all came to it as a result of these cries. There lay the grey wolf who had guarded over the head, and with his two feet had embraced the head, greedy and hungry, and yet for fear of God had not dared to eat the head, but had held it safe against other beasts.

þa wurdon hi ofwundrode þæs wulfes hydrædenne, and þæt halige heafod ham feredon mid him, þancigende þam ælmihtigan ealra his wundra; ac se wulf folgode forð mid þam heafde oppæt hi to tune comon, swylce he tam wære, and gewende eft sibban to wuda ongean. þa landleoda þa sibban ledon þæt heafod to þam halgan bodige, and bebyrigdon hine swa swa hi selost mihton on swylcere hrædinge and cyrcan arærdan sona him onuppon.

They were astonished at the wolf's guardianship and carried the holy head home with them, thanking almighty God for all of His wonders; but, as if he were tame, the wolf followed the head forth until they came to the town, and then turned back to the forest. Then the folk of that country laid the head with the holy body, and buried him (as well as they could in such haste), and within a short time raised a church over him.

As we are explicitly told, the wolf protects the martyr's head through fear and obedience to God. Ælfric emphasises the miraculous nature of the wolf's self-control by laying stress on the point that it is *grædig and hungrig* ('greedy and hungry') – lying with such a delicacy literally between its paws (*mid his twam fotum hæfde þæt heafod beclypped*) must have been a sore temptation indeed. The wolf ceases its guardianship only when the head has been safely brought out of the wild and back into the town, presumably slinking away to resume its normal wolf-like behaviour.

This passage also demonstrates the importance of bodily wholeness in the Christian tradition – as Thompson writes, a Christian audience would have 'had a great emotional investment in the idea of the intact corpse as a promise of salvation'.³³⁵ In this particular instance, the reuniting of Edmund's head and body are ironically only made possible by the intervention of a beast that would normally *slitan*, or 'tear apart', a human carcass.

Jonas's *Life of St Columban* includes an account of the Irish monk's escape from a pack of wolves. Columban charitably decides he would rather be slain by wild beasts, who would remain free of sin, than by humans, who would be damned for doing so. The concept of wolves remaining innocent (due to their soullessness) even as they slaughter and feast on human flesh

³³⁵ Thompson, 'Death in England', 110.

contrasts with the commonly-held image of wolves rife with human faults such as greed, gluttony and murderous intent.

While the holy man was wandering through the dark woods and was carrying on his shoulder a book of the Holy Scripture, he happened to be meditating. And suddenly the thought came into his mind, to which he would prefer, to suffer injuries from men or to be exposed the rage of wild beasts ... He decided that it was better to suffer from the ferocity of wild beasts, without any sin on their part, than from the madness of men who would lose their souls. And while he was turning this over in his mind he perceived twelve wolves approaching and standing on the right and on the left, while he was in the middle. He stood still and said: 'Oh, God, come to my aid. Oh, Lord, hasten to aid me!' They came nearer and seized his clothing. As he stood firm they left him unterrified and wandered off into the woods.³³⁶

Salisbury suggests that miraculous animal behaviour could manifest itself in two ways in medieval scripture:

In the presence of sanctity, animals renounced their bestial nature, which was defined as irrational and violent, with no capacity for human friendship and frequently marked by the desire to eat humans. There are two main forms of interactions between saints and animals in the saints' lives before the twelfth century. Animals either simply suspended their bestial behaviour or went beyond that and acquired some human qualities.³³⁷

The suspension of bestial behaviour has already been explored, but we can find an example of the acquisition of human qualities by a wolf in book four of the *Vitae Patrum*. It tells the story of a wolf that steals bread from an old man who had previously fed it every day. The wolf is aware that she has sinned and returns to the hermit who forgives her and gives her a double ration of bread. The wolf acknowledges the crime of theft and 'is thrown into confusion by a sense of shame'. She bows her head to the hermit, seemingly understanding the significance of his words of forgiveness.³³⁸ A similar story is told of the 12th-century Wolf of Gubbio, which suspends its attacks on the town to negotiate and even make a pact with Francis of Assisi.

At the time when St Francis was living in the city of Gubbio, a large wolf appeared in the neighbourhood, so terrible and so fierce, that he not only devoured other animals, but made a prey of men also; and since he often approached the town, all the people were in great alarm, and used to go about armed, as if going to battle. Notwithstanding these

³³⁶ Dana Munro, trans., 'Life of St. Columban by the Monk Jonas', *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History II* (1895).

³³⁷ Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 172.

³³⁸ *De Vitae Patrum*, IV(7), <http://www.vitae-patrum.org.uk/page74.html> (accessed 19/1/2010).

precautions, if any of the inhabitants ever met him alone, he was sure to be devoured, as all defence was useless: and, through fear of the wolf, they dared not go beyond the city walls. St Francis, feeling great compassion for the people of Gubbio, resolved to go and meet the wolf, though all advised him not to do so. Making the sign of the holy cross, and putting all his confidence in God, he went forth from the city, taking his brethren with him; but these fearing to go any further, St Francis bent his steps alone toward the spot where the wolf was known to be, while many people followed at a distance, and witnessed the miracle. The wolf, seeing all this multitude, ran towards St Francis with his jaws wide open.

As he approached, the saint, making the sign of the cross, cried out: 'Come hither, brother wolf; I command thee, in the name of Christ, neither to harm me nor anybody else.' Marvellous to tell, no sooner had St Francis made the sign of the cross, than the terrible wolf, closing his jaws, stopped running, and coming up to St Francis, lay down at his feet as meekly as a lamb. And the saint thus addressed him: 'Brother wolf, thou hast done much evil in this land, destroying and killing the creatures of God without his permission; yea, not animals only hast thou destroyed, but thou hast even dared to devour men, made after the image of God; for which thing thou art worthy of being hanged like a robber and a murderer. All men cry out against thee, the dogs pursue thee, and all the inhabitants of this city are thy enemies; but I will make peace between them and thee, O brother wolf, [if thou] no more offend them, and they shall forgive thee all thy past offences, and neither men nor dogs shall pursue thee any more.'

Having listened to these words, the wolf bowed his head, and, by the movements of his body, his tail, and his eyes, made signs that he agreed to what St Francis said. On this St Francis added: 'As thou art willing to make this peace, I promise thee that thou shalt be fed every day by the inhabitants of this land so long as thou shalt live among them; thou shalt no longer suffer hunger, as it is hunger which has made thee do so much evil; but if I obtain all this for thee, thou must promise, on thy side, never again to attack any animal or any human being; dost thou make this promise?' ... And putting out his hand he received the pledge of the wolf; for the latter lifted up his paw and placed it familiarly in the hand of St Francis, giving him thereby the only pledge which was in his power.³³⁹

As we have seen, Christian analogues to the Anglo-Saxon wolf are many and various. Biblical wolves tend to symbolise death and destruction, but also have a demonic element that is not as obvious in the Beasts of Battle tradition. The diabolical nature of wolves is thus an imported association in post-conversion England which would have affected an Anglo-Saxon audience-

³³⁹ Dom Roger Hudleston, ed., *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi* (New York: Heritage Press, 1965) ch. XXI.

member's reaction to the (originally pagan) trope of the battlefield wolf. This associative effect is compounded in poems such as *The Battle of Maldon*, where the *scop* links the Christian defenders to the flock of God. The savage behaviour of the carrion-eating wolf serves to reinforce negative perceptions of this beast and makes positive descriptions, such as miraculous obedience in the presence of holy figures, even more extraordinary.

The raven in scripture

Like the wolf, there is no shortage of allegorical references to the raven in scripture.³⁴⁰ The bulk of Christian commentary on the raven paints the bird in a negative light, with its harsh call, dark plumage and scavenging nature making it something of an easy target for such a stigma. Allegorical significations, however, are more varied and complex than those attached to the Christian wolf, with conflicting positive portrayals and some surprising usages of what essentially is, across most cultural traditions, a bird of ill-omen. It is likely that many of these allegorical layers of meaning (the negative in particular) would have added extra significance to the Beasts of Battle raven for an Anglo-Saxon audience.

It can be assumed that the 'birds of the air' mentioned in those biblical passages involving carrion-eaters (Deut. 28:26, Jer. 15:3, Ez. 39:4 etc.) include the birds most commonly associated with scavenging: the vulture, the raven, the eagle and others. In addition to these passages there are some more specific instances of ravens eating human flesh, such as Prov. 30:17: 'The eye that mocketh at his father, and that despiseth the labour of his mother in bearing him, let the ravens of the brooks pick it out, and the young eagles eat it.' Ravens are portrayed as a punishing force awaiting sinners who have broken the fifth commandment. The later bestiaries associate the raven's pecking of eyes with the devil's destroying the ability of his victims to judge correctly, leaving the mind open to attack.³⁴¹

In his pastoral letter to Wulfsgie, Ælfric uses the image of the greedy raven in a scathing description of priests attendant upon deathbeds:

*Sume preostas fægnað þonne men forðfarað, 7 gegaderiað hy to þam lice, swa swa
grædige hremmas þær hy hold geseoð, on holte oppe felda; ac hym gebyrað to bestandenne*

³⁴⁰ The raven is in fact the first bird to be mentioned by name in the Bible (and is thus one of the first birds in written record).

³⁴¹ <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast251.htm> (accessed 5/4/10)

*þa men þe gehyrað to his hyrnysse, into his mynstre; 7 he ne sceal na faran on opres folgoþe to nanum lice, butan he gelapod sy.*³⁴²

Some priests are glad when men depart from this life and gather around the body just as greedy ravens do when they see a corpse in a wood or field. But it is fitting for a priest to perform funeral rites for men who belong to his parish, in his church; and he must not travel to any other district to attend a corpse unless he is summoned.

Ælfric very effectively draws upon a number of the raven's attributes to paint his negative picture of the priests: the greedy and scavenging nature of the bird, its plumage equated with the priests' fluttering robes and its croaking no doubt mirrored in the speech of the greedy clergymen. The trait most similar to the Beasts of Battle raven is the priests' *fægnað* ('being glad'/'rejoicing') over human death.

The raven is named an unclean bird or 'abomination' in Deut. 14:14 and Lev. 11:15 that must not be eaten due to its scavenging nature. The categorisation as such can be seen to lower the status of the raven in the Christian view of the animal kingdom, but in practical terms it served to raise the bird from a potential source of food to a competitor that must be tolerated and even feared.

Positive mentions of the raven in scripture contrast sharply with these images. Like the wolf, the raven acts as an agent of God's will in three examples of miraculous intervention. In 1 Kings 17:1–6 the Lord sends ravens to feed Elijah (Elias) with 'bread and flesh' in the otherwise inhospitable desert:

And Elias the Thesbite of the inhabitants of Galaad said to Achab, 'As the Lord liveth the God of Israel, in whose sight I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to the words of my mouth'. / And the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'Get thee hence ... and hide thyself by the torrent of Carith, which is over against the Jordan. / And there thou shalt drink of the torrent: and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there'. / So he went, and did according to the word of the Lord: and going, he dwelt by the torrent Carith, which is over against the Jordan. / And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the torrent.

This passage provides another example of the sanctity of a holy figure overturning the natural instinct of a scavenger; that is, to avoid contact with humans, to eat the bread and flesh itself,

³⁴² Dorothy Whitelock, M. Brett and C. Brooke, *Councils and Synods of Great Britain with Other Documents Relating to the English Church. Volume 1, Part 1. 871–1066* (Oxford, 1981), 295.

or to feast on Elijah's carcass if he were to perish in the desert. The writer may have chosen the raven rather than a more reputable creature to feed Elijah because its very unsuitability for the task makes the raven's role in this tale more miraculous.

Bede writes of some penitent crows in his *Life of St Cuthbert* (chapter 20) to illustrate that 'the obedience and humility of birds are a warning to the perversity and pride of mankind'.

... There were some crows which had long been accustomed to build in the island. One day the man of God saw them, whilst making their nests, pull out the thatch of the hut which he had made to entertain the brethren in, and carry it away to build with. He immediately stretched out his hand, and warned them to do no harm to the brethren. As they neglected his command, he said to them, 'In the name of Jesus Christ, depart as speedily as possible, and do not presume to remain any longer in the place, to which you are doing harm.' He had scarcely uttered these words, when they flew away in sorrow. At the end of three days one of the two returned, and finding the man of God digging in the field, spread out its wings in a pitiable manner, and bending its head down before his feet, in a tone of humility asked pardon by the most expressive signs it could, and obtained from the reverend father permission to return. It then departed and fetched its companion; and when they had both arrived, they brought in their beaks a large piece of hog's lard.³⁴³

The allegorist writes that the bird strove 'by prayers, lamentation and presents to obliterate the injury which it had done', suggesting that all Christians should strive as earnestly after humility,³⁴⁴ concluding with the warning 'let no one think it absurd to learn virtue from birds', a common exhortation from a church which time and time again looked to the animal kingdom as a teaching tool.

The *Dialogues of St Gregory the Great* describe a crow disposing of a poisoned loaf at St Benedict's command:

Florentius ... poisoned a loaf and sent it to the servant of almighty God [Benedict], as it were for a holy present. The man of God received it with great thanks, yet not ignorant of that which was hidden within. At dinner time, a crow daily used to come to him from the next wood, which took bread at his hands; coming that day after his manner, the man of God threw him the loaf which the priest had sent him, giving him this charge: 'In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, take up that loaf, and leave it in some such place where no man may find it.' Then the crow, opening his mouth, and lifting up his wings, began to hop up and

³⁴³ J.F. Webb and D.H. Farmer, trans., *The Age of Bede* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 71–2.

³⁴⁴ This display of humility is similar to that shown by the wolf to the old hermit in *De Vitis Patrum* (see p.102).

down about the loaf, and after his manner to cry out, as though he would have said that he was willing to obey, and yet could not do what he was commanded. The man of God again commanded him, saying: 'Take it up without fear, and throw it where no man may find it.' At length, with much ado, the crow took it up, and flew away, and after three hours, having dispatched the loaf, he returned again, and received his usual allowance from the man of God.³⁴⁵

Both occurrences include the bird communicating with the saints through expressive and personified gestures. During a miraculous intervention the beasts often take on human characteristics, gaining the ability to communicate, emphasise and avoid sin.

St Vincent of Saragossa's corpse was protected by a raven in much the same way as St Edmund's decapitated head was protected by a wolf. After a particularly gruesome course of torture which led to the martyr's death, Dacian had Vincent's body exposed in a marsh so his followers could not honour him in a tomb. In another reversal of the scavenger role, a crow acts against its nature and guards the body from other birds and beasts:

After [the torture] a soft bed was prepared for him, on which he was no sooner laid but he expired, the happy moment he had not ceased to pray for ever since his torments, and his first call to martyrdom. Dacian commanded his body to be thrown on a marshy field among rushes; but a crow defended it from wild beasts and birds of prey.³⁴⁶

Somewhat ironically, given the raven's predilection for unburied corpses, the Judeo-Christian tradition describes the raven showing the first humans how to bury a corpse.³⁴⁷ Ginzberg writes:

... For a long time [the corpse of Abel] lay there exposed, above ground, because Adam and Eve knew not what to do with it. They sat beside it and wept, while the faithful dog of Abel kept guard that birds and beasts did it no harm. All of a sudden, the mourning parents observed how a raven scratched the earth away in one spot, and then hid a dead bird of his

³⁴⁵ Edmund Gardner, ed., *The Dialogues of Saint Gregory* (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1911), 65–66.

³⁴⁶ Alban Butler, 'St Vincent, Martyr', in *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Principal Saints*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20450> (accessed 25/4/2014).

³⁴⁷ This is an accurate observation of a raven's behaviour – ravens do bury and store meat and other food. See Derek Goodwin, *Crows of the World* (St Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1983), 139.

own kind in the ground. Adam, following the example of the raven, buried the body of Abel, and the raven was rewarded by God.³⁴⁸

This reward was twofold – firstly that the ravens’ prayers for rain would always be answered, and secondly that their young would be nurtured by God. The mistaken belief, later advocated in the writings of Isidore and the bestiaries,³⁴⁹ was that ravens refuse to feed their young until they grow black feathers and are recognisable as their own. According to Jewish legend, the raven:

... is unkind toward his own young so long as their bodies are not covered with black feathers, though as a rule ravens love one another. God therefore takes the young raven under His special protection ... His young are born with white feathers, wherefore the old birds desert them, not recognizing them as their offspring. They take them for serpents. God feeds them until their plumage turns black, and the parent birds return to them.³⁵⁰

There are at least three instances of God feeding young ravens in the scriptures (Job 38:41, Psalms 147:9 and Luke 12:24). Moberly comments that this is illustrative of divine care;³⁵¹ a holy tenderness towards creatures described elsewhere as abominations. The story can be seen as both a positive and negative characteristic of ravens, as abandoning one’s young is a culpable act, yet the miraculous nurture of the chicks is a sign of divine favour. The later bestiaries commented, ‘As the raven will not feed the chicks until it recognises them as its own, so the teacher should not tell his students of the inner mysteries until he recognizes that they are ready to receive them, when they have grown dark with repentance’.³⁵² The monogamous mating habits of the raven are also highlighted as a positive characteristic of an otherwise wicked creature – Diekstra writes that the early Christians viewed the raven’s monogamy as a symbol of the mystical union of Christ and Church.³⁵³

³⁴⁸ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1987) I:113, V:142–3). Also described in the Qur’an (Al-Ma’ida 5:31).

³⁴⁹ Stephen Barney, W. Lewis, J. Beach and Oliver Bergholf, eds., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁵⁰ Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, V:142–3. Holmgren writes that this tale has little basis in ornithology: ‘Anyone who watched ravens would soon learn that these birds are loyal and considerate mates and devoted parents. You also learn that young raven nestlings squawk for food with louder and longer cries than almost any other species you could name, so they were the example that came immediately to mind when the writers of Job 38:41 and Psalm 147:7–9 wanted to call up a reminder of how God the Father provides for all small wildlings, giving each its food – not with his own hand but by providing parent ravens ... with the instincts to choose the food best suited to infant needs, to bring such good again and again as long as the opened beaks and lifted voices reveal hunger’s need’. Virginia Holmgren, *Birdwalk Through the Bible* (New York: Dover, 1988).

³⁵¹ R. Moberly, ‘Why did Noah Send out a Raven?’ *Vetus Testamentum* 50 (2000): 355.

³⁵² <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast251.htm> (accessed 5/4/10).

³⁵³ F. Diekstra, ‘The *Physiologus*, The Bestiaries and Medieval Animal Lore’, *Neophilologus* 69 (1985): 143.

Noah and the raven

Perhaps the most interesting and puzzling usage of the raven in scripture is in Genesis 8:7, in which Noah ‘sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth’. This suggests that the raven eventually returns, although the Old Latin versions of this passage have the raven disappearing entirely.³⁵⁴ After this apparent failure, Noah sends the more successful dove which returns (on its second attempt) with the famous olive leaf. This scarcity of detail about the raven’s role in the Hebrew text and subsequent Christian analogues has puzzled commentators for centuries, leading to extra-biblical insertions and theories to explain the raven’s presence.

Moberly argues that the original text gives us all the evidence we need, and puts forth the theory that we should abandon the ‘usually unquestioned assumption’ that the raven, like the dove, was sent to search for dry land. While the task of the dove is specified, the raven’s unexplained flying to and fro makes sense if read in the context of Gen. 1:2, in which the spirit of God moves back and forth across the waters before creating dry land. Moberly theorises that Noah sends out the raven as a symbolic re-enactment of the Creation, ‘not just the passive recipient of, but also an active participant in, the work of God, symbolically replicating God’s action through the spirit, and so appropriating it within the created realm’.³⁵⁵ The dove is sent twice to confirm that the re-creation is complete while the raven continues to fly ‘to and fro until the waters were dried up from off the earth’. It was unnecessary to specify the raven’s role as ‘the context makes clear its symbolic role in relation to the divine spirit and the receding waters’.³⁵⁶ This solution, however, leaves unanswered the question as to why the seemingly unsuitable raven was chosen to symbolise God’s spirit.³⁵⁷

The writer of the Old English *Genesis A* (1438b–54b) assumes the birds were given the same task (to seek dry land) and provides a plausible theory for the raven’s failure in a version of the story that is much-expanded from the Vulgate original:

<i>Let þa ymb word daga</i>	Then, after many days,
<i>þæs þe heah hlioðo horde onfengon</i>	after the high hills [waves] had received the hoard
<i>and æðelum eac eorðan tudres</i>	and also the princes of the progeny of the earth,

³⁵⁴ Gatch, ‘Noah’s Raven in Genesis A’, 5.

³⁵⁵ Moberly, ‘Why did Noah Send out a Raven?’, 354.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

³⁵⁷ Holmgren suggests the following reasons for Noah’s choice of the much-maligned raven for the task of seeking dry land: ‘Only a bird would be able to bring back such word, yea or nay, and Noah must have thought that the raven – strong of wing and adventurous of spirit – would be the best choice. Then, too, its black wings would be easily followed by watchers at the Ark windows, even against grey skies, while those of a smaller or paler bird would be lost.’ (Holmgren, *Birdwalk Through the Bible*.)

<i>sunu Lameches sweartne fleogan</i>	the son of Lamech let the black raven fly
<i>hrefn ofer heahflod of huse ut.</i>	over the high flood, out of the ark.
<i>Noah tealde þæt he on neod hine,</i>	Noah thought that if the raven did not find land
<i>gif he on þære lade land ne funde,</i>	on that journey it would seek him out of need,
<i>ofer sid waeter secan wolde</i>	it would seek the vessel over the wide waters.
<i>on wægþele. Eft him seo wen ge Leah,</i>	Afterwards his hope deceived him,
<i>ac se feonde gespearn fleotende hreaw;</i>	because the enemy ³⁵⁸ perched on floating carrion;
<i>salwigfeðera secan nolde.</i>	the dark-feathered one did not seek [the ark].
<i>He þa ymb seofon niht sweartum hrefne</i>	Seven nights after he released the dark raven,
<i>of earce forlet æfter fleogan</i>	he let the grey dove fly from the ark
<i>ofer heah wæter hawse culufan</i>	over the deep water,
<i>on fandunga hwæðer famig sæ</i>	to test whether the deep foamy sea
<i>deop þa gyta dæl ænigne</i>	had yet given up
<i>grenre eorðan ofgifen hæfde.</i>	any portion of green earth.

Noah's Anglo-Saxon raven naturally behaves like a carrion-eater, abandoning its holy quest to feast instead on the corpses of flood victims.³⁵⁹ The raven's behaviour is further attested to in an illustration in the Cotton Claudius B.iv manuscript; a depiction of Noah's ark with a raven pecking at a severed head.³⁶⁰ Gatch writes that this is one of the *Genesis scop*'s few excursions from the letter of the original. Commentators have found much of allegorical significance in this passage. Ambrose in his *De Noe* ('On Noah') states that the raven represents 'the sinfulness of penitent man – his darkness, impurity, imprudentness'.³⁶¹ Noah deliberately sends this sinning creature out into the water-covered world where he hopes it will die, waiting seven days before deeming it safe to send the dove, a symbol of purity and goodness.

³⁵⁸ Gatch notes the word *feond* ('enemy') causes difficulty here as the raven is not represented elsewhere in scripture as the devil or enemy of mankind. Editors have amended this to *se feonde* ('rejoicing, he perched on floating carrion', which seems contextually suitable. See Gatch, 'Noah's Raven in Genesis A'.

³⁵⁹ Commentary on this passage overwhelmingly reveals the raven bearing the blame for failing to return to the ark, yet a realistic analysis of the bird's behaviour would suggest the fault lies with Noah's ignorance of his chosen bird's habits. Holmgren writes that when the raven failed to return, 'Noah must have remembered that the raven is an eater of carrion and would have found plenty of such fare exposed by the falling waters ... that it is a bird of the hill, not used to nesting in cotes along a garden wall, which the Ark resembled, and would not have had any need or instinct for returning to such quarters, as doves would do. The fault had been Noah's for making the wrong choice, but down through the ages the raven has had to bear the blame, becoming the symbol of ill omen and even death, the companion of witches and wizards and the embodiment of lost souls', (Holmgren, *Birdwalk Through the Bible*.)

³⁶⁰ British Museum MS Cotton Claudius B.iv, folio 15r.

³⁶¹ J.J. Savage, 'Saint Ambrose: *Hexaëmeron*', *Fathers of the Church Vol. 42*, (Washington, CUA Press, 1961).

To expand upon Ambrose's interpretation, the ark itself represents the baptised, and Gatch stresses that it is nowhere suggested that the raven represents the devil – rather, the dark bird represents bad, or lapsed, Christians.³⁶² Its status as one of the chosen in the ark of salvation means the raven represents 'either sinfulness in flight from purity or the worldly Christian who strays from the narrow confines of strict religious life'.³⁶³ Ambrose writes, 'Some (the dove) take advantage of their baptism; others (the raven) do not ... some take the grace of the Lord to their salvation, others to their perdition.'³⁶⁴ Bede compares the raven with 'those who by means of the sacraments have in truth been established and imbued with things celestial, but nevertheless, going out with the blackness of earthly pleasures, love the wide way of the world more than the cloister of ecclesiastical conversation'.³⁶⁵ This tropological treatment is similar to Augustine's, who wrote 'Who are the ravens? Those who seek their own. Who are the doves? Those who seek those things which are Christ's'.³⁶⁶ Augustine makes use of Noah's raven in an attack on unreformed Christians: 'You have really become a crow. Behold, I say to you that when you make the noise of a crow, ruin is threatening you. For that crow whose cawing you imitate went forth from the ark and did not return.'³⁶⁷

The raven's punishment is a fascinating addition to this story. Korotayez provides the following Arabic translation of the Pentateuch by an unknown author, containing an illuminating commentary on Genesis 8.6–12:

Saint Ephrem the Syrian said that after 40 days and 40 nights the waters of the rain stopped [flooding the earth] ... Noah opened the window of the ark ... and immediately sent out the raven, ordering him and telling him 'Go, search the world, [find out] if there has been left in it a high mountain not covered with water.' As for the raven, he went and did not find a place to put his legs. The raven looked at dead bodies of animals and people floating over the water, he descended on the dead bodies of the drowned, began to eat them and did not return to let Noah know ... [at that time] the raven was of white colour ... Three months

³⁶² In his c.850 *Panegyric on King Louis the German*, Sedulius Scotus (II 30, verses 51–60), writes of war-hardened Danish delegates to the Carolingian court who are subsequently baptised and become peaceful. Lukman ('The Raven Banner and the Changing Ravens', 135) writes that 'by the miracle of holy baptism, their [black] clothes are changed into white, and they are no longer aggressive, heathen ravens but peaceful, white, Christian doves'. This is a reference to Ovid's metamorphosis of the raven but also echoes the story of Noah's two winged scouts – the sinful raven and the holy dove.

³⁶³ Gatch, 'Noah's Raven in *Genesis A*', 5.

³⁶⁴ Savage, 'Saint Ambrose: *Hexameron*'.

³⁶⁵ C. Jones, ed., *Bede: Libri quatuor in principium Genesis*, CCSL 118A (1967).

³⁶⁶ Edmund Hill, ed., 'Homilies on the Gospel of St John', *The Works of St Augustine*, (New York: New City Press, 2009).

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 'Sermons on the Liturgical Season', *The Works of St Augustine*, (New York: New City Press, 1993). Osborn writes that in medieval iconography, souls emerging from dead heathens' mouths were usually depicted as ravens. 'Domesticating the Dayraven', 318.

later the raven returned to Noah ... Noah asked him about his delay, and the raven told him [that] because he was busy eating, he forgot about coming back. Noah told the raven: 'You will be cursed ... God will change your appearance to black ...' And from that hour when Noah said these words the raven's appearance changed, his [previous] colour disappeared, his face became black, his head became black ...³⁶⁸

The raven is as white as the dove before its flight from the ark, suggesting that before the former succumbs to the destructive passions that lead it from the church, the two birds are equally virtuous. The raven is tempted by the corpses and falls from its hitherto pure state, while the dove 'can find no resting place amidst these destructive passions and returns to Noah and thus the church'.³⁶⁹ A white raven that symbolises purity and lives in a state of grace can be linked to the ravens' chicks (as described above) – white-plumaged and fed by God while their black-plumaged, 'fallen' parents turn away from them.

Gatch dismisses speculation about a Germanic background for Noah's raven and the comment by Kennedy that 'the raven must miss his usual companions as Beasts of Battle, the eagle and the wolf'.³⁷⁰ This is not to say, however, that learned Anglo-Saxons may not have made this connection – the hovering raven at a scene of carnage may well have triggered associations with the biblical raven pecking at a floating corpse. Whether or not Bede and Augustine's tropological interpretation can be applied to the battlefield raven can only be speculated – the corpse-pecking *hrefn* may symbolise a lapsed Christian overindulging in the earthly sin of gluttony.

A Norse parallel for the ark raven story can, in fact, be found in *Islendingabok*, as described by Mowat:

[Norse navigators were] brilliant improvisers. In the *Islendingabok* we read of the exploit of one Raven-Floki who wished to make a voyage to Iceland but who did not have sailing directions for the voyage. Floki set out to go there anyway, and as navigational aids he carried a number of ravens. Ravens, as Floki evidently knew, are land birds – and non-migratory. They do not have to make passages across large expanses of open water, and seldom do so voluntarily. When a raven is freed from a ship it will promptly make for the nearest land it can see. From a height of 5000 feet – at which altitude the big black bird is

³⁶⁸ A. Korotayez et al, 'Return of the White Raven: Postdiluvial Reconnaissance Motif A2234.1.1 Reconsidered', *Journal of American Folklore* 119 (2006): 203.

³⁶⁹ Moberly, 'Why did Noah Send out a Raven?', 346.

³⁷⁰ Gatch, 'Noah's Raven in *Genesis A*', 6, and Charles Kennedy, *The Earliest English Poetry*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1943): 173.

still easily visible from sea level – a raven can probably see land ninety miles away, and high land a great deal farther off.

It is recorded that on the first day out of sight of the Faeroes, Floki released a raven, which circled a few times and then struck off on the vessel's back track, toward the Faeroes. On the second day another raven circled for a long time high in the pale sky, and finally returned to perch upon the vessel's mast. But on the next day, the raven climbed to a great height and then flew purposefully off toward the west. Following it with their eyes until it vanished, the Norsemen set their course by that of the bird and in due time raised the coast of Iceland.³⁷¹

Floki's raven acts in the manner Noah intended his raven to behave when he releases it from the ark – when it finds no sign of land it returns to the Viking vessel, and its eventual disappearance is taken as a sign that it has successfully located dry land. The similarity between the two tales suggests that Noah's scheme would have been sound if he had not failed to take into account the large number of floating corpses caused by the catastrophic deluge, and their subsequent lure for his carrion-eating scout.

To conclude this exploration of biblical raven imagery that may have had bearing on the theme of the Beasts of Battle, two contrasting images of the raven can be found in Christian writings.³⁷² The first is a croaking, thieving scavenger that is unfit to eat and will pluck out a human's eye if given the chance. The second is a different bird altogether: a raven that buries its dead, whose young are nurtured by God, who is trusted by Noah and brings relief to Elijah in the desert. The Beasts of Battle raven is comparable to the first, but is irreconcilable with the second. There is no solution to this incompatibility – the raven, like many other animals in Christian interpretation of the natural world, is an allegorical jumble. Gatch quotes the work of Hrabanus Maurus to stress this point:

In Proverbs, says he, the raven denotes the blackness of sinners and demons. In Job, he is an allegory of the preacher, for he chews up or pre-digests food (the Gospel) before giving it to his children. In Song of Songs, he is Christ and the church; in the Psalms, sins or infidelity;

³⁷¹ Farley Mowat, *Westviking: The Ancient Norse in Greenland and North America* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965). See also the passage entitled 'Floki released a raven' in Gibson's *Bedside Book of Birds*, 134–5.

³⁷² This chapter concentrates on written accounts of the raven in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but stories of this bird are scattered throughout the folklore and religious tales of many cultures in both literary and oral traditions. Holmgren writes, 'The raven holds claim to unwritten birdlore ... for it is known all around the northern half of the globe and has many a role in Nordic sagas, the legends of North American Indian tribes, and the folk tales told around desert campfires and Eskimo snow lodges'. Holmgren, *Birdwalk Through the Bible*.

in Wisdom, tardiness in repentance. The raven has not, in other words, an univocal allegorical meaning in Scripture. He means different – indeed, opposite – things in different contexts.³⁷³

In the context of the Beasts of Battle, the raven has none of these redeeming qualities that would have appeared in scriptural representations in post-conversion England. It is portrayed partaking in a reprehensible and sinful act (feasting on a human corpse), an image which lends itself to the church's negative associations with the raven – a scavenger, unclean and fallen from grace.

The eagle in scripture

In a comment on scriptural representations of the eagle, St Augustine wrote that in these accounts what is to be considered is the spiritual significance, not the authenticity of the fact described.³⁷⁴ Christian eagle imagery is substantial and varied, differing from wolf and raven imagery in that this bird of prey is, in the main, portrayed positively. Eagle imagery is still very much in use in the modern-day church, on pulpits to symbolise its association with John the Evangelist, and on baptismal fonts to symbolise rebirth and baptism.

Like the wolf and the raven, the eagle features in at least one story of miraculous intervention, bringing divine succour to St Cuthbert. Bede describes the saint admonishing his hungry follower:

‘My son, learn to have faith, and trust in God, who will never suffer to perish with hunger those who trust in Him.’ Then looking up, and seeing an eagle flying in the air, he said, ‘Do you perceive that eagle yonder? It is possible for God to feed us even by means of that eagle.’ As they were thus discoursing, they came near a river, and behold the eagle was standing on its bank. ‘Look,’ said the man of God, ‘there is our handmaid, the eagle that I spoke to you about. Run, and see what provision God hath sent us, and come again and tell me.’ The boy ran, and found a good-sized fish, which the eagle had just caught. But the man of God reproved him, ‘What have you done, my son? Why have you not given part to God’s

³⁷³ Gatch, ‘Noah’s Raven in *Genesis A*’, 6. See also Priscilla Throop, ed., *Hrabanus Maurus: De Universo* vol. 1, (Vermont: Medieval MS, 2009). Holmgren makes the point that any positive raven imagery in the Bible (such as God’s divine care for fledglings) has been effectively overwhelmed by the negative portrayal of Noah’s greedy raven: ‘... whatever evil clung to the raven’s feathers from pagan tales was enhanced by its failure as messenger for Noah, and when other Bible lines seemed to say that God himself had to feed the raven fledglings, since their parents did not do so, the failure to return to the Ark was taken as proof that a raven has no care for mate or young’. (Holmgren, *Birdwalk Through the Bible*).

³⁷⁴ St Augustine (PL 37, 1323).

handmaid? Cut the fish in two pieces, and give her one, as her service well deserves.' He did as he was bidden, and carried the other part with him on his journey.³⁷⁵

Yet the miracle of an obedient eagle does not seem as effective as the miracles involving the wolf or raven. We know that realistically this behaviour is very unlikely, but the eagle's allegorical association with overwhelmingly positive imagery lessens the surprise of its service as a miraculous 'handmaid' of God.

The eagle grasping a fish carries two contrasting associations – firstly, it symbolises Christ, the supreme 'fisher of men' who was often depicted as an eagle flying into the heavens with a fish (a Christian soul) in its claws. Yet the fish is also one of the earliest symbols of Christianity, positioning the eagle as a symbol of Satan or the Antichrist who was often portrayed devouring the human soul in the form of helpless creatures, such as rabbits, birds or fish.³⁷⁶ The Aberdeen Bestiary (c.1200) takes a similarly negative view:

The word 'eagle' in the Holy Scriptures signifies sometimes evil spirits, ravishers of souls; sometimes the rulers of this world ... [it] represents those who lie in ambush for the spirit ... The descent of the eagle from the sky to the earth to find food also represents the fall of Adam, who ate what was forbidden.³⁷⁷

A similar yet less ambiguous image is that of an eagle grasping a snake, a representation of Christ's triumph over Satan.³⁷⁸

The association of eagle imagery with secular nobility and royalty extends to the royalty of Christ. A striking image is that of the eagle-headed lion, or griffin. A union of the king of the beasts and the king of the air, the griffin was adopted by the church as a symbol of the unification of the human and the divine in the person of Christ.³⁷⁹ Diekstra writes that the double-headed eagle, another much-used symbol in heraldry,³⁸⁰ also symbolised this unification of the earthly and heavenly.³⁸¹ By no means should the eagle or its derivatives be

³⁷⁵ Webb and Farmer, *The Age of Bede*, 60–1.

³⁷⁶ <http://ww2.netnitco.net/~legend01/eagle.htm> (accessed 30/07/09).

³⁷⁷ Aberdeen University Library, Univ. Lib. MS 24.

³⁷⁸ Houwen writes that in pre-Christian art, 'an eagle struggling with a bull, snake or lion signifies the struggle between spiritual and earthly forces ... the association between birds ... and the soul or spirit of men was an ancient and a common one, both in art and literature. Houwen, 'Animal Parallelism in Medieval Literature', 492.

³⁷⁹ Stephen Friar, *A New Dictionary of Heraldry* (London: Alphabooks, 1987), 173.

³⁸⁰ Associated with the heraldry of the Byzantine, Holy Roman and Russian empires, signifying (among other things) the rulers' dominance over both church and state.

³⁸¹ Diekstra, 'The *Physiologus*', 143.

seen as the only or ultimate representation of Christ – as Houwen comments, Christendom eagerly utilised a number of beasts to symbolise the divine, particularly with the growing popularity of the bestiaries:

One gets the impression that almost any animal could symbolise Christ: the centaur, the eagle, the elephant, the griffin, the hart, the lamb, the lion, the lynx, the otter, the pelican, the phoenix, and the unicorn. This use of different animals symbolising one and the same thing or person (like Christ) allows the author to vary his images without necessarily varying the symbolism.³⁸²

Houwen's mention of the phoenix raises the point of a shared trait with the eagle in Christian and eastern lore – rejuvenation, an essential emblem of the Messiah and one of the pillars of the faith.³⁸³ Eagles were said to be able to restore their own youth by flying into the sun, bursting into flame and then diving three times into the water of a fountain.³⁸⁴ Unlike the phoenix, the eagle was not believed to be immortal, yet the story's allusions to baptism and the eagle's other associations with Christ made this a fitting symbol for immortality after death, rebirth after baptism and the divine resurrection.³⁸⁵ The renewal of the eagle is referred to in Isaiah 40:31: 'But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles'. Psalm 102:5 also describes youth that is 'renewed like the eagle's'.

The eagle was also believed to be able to stare directly into the sun, leading to associations with the contemplation of the divine; that is, the ability of the saints to see God and discern divine truths.³⁸⁶ Pliny the Elder wrote that 'the sea-eagle forces its unfledged young to look at the rays of the sun; if any of them blinks or has watering eyes, those ones are thrown out of the nest'.³⁸⁷ Isidore repeats this story in his *Etymologies*, adding that the word *aquila* is derived from the sharpness ('acumen') of the eagle's eyes. 'Acumen' in modern English has come to mean insight or shrewdness, a necessary attribute of those who wish to see the divine.³⁸⁸ This apparent ability to stare at the sun led the fourteenth-century French theologian Durandus and

³⁸² Houwen, 'Animal Parallelism in Medieval Literature', 491.

³⁸³ This is not to say that rejuvenation in animals was always linked to the divine – it is also mentioned in the Latin bestiary in connection with the hoopoe, the lizard and the (traditionally diabolical) snake. See Diekstra, 'The *Physiologus*', 148.

³⁸⁴ MS. *Ashmole 1511*, folio 74, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

³⁸⁵ <http://ww2.netnitco.net/~legend01/eagle.htm> (accessed 30/07/09).

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ H. Rackham, ed., *Pliny – Natural History*, book 10 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1940).

³⁸⁸ The Christian eagle's acumen may also refer to truth-telling, or holy augury: 'For a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the truth', (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

others to link the eagle with John the Evangelist, whose gospel contemplates the divine nature of Christ.³⁸⁹

As an example of positive and negative associations existing alongside each other, the great height at which eagles were observed to fly (also mentioned in the bestiaries) led to a positive association with Christ's ascension, while the height at which they nest created an association with the negative traits of pride and vanity. Edom's lofty stronghold is described as a product of such in Jer. 49:16 and Oba. 1:3–4:

Thy arrogancy hath deceived thee, and the pride of thy heart: O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, and endeavourest to lay hold on the height of the hill: but though thou shouldst make thy nest as high as an eagle, I will bring thee down from thence. /

Though thou be exalted as an eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars: thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.

The motherly care of the eagle over its young is echoed in the Song of Moses, where the Lord's watchfulness over Jacob and the tribes of Israel is likened to 'the eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, he spread his wings, and hath taken him and carried him on his shoulders'.³⁹⁰ Moberly points out that this image is in turn comparable to the delivery of Israel in Exodus 19:4: 'You have seen what I have done to the Egyptians, how I have carried you upon the wings of eagles, and have taken you to myself'.³⁹¹ Again, the eagle represents divine care, its wings a symbol of protection. This stands in contrast with Jer. 49:22, in which the avenging armies of the Lord will 'come up as an eagle, and fly: and he shall spread his wings over Bozrah' – the eagle's wings in this instance portend destruction. The eagle's swiftness is often used in scripture to emphasise the speed of attacking armies (Deu. 28:49, Hos. 8:1, Jer. 4:13, Lam. 4:19), for example in Hab. 1:8 the Chaldean horsemen '... shall come from afar; they shall fly as an eagle that maketh haste to eat'.³⁹² The equating of an approaching attacker with a ravening bird of prey brings to mind the linking of the charging Vikings with voracious wolves in the *Battle of Maldon* 96a.

³⁸⁹ Houwen, 'Animal Parallelism in Medieval Literature', 491. An Anglo-Saxon illustration of the eagle of St John can be found in the early 8th-century *Northumbrian Gospel Book* (reproduced in Gibson, *Bedside Book of Birds*, 316.

³⁹⁰ Deu. 32:11.

³⁹¹ Moberly, 'Why did Noah Send out a Raven?', 352.

³⁹² The eagle in *Exodus* lines 161–9 is also equated with a terrifying cavalry charge. See Breeze, 'Habakkuk 1:8 as source for *Exodus* 161–69', 161.

The biblical eagle and its Anglo-Saxon counterpart are unarguably more majestic than the skulking wolf and croaking raven, yet it shrieks for carrion just as enthusiastically and partakes in the same grisly feasts.³⁹³ The eagle's associations, both religious and secular, have given it a body of positive meaning that is predominantly irreconcilable with its Beast of Battle role. In this context, it seems that the Anglo-Saxon *scops* regarded the Germanic eagle as no better than a vulture, pushing aside the positive inherited associations. The biblical association of eagles with attacking armies (usually to describe their great speed) is a potential parallel with the Beasts of Battle eagle, in that the scriptural bird of prey is regularly referred to when battle seems imminent. Like the Anglo-Saxon eagle, this may very well have meant that the biblical eagle could have been seen as part of the paraphernalia of warfare, with the description of an army moving at the speed of an eagle leading a Christian audience to expect that slaughter will soon follow.

Original contributions to this field of study raised in chapter three include the examination of how the trope of miraculous obedience may have affected an Anglo-Saxon audience's response to the Beasts of Battle. The beasts serve to represent 'normal' savage behaviour, making any deviation from the norm (such as miraculous obedience) all the more notable and meaningful. This chapter has contributed to existing scholarly discussion around Noah's raven by concentrating on the naturalistic aspect of its disobedience – as a carrion-bird, the raven only behaves according to its natural instincts in seeking out carcasses rather than dry land, in the same manner as the Beasts of Battle raven naturally seeks out carrion after a battle. Finally, chapter three has explored the way in which the 'unclean' status of the wolf, raven and eagle would have increased the negative perception of the theme and fear/ignominy of being devoured by the wolf, raven or eagle.

To conclude this chapter, the majority of Christian parallels with the three Beasts of Battle serve to reinforce the negative associations with the wolf, raven and eagle. They are pictured scavenging corpses; unclean, even diabolical creatures that are often used as a threat or punishment from God. Yet all three beasts also carry a body of positive associations in scripture. For an Anglo-Saxon audience familiar with the Beasts of Battle theme, the inherited body of negative associations would have made positive biblical imagery, such as miraculously obedient animals, all the more surprising.

³⁹³ See Matthew 24:28: *Swa hwær swa hold byþ, / ðæder beoþ earnas gegaderode* ('For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together').

Chapter 4

Raven-gladdeners: Norse and Celtic portrayals of the Beasts of Battle

Alongside the cultural shift brought about by the conversion of England, the cultural identity of the Anglo-Saxons was shaped through contact, both in peace and war, with two other major cultures present in the British Isles – the Scandinavians and the Celts. The *scops* and bards of the three cultures would describe armed conflict in very different ways – for example, the elegiac mood of the Anglo-Saxon poetry was dissimilar to the Norse equivalent, which tended to be bloodier and more celebratory. The Celtic poets were more prolific in their usage of animal metaphors to describe and praise warriors, while their battle-narratives were arguably the least realistic of the three cultures. Fascinatingly, all three peoples employed the Beasts of Battle in their depictions of conflict, the idiosyncrasies of the beasts reflecting subtle differences in culture and world-view.

This chapter explores different conventions in the usage of the Beasts of Battle across the Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic cultures, firstly focusing on the bloody aspect of the Scandinavian beasts and how the ‘subtler’ treatment of the wolf, raven and eagle in Old English affects our reaction to the theme. Old Norse skaldic ‘praise poetry’ is central to this investigation, and the ways in which the Beasts of Battle were a recurrent aspect of the tradition. The prophetic nature of the Old Norse beasts is also explored, including the role played by ravens and wolves as companions of Odin. This chapter focuses on lines 162a–8b of the Old English *Exodus*, which contain vocabulary including *cwyldrof*, *wælceasega* and *drihtneum* that is strongly suggestive of an Old Norse connection. Also examined is the wolf’s role in the Nordic doomsday, and how this may have added to the menace of this creature in Old English poetry. The use of animal symbolism on the battlefield itself is investigated, namely the dress and behaviour of Viking *berserkirs* and the magical properties of the raven banner. Lastly, this chapter examines Beasts of Battle parallels in three Celtic texts – *Rhonabwy’s Dream*, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* and *Y Gododdin*.

Three poetic traditions, one motif

Ryan,³⁹⁴ Meaney,³⁹⁵ Frank³⁹⁶ and Jesch³⁹⁷ have all sought to understand how the Beasts of Battle came to exist in the poetry of these three traditions. Scholars such as Neckel³⁹⁸ have put

³⁹⁴ Ryan, ‘Othin in England’, 460.

³⁹⁵ Meaney, ‘Woden in England’, 105.

³⁹⁶ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 338–55.

³⁹⁷ Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 251–80.

forward the theory of a common Germanic source (for the Old English and Norse traditions), preserved in its purest form in Scandinavian writing. Frank argues that this is a misconception.³⁹⁹ A more likely scenario (as developed by Jesch in 2002) would have involved ‘cross-fertilization at the lexical level’ between Old English and Old Norse poetry, including that containing the Beasts of Battle.⁴⁰⁰ Frank points to art history as evidence of cultural exchange:

The evidence amassed by art historians points to an integration of Scandinavian motifs with English traditions, a reciprocity and blending, not a stifling of one by the other. If Old English poetry alone of the arts did not ‘catch’ Scandinavian taste, its immunity needs explaining.⁴⁰¹

Statements such as the above have been inspired by certain passages in Old English poetry that bear remarkable resemblance to Old Norse verse, one such passage (*Exodus* 162a–8b) describing the Beasts of Battle in an intriguingly Scandinavian manner. This passage is examined in detail later in this chapter (pp.130–7).

If the Beasts of Battle were seen by the Anglo-Saxons as ‘foreign’ and linked with the poetry of the raiding Scandinavians to the north or the fierce Celts to the west, we may speculate that their appearance would summon associations for an English audience normally brought about by any reference to a belligerent foreign power – that is, hatred, fear and fascination.

The Scandinavian Beasts of Battle

The Old Norse Beasts of Battle are fiercer, bloodier, and serve a different purpose to their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. They are often included in the poetry as a eulogistic rather than elegiac device. This is more apparent in the skaldic poetry (the function of which is to praise individual warriors and kings) than in the Eddic poetry with its mythological tales and characters. In common, however, among different cultures and modes of writing is the beasts’ intriguing and evocative nature. Ryan writes of the ‘strength and horrifying power these beliefs had over the imaginations of the Germanic peoples’:

Sinister overtones are associated with the wolf and the raven in the poems of the elder Edda, and the later verses of the scalds ... These passages have just as much evocative power in spite of their formlessness, as those in the English literature.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ Neckel, ‘Die Kriegerische Kultur’, 17–44.

³⁹⁹ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 338–55.

⁴⁰⁰ Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 258.

⁴⁰¹ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 352.

The fierce and bloody character of the Norse beasts is palpable in many of the passages in which they appear. This is a strong reflection of the eulogistic intentions of the Norse poets which drive the exultant and celebratory mood that is absent from comparable passages in Old English (with the notable exception of *The Battle of Brunanburh*, as discussed in chapter two). Jesch writes that the tone of the Norse passages is ‘quite the opposite [of the Old English elegiac mood]: upbeat and positive’.⁴⁰³

This tone is evident in Saxo’s *Ragnars Saga Lodbrókar*, in which Lodbrok’s pillaging sons complain that the Beasts of Battle will not find any food in the enemy towns as the inhabitants have fled rather than offer battle, but braggingly point out that there is plenty of carrion at the site of a previous battle on the coast:

They were short of food and had no occasion to fight because every town had been evacuated by the inhabitants. One morning Biorn Jarinsiða said: ‘Every morning the vigorous bird of the battlefields is flying over the towns, apparently almost dying of hunger; if it would fly south to the sands, it could get blood enough from the men we killed there.’⁴⁰⁴

Norse conventions

The differences in the treatment of the Beasts of Battle can best be demonstrated with a summary of the convention and some specific examples of Norse usage. While the Anglo-Saxon beasts hover or cry in anticipation of a clash of armies and the ensuing carrion, in the Norse convention (as described by Jesch), ‘the warrior feeds the Beasts of Battle, the Beasts of Battle enjoy their food’.⁴⁰⁵

The Norse individual may be praised for his actions in a particular battle or more generally, ‘for his prowess in a campaign or in the whole of his career.’⁴⁰⁶ This spotlight on the provider of carrion gives the Norse poetry a narrower focus than its Anglo-Saxon equivalent, yet despite the restrictions in usage there are significantly more examples of the Norse Beasts of Battle trope in surviving manuscripts. One such example occurs in *Haraldskvæði* (also known as *Hrafnsmál*, or ‘Raven Song’) where a Valkyrie asks a raven:

⁴⁰² Ryan, ‘Othin in England’, 479.

⁴⁰³ Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 254.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ragnars Saga Lodbrókar*, ch.15 from Hilda Ellis-Davidson, ed., *Saxo Grammaticus: The history of the Danes: Books I–IX* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980); quoted in Niels Lukman, ‘The Raven Banner and the Changing Ravens’, 145.

⁴⁰⁵ Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 254.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

‘How is it with you, ye ravens? Whence are ye come with bloody beak at the dawning of day? Torn flesh is hanging from your talons, and a reek of carrion comes from your mouths. I doubt not that ye have passed the night amid a scene of carnage.’

The sworn brother of the eagle shook his dusky plumage, wiped his beak, and thought upon his answer: ‘We have followed Harold, the son of Halfdan, the youthful scion of Yngvi, ever since we came out of the egg.’⁴⁰⁷

The concept of beasts being ‘followers’ of an individual warrior is unknown in the surviving Anglo-Saxon poetry. The beasts in this regard could be seen as part of the paraphernalia or trophies⁴⁰⁸ won in battle by a renowned warrior. Harold’s ravens brag that they have followed him since they ‘came out of the egg’, suggesting that he has kept the birds sated for their entire lives. It is also possible that the author, in giving Harold raven-followers, is positioning him to be compared to Odin and his faithful ravens Huginn and Muninn.

The Anglo-Saxon *Judith* contains two passages that mention warriors slaughtered with the intent of ‘feeding’ the Beasts of Battle.

Judith 205b–12a

<i>pæs se hlanca gefeah</i>	At that, the lean one rejoiced,
<i>wulf in walde ond se wanna hrefn,</i>	the wolf in the forest and the dark raven,
<i>wælgifre fugel; wistan began</i>	the slaughter-greedy bird; both knew that
<i>þæt him ða þeodguman þohton tilian</i>	the men of that nation meant to provide them with
<i>fylle on fægum. Ac him fleah on last</i>	their fill of the doomed ones. But in their wake flew
<i>earn ætes georn, urigfeðera;</i>	the eagle, eager for food, dewy-feathered;
<i>salowigpada sang hildeleoð</i>	the dark-plumaged one sang a battle-song,
<i>hyrnednebba.</i>	horny-beaked.

It is possible that the treatment of the beasts in this passage was inspired by the skaldic poetry of the Anglo-Saxons’ northern neighbours. The celebratory feel occasioned by this usage is at odds with the typically elegiac atmosphere inherent in most Anglo-Saxon Beasts of Battle passages. This description, however, cannot technically be classified as skaldic, because the

⁴⁰⁷ Lee Hollander, *Old Norse Poems: The Most Important Non-skaldic Verse Not Included in the Poetic Edda*, (1936) stanzas 3–4. <http://www.forgottenbooks.org> (accessed 25/4/2013). A similar passage can be found in *Guðrúnarkviða II* (‘The Second Lay of Guthrún’): ‘In Southland seek thou Sigurth’s body, / There mayst thou hear the hoarse ravens, / The cry of eagles, eager for meat, / The howls of wolves thy husband about’. Daniëlli, ‘*Wulf, Min Wulf*’, 513.

⁴⁰⁸ See chapter two for a discussion of the Beasts of Battle as trophies of victory.

beasts are fed by a large group ('the men of that nation') rather than by an individual hero. Lines 295a–6a are similar:

wulfum to willan ond eac wælgifrum [the enemy soldiers hacked down by swords] as a
fuglum to frofre. treat for wolves and as a pleasure for slaughter-greedy birds.

There are three points to expand upon in this description. Firstly, the Norse poetry describes the beasts being fed by individuals, whereas the Anglo-Saxon beasts only appear at a clash of armies. Again, this is due to the commemorative function of the skaldic 'praise' poetry. There is an immediately apparent dissimilarity between the usage of the human subject – the Anglo-Saxon *scops* focused on those who become the carrion, while the Scandinavians focused on the providers of the feast, who would usually survive the battle.⁴⁰⁹ Eirik Bloodaxe is praised in stanzas 10–12 of the Egill Skalla-Grímsson's *Hofuðlausn* ('Head's Ransom') with: 'The prince reddened the blade – there was food for the ravens ... Eirik offered corpses to the wolf by the sea'.⁴¹⁰ The eulogistic usage of the beasts is further reflected in the kennings for individual warriors. Jesch comments,

The whole idea [of the Norse Beasts of Battle] can be collapsed into a kenning for a warrior: he becomes the 'feeder' or 'fattener' or 'hunger-diminisher' or 'reddener' or even 'gladdener' of the carrion bird or wolf.⁴¹¹

In the flyting scene from *The First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*, Sinfjotli describes the hero Helgi as 'he who has often given food to the eagles',⁴¹² while in *The Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*, the Valkyrie Sigrun asks, 'Where have you, prince, stirred up war or fed the goslings of Gunn's sisters [the Valkyries' ravens]?' Helgi answers that in Bragalund he 'gave food with sword-points to the eagle's race'.⁴¹³ Tellingly, 'the drink of the raven' is a kenning for blood, demonstrating the enduring association between ravens and bloodshed.⁴¹⁴

Secondly, the Beasts of Battle are portrayed feeding on the slain in Norse depictions, while in Anglo-Saxon poetry (as Griffith points out) there is an 'almost total absence of description of the beasts actually eating the slain'.⁴¹⁵ This can be partly explained by the fact that in many of the Anglo-Saxon passages the beasts arrive in anticipation of the conflict before there is carrion

⁴⁰⁹ Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 254–6.

⁴¹⁰ Örnólfur Thorsson, ed., *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 10–12.

⁴¹¹ Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 256.

⁴¹² Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 119.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 133–4.

⁴¹⁴ Frank, 'Skaldic Tooth', 340.

⁴¹⁵ Griffith, 'Convention and Originality', 186.

to feed upon,⁴¹⁶ their very presence as symbols of bloodshed and violence rendering an actual description of a gory feast unnecessary. The Anglo-Saxon *scops*' restraint in this regard raises the question as to whether their beasts were symbolically more effective than the unashamedly blatant Norse counterparts.

There is a wealth of examples of the Norse beasts actively feeding on the slain, such as this kenning-filled passage in praise of Eirik Bloodaxe (*Hofuðlausn* stanzas 10–12):

Arrows took life. Bloody spears flew. The destroyer of Scots fed the wolf (horse of the giantess). This sister of Nar trod supper for the eagles ... Eagles (battle-cranes) flew over the rows of corpses. The beaks of the ravens (wound-mews) did not lack blood. The wolf tore at wounds while blood (the wave from the spear-point) splashed up towards the beaks of the ravens ... The end of hunger came for the wolf (steed of the giantess).⁴¹⁷

The sheer bloodthirstiness of this depiction points to some significant cultural variances between the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians, immediately evident in what must have been very different tastes and expectations of the audience. This is not to say that there are not some very bloody passages in Old English – the decapitation of Holofernes in *Judith* and Grendel's violent night-attacks in *Beowulf* are described in grisly, lingering detail – yet the Beasts of Battle passages lack this gory edge.⁴¹⁸ Again, this could be ascribed to their associative power which would make a description such as that from *Hofuðlausn* seem superfluous.

The bloodiness of the Norse depictions of the beasts has been linked to the fact that at the end of the first millennium the Scandinavians were closer to their warrior past than the comparatively domesticated Anglo-Saxons. Neckel, as quoted in the introduction to this thesis, wrote in 1919 that the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons 'bears witness to a very profound Christianisation of thought and emotion ... [they had a] partiality to elegiac modes and

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 187.

⁴¹⁷ Skalla-Grímsson praising Eirik Bloodaxe in *Hofuðlausn* stanzas 10–12, in Örnólfur Thorsson, ed., *The Sagas of the Icelanders* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

⁴¹⁸ Only the *scop* of *Genesis A* describes carrion birds actively tearing at dead bodies. Another particularly grisly passage occurs in the description of the closing of the Red Sea on the Egyptian army in *Exodus* 449–55: 'The hillsides [waves] were blood-spattered, the sea spewed blood, tumult was in the waves, the water full of weapons, a slaughter-mist rose up. The Egyptians were turned back, they fled in fear, they recognised sudden disaster, the cowardly ones wanted to reach their homes – their boast grew more mournful'. We have been told that the Beasts of Battle were following *on laðra last* ('in the wake of the hostile ones') yet they are not subsequently described feasting on the decimated Egyptian corpses. See Jorgensen, 'The Trumpet and the Wolf', 329.

splendid, moving imagery with hazy outlines. A battle description in the northern style cannot fit into this world; it would appear too crass ... it is too wild.⁴¹⁹

These 'hazy outlines' are evident in Old-English Beasts of Battle scenes – rather than a sharp, detailed description of a bloody feast, it is enough for the *scop* to describe the howl of a wolf, the dew on an eagle's plumage or the cry of a raven. Also rendered unnecessary are the grisly kennings often assigned to these creatures in Norse verse, such as 'wound-mews'⁴²⁰ and 'corpse-swallower'.⁴²¹

The third apparent difference is that the northern beasts are often described as 'enjoying their food'. Again, this is not entirely absent from the Old English (the beasts are described as 'enjoying the carrion' in *The Battle of Brunanburh*, but are otherwise described as 'greedy' for corpses) yet this detail is more prevalent in Old Norse. In the *Second Lay of Gudrun*, Hogni directs: 'Look for Sigurd there on the roads southwards! There you'll hear the ravens shriek, the eagles shriek; rejoicing in the carrion, the wolves are howling over your husband.'⁴²² In the flyting passage of the *Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*, Helgi retorts: 'For you, Sinfiolti, it would be more fitting to draw up for battle and make the eagles glad, than to be bandying useless words'.⁴²³

The joyful beasts reflect the Scandinavian view that battle was something to be rejoiced in, with the panegyric *Brunanburh* echoing this ethos most closely among the predominantly elegiac Anglo-Saxon poems.⁴²⁴ Jones points out a passage in the Norse *Bjarkamal* which reflects this idea of the glory of dying in battle and celebrating (rather than lamenting) the notion of being consumed by scavengers:

... we shall be the prey of ravens and a morsel for hungry eagles, and the ravening bird shall feast on the banquet of our body. Thus should fall princes dauntless in war, clasping their famous king in a common death.⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁹ Neckel, 'Die Kriegerische Kultur', 28–9.

⁴²⁰ *Hofuðlausn* stanzas 10–12 in Thorsson, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*.

⁴²¹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 45.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴²⁴ See *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (1240) for a Norse account of the battle at Brunanburh. Calder, Daniel and Bjork, Robert, (eds.), *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry, II: The Major Germanic and Celtic Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983) 157–65.

⁴²⁵ Gwyn Jones, *Kings Beasts and Heroes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 158–9.

A similar celebratory attitude to becoming carrion for the Beasts of Battle can be found elsewhere in Norse literature. Lukman notes that in the Orkneyan *Háttalykill* and the Norwegian *Ragnar's Saga*:

Ragnar Loðbrok and his sons considered it their first duty to feed the voracious raven on innumerable battlefields – well aware that one day the unthankful dark companion will feed on their own corpses and scream with joy while sucking their blood and pecking out their eyes.⁴²⁶

Hume writes that the Old Norse compounds *hrafn-fæðir*, *hrafn-gæðir*, *hrafn-gælir*, *hrafn-greddir* and *hrafn-parfr* are all kennings for ‘warrior’, noting that ‘Allowing for varying shades of meaning, they all signify (approximately) “food for ravens”’.⁴²⁷

The imagery of feasting Beasts of Battle is given a sexualised twist in *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana onnor* (HHII) when Sigrun describes her joy at entering the burial mound for a final night with Helgi’s ‘slaughter-dew’ soaked ghost. The Valkyrie is as glad as ‘the greedy hawks ... when they know of slaughter / steaming food’.⁴²⁸

Prophetic nature of the Norse beasts

As discussed above, a significant difference that becomes apparent when comparing the two traditions is the lack of subtlety in the depictions of the Scandinavian beasts. Vague associations that must be teased out when examining the Anglo-Saxon passages are loudly proclaimed by the Norse poets. One such association is the prophetic nature of the beasts, as examined in chapter one. While the Anglo-Saxon beasts create an expectation of slaughter simply by appearing before a battle, the Norse prophetic passages can be much more obvious and are often highlighted in advance by the poets. In *Fragment of a poem about Sigurd*, a raven actually calls out a prophecy to the warriors: ‘... a raven called out loudly from a tree: “Atli will redden his blades in your blood, your oaths will destroy you, you warlike men”’.⁴²⁹ Hnikar’s list of good omens before battle in the *Lay of Regin* include the following:

There are many good omens if men knew them, while swords are swinging; a trusty omen for the warrior, I believe, is the company of the dark raven.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶ Lukman, ‘The Raven Banner’, 134.

⁴²⁷ Hume, ‘The Function of the “Hrefn Blaca”’, 61.

⁴²⁸ See p.71 for the full passage.

⁴²⁹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 174.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 155.

... That is [another] omen, if you hear a wolf howling under ash-branches, good luck will be ordained for you against the warriors if you catch sight of them first.⁴³¹

Rather than inspiring a sense of foreboding or elegy, the Norse beasts were at times viewed with delight by the warriors. A circling eagle or prowling wolf could augur either victory or defeat, depending on the circumstances in which they appear. The Anglo-Saxon beasts tended to take a neutral role, signalling only that there will be (or has been) bloodshed, rather than prophesying that one army is likely to triumph over the other. Niles notes that the Anglo-Saxons tended to employ the motif with an 'even-handed horror', with the exception of *The Battle of Brunanburh*.⁴³²

This association with victory stems from the Scandinavian beasts' skaldic function – their connection with a particular hero signals that he will 'gladden' or 'fatten' them with one or more victories in battle. In *The First Poem of Helgi Hundinsbani*, ravens predict that the one-day-old Helgi will grow into a wolf-feeding hero. Like the infant Hercules strangling the snakes in his crib, the son of Sigmund is identified by the beasts as a warrior-hero with a violent future.

It was a long time ago that the eagles shrieked, the sacred waters poured down from Himinfell; then Helgi, the man of great spirit, was born to Borghild in Bralund.⁴³³

... one raven said to another – he sat on a high tree, they were hoping for food: 'I know something. The son of Sigmund stands in his byrnie, one day old; now dawn has come; sharp his eyes like a fighter; he's the friend of wolves, we should be cheerful.'⁴³⁴

Parallels can be seen between the above passage and the Beasts of Battle episode in *Beowulf* 3024b–7b.⁴³⁵ Both mention all three beasts (eagle, raven and wolf), and both feature a talkative raven who shares its delight at the prospect of carrion with its companion, the wolf.⁴³⁶

⁴³¹ Ibid., 155.

⁴³² Niles, 'Skaldic Technique in Brunanburh', 356–66.

⁴³³ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 115.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁴³⁵ Frank, 'Skaldic Tooth', 349.

⁴³⁶ Providing further evidence of a northern connection, *Beowulf's* Grendel is analogous to undead creatures in the Old Norse sagas [thought to be centuries older than *Beowulf*], such as 'the *draugr* called Ögmundr in *Örvar-Odds Saga*, who is invulnerable to iron weapons and who lives beneath a waterfall with his mother, a troll-woman or *gýgr*'. The fight between the monster Glámr and the hero in *Grettis Saga* is also strikingly similar to the wrestling match between Beowulf and Grendel. Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', 376. See also 'Grettir and Grendel Again' in Orchard, Andy. *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 140–68.

Jesch notes that the beasts anticipate victory for the hero in Einarr Sklaglamm's *Vellekla* ('Shortage of Gold'): 'the one who offered to hold a battle saw strong corpse-vultures [eagles/ravens]'.⁴³⁷ The purpose of the scavengers' appearance 'is not to evoke an atmosphere of doom for men and exultation for the birds, but to anticipate the warrior's glorious, and foreordained, victory in an image of well-fed ravens (or eagles)'.⁴³⁸

Companions of Odin

As examined in chapter three, a connection between the Anglo-Saxon Beasts of Battle and the Christian tradition can be postulated, but the link between the Old Norse beasts and the Scandinavian gods (Odin in particular)⁴³⁹ was much more tangible. Snorri's *Prose Edda* (and dozens of artistic renderings) describe Odin's two ravens Huginn and Muninn ('Thought' and 'Memory') who bring news to him from all over the world.⁴⁴⁰ Having birds of slaughter act as his messengers, rather than more benign creatures, suggests that the information gathered by the ravens often concerned bloodshed, war and raven-feeding warrior heroes. The ravens' role as gatherers of information and subsequent holders of foreknowledge can be linked to their prophetic abilities, also present in the Anglo-Saxon equivalent – Old Norse ravens *know* when slaughter is imminent and, unlike their southern cousins, would sometimes predict the outcome of an impending conflict.⁴⁴¹ For the Anglo-Saxons, the link between ravens and their enemies' terrifying one-eyed god would carry associations of pagan magic and the worship of Germanic deities long-forbidden in post-conversion England.⁴⁴² Scandinavian warriors would bring representations of the raven into battle on war-standards or banners, claiming this particular Beast of Battle as their own and further enhancing the terror of their presence with associations of paganism.

⁴³⁷ Lee Hollander, trans., *The Skalds: A Selection of Their Poems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), verse 30.

⁴³⁸ Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 258.

⁴³⁹ The etymology of Woden is centred around his prophetic nature: Anglo-Saxon *Wōd* = prophecy; while Latin *vat-es* = prophet.

⁴⁴⁰ Jesse Byock, trans., *The Prose Edda* (London: Penguin, 2006), verse 1220–40. Graeme Gibson writes 'Much of Odin's power is attributed to his "raven knowledge", as second sight is called in parts of Scotland. Perhaps it is this kind of belief that survives in the saying, "A little bird told me". From *The Bedside Book of Birds*, 113.

⁴⁴¹ Hume writes that 'even after overt connection to Odin was lost, the ravens continued to be looked on as augurs, particularly concerning battle or death ... the early English church had to forbid such augury, so frequently did the Anglo-Saxons practise it even after conversion'. From 'Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 61.

⁴⁴² Honegger cautions that the connection with Odin's companions may have disappeared in Anglo-Saxon England by the time the heroic poems were written down. The Norse tradition, however, 'preserved this connection between animals and the Germanic gods until a much later date.' From 'Form and Function', 290.

Ryan writes that in addition to their role as bringers of intelligence, Odin's ravens and his two wolves (Freki and Geri) 'seem to have been omen carriers, or even familiar spirits,'⁴⁴³ a further link with paganism and witchcraft. Significantly, the names of both Odin's wolves can be roughly translated as 'greedy' or 'ravenous'.⁴⁴⁴

Odin was known to 'feed' his wolves,⁴⁴⁵ a practice belonging to the skaldic praise-poem tradition of heroes providing corpses through slaughter for the Beasts of Battle. Jesch points out that specifically-named eagles, ravens and wolves (such as Huginn, Muninn, Geri and Freki) are present in the mythological poems of the *Edda*, rather than the three generic and unnamed Beasts of Battle.⁴⁴⁶ The appellations of Odin's two ravens and two wolves are thus often used as proper-noun kennings for the beasts, along with other creatures from Eddic mythology such as 'the troll-woman's mount'.⁴⁴⁷ The employment of the kennings 'Huginn' or 'Muninn' makes the corpse-birds easier to identify as ravens – many of the vaguely-described birds in these passages are hard to classify as a particular species and are often interchangeable.⁴⁴⁸ Jesch writes that a proper noun (such as Freki or Geri) can be taken by readers as a common noun meaning 'wolf' and often does not actually refer specifically to the mythologised companions of Odin. Snorri writes in *Skáldskaparmál* chapter 75: 'These are names of the raven: "Crow, Huginn, Muninn, Bold of Mood, Yearly Flier, Year-Teller, Flesh-Boder."' ⁴⁴⁹

The eagle, also associated with Odin,⁴⁵⁰ can be found in Eddic mythology in a descriptive passage redolent of the language employed to describe the Beasts of Battle. In verse 37 of *Vafþrúðnismál*, an eagle (actually a giant in disguise named *Hræsvelgr*, or 'Corpse-swallower') is specifically named as responsible for the wind.⁴⁵¹ Ryan points out two other usages of the eagle within the Beasts of Battle tradition: [in the *Edda*] 'the witch rides upon the wolf, using eagles as reins. Even the glamorised Brynhild came from battle, riding upon an eagle.'⁴⁵²

⁴⁴³ Ryan, 'Othin in England', 460.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁴⁴⁵ See 'Grimnir's Sayings' verse 19: 'Geri and Freki, tamed to war, he satiates,' from Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 54.

⁴⁴⁶ Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 261.

⁴⁴⁷ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 121.

⁴⁴⁸ Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 256.

⁴⁴⁹ Snorri, *Skáldskaparmál* chapter 75,

<http://www.germanicmythology.com/ProseEdda/BRODEURSkaldskaparmal.html> (accessed 27/4/2013).

⁴⁵⁰ See Ryan, 'Othin in England', 472.

⁴⁵¹ Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 263.

⁴⁵² Ryan, 'Othin in England', 478(n).

Norse elements in *Exodus* 162a–8b

The Anglo-Saxon passage containing the strongest hint of a link between the Old Norse and Old English Beasts of Battle can be found in *Exodus* 162a–8b:

<i>Hreopon herefugolas hilde grædige,</i>	The war-birds screamed, greedy for battle,
<i>Deawigfeðere ofer drihtneum</i>	dewy-feathered above the troops,
<i>wonn wælceasega. Wulfas sungon</i>	the dark chooser of the slain. Wolves sang
<i>atol æfenleoð ætes on wenan,</i>	a horrid evening-song in anticipation of the feast;
<i>carleasan deor, cwyl drof beodan</i>	brazen beasts, bold at nightfall, they awaited
<i>on laðra last leodmægnes fyl.</i>	in the wake of the hostile ones the fall of the mighty host.
<i>Hreopon mearcweardas middum nihtum.</i>	The border-guardians screamed in the middle of
	the nights.

Through his employment of unusual language and treatment of the Beasts of Battle, the *Exodus* scop created a passage with a number of tantalising clues to a possible connection (or deliberate association) with the Old Norse tradition. Scholars including Ryan, Tolkien, Jesch and Frank⁴⁵³ have drawn inferences from a number of elements in this passage to support this theory, while others, such as Meaney and Hall,⁴⁵⁴ disagree with the supposition that any such connection was likely to exist.

The passage is, as Frank writes, ‘extraordinarily responsive to a “skaldic” reading’.⁴⁵⁵ Frank theorises that the Beasts of Battle is one of many examples of the Anglo-Saxon fascination for Scandinavian culture, and the use of the three beasts might simply have been a ‘northern decoration’ employed by the scop to appease this predilection in his audience.⁴⁵⁶

The compounds from *Exodus* 162a–8b that have garnered particular interest are *cwyl drof*, *wælceasega* and *drihtneum*. Frank explores the possibility that the *Exodus* scop chose such words to create a deliberate association with Old Norse literature for the Anglo-Saxon audience, who may have had a taste for the rich and fascinating mythology of their northern neighbours.

⁴⁵³ Ryan, ‘Othin in England’; Joan Turville-Petre, ed., *The Old English ‘Exodus’: Text, Translation and Commentary* by J. R. R. Tolkien, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981): 23; Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’; Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’.

⁴⁵⁴ Meaney, ‘Woden in England’; Hall, ‘Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle’, 113.

⁴⁵⁵ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 339.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

Through these ... compounds, the screaming and yelping beasts of *Exodus* are given what, to my ears at least, sounds like a northern accent, as if the poet wanted to supply his audience's craving for what they had always had, to indulge their skaldic tooth.⁴⁵⁷

Frank's theory might be applied across contemporary and later Beasts of Battle passages: if the *scop* employed the beasts in *Exodus* to create a deliberate association with Scandinavian mythology, the motivation for other *scops*' inclusion of the beasts in similar known passages may become clearer. *Exodus*, however, is the only Anglo-Saxon Beasts of Battle passage to contain such provocatively Scandinavian vocabulary.

Cwyldrof

Cwyldrof is translated above as 'bold at nightfall', in agreement with Tolkien's translation 'bold at the dying of day'. Hall notes that the 'wolves sing *atoll æfenleoð*, a "horrid evening-song" – this makes "bold as nightfall" especially appropriate.'⁴⁵⁸ Hall also notes that *cwyldrof* has been taken to mean 'strong in killing', 'devoted to slaughter' or the like,⁴⁵⁹ but as pointed out by Farrell, wolves are not, both in the natural world and other Beasts of Battle passages, attackers or killers of humans – they are always scavengers.⁴⁶⁰ *The Battle of Maldon*, however, could be seen as an exception to this rule, if one accepts the substitution of Vikings for wolves and their subsequent shift from scavengers to active attackers. Hall writes that translations such as 'strong in killing' or 'devoted to slaughter' would be better expressed as 'bold at death', in the sense that the wolf is bold at 'wolfing down flesh at a scene of death' rather than bold at killing.⁴⁶¹ Farrell translates *cwyldrof* as 'strong in pestilence', justifying this with the idea of the 'spiritual foulness' of the attacking Egyptian army which attracts the carrion beasts.⁴⁶²

The possibility of a specifically Norse connection with *cwyldrof* is explored by Tolkien, who notes the similarity between *cwyld* and the Old Norse *kveld* ('evening') and suggests *cwyldrof* 'seems to be an echo of a dark pagan word which consorts well with *drihtneum* and *wælceasega*.'⁴⁶³ Frank also points to the *Exodus scop*'s creation of a menacing atmosphere through his introduction of night and darkness, raising associations with the mythological denizens of the pagan north:

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁴⁵⁸ Hall, 'Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle', 113. Bradley and Hall have interpreted *æfenleoð* as a Christian term – 'vespers' or 'evensong'. This is at odds, however, with the predominately pagan feel of the Beasts of Battle passages.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁶⁰ Robert Farrell, 'Eight Notes on Old English *Exodus*,' *NM* 67, (1966): 373.

⁴⁶¹ Hall, 'Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle', 114.

⁴⁶² Farrell, 'Eight Notes', 373. Hall disagrees with this reading.

⁴⁶³ Quoted in Turville-Petre, *The Old English 'Exodus'*, 23.

Cwyldrof is a reminder that wolves in skaldic kennings tend to be characterised not as corpse-pickers but as the mounts of giantesses, troll-wives, or witches, steeds of the *kveldriða* ‘one who rides in the evening’; the *Exodus* poet’s *cwyld*, apparently cognate with ON *kveld*, places the wolf in this ominous twilight world.⁴⁶⁴

Frank’s reading of the passage introduces other possible associations for the original audience, suggesting the term embraces a double meaning, specifically ‘those who in the evening inflict savage death’.⁴⁶⁵ Frank also notes that *Kveldúlf* (Evening-wolf) occurs as a name in Old Norse,⁴⁶⁶ one of many Scandinavian compound names containing the word ‘wolf’ or ‘raven’. Jesch lists other significant names from Old High German: Hildulf (‘Battle wolf’), Randulf (‘Shield wolf’), Ortolf (‘Spear wolf’) and Wolfram (‘Wolf-raven’).⁴⁶⁷ Another important continental description of Germanic appellations highlighted by Jesch is from the 6th-century anonymous *Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum*: ‘[Barbarians are known to] name their sons in accord with the devastation of wild beasts and birds of prey, and it is a source of pride to rave for blood.’⁴⁶⁸

Wælceasega

Wælceasega, translated above as ‘chooser of the slain’, is perhaps the most intriguingly Scandinavian term in this passage. At first glance, it would appear that the *scop* is simply referring to the raven, which hovers over the dead of the battlefield and ‘chooses’ the carrion upon which it will feast. An Old Norse reading of the passage, however, brings to light the similarity between *wælceasega* (possibly an analogous formation of the Old English *wælcyrige*)⁴⁶⁹ and the Old Norse *valkyrja*, or Valkyrie. Hall notes that several scholars regard *wælceasega* to be ‘an explicit or implicit reference to a Valkyrie’.⁴⁷⁰ These war-goddesses, also described as ‘handmaidens of Odin’⁴⁷¹ would hover over the field of battle and quite literally ‘choose the slain’ to escort to Valhalla. The Valkyries’ role could be interpreted in two ways: firstly, that they choose the already-dead, the greatest of the slain warriors, whom they deem worthy for Valhalla, and secondly, that they choose which warriors are to die and take them to their reward. Lukman discusses this ‘hand-picking’ role of the Valkyries: ‘[Odin’s] maidens ...

⁴⁶⁴ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 350.

⁴⁶⁵ Hall, ‘Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle’, 112.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁶⁷ Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 271.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 275. Jones writes, ‘We may note too the frequency with which men of mould, as well as heroes, were named from the animal world: Wolf, Bear, Boar, Horse, Deer, Hound, Serpent, Bull and Eagle, and their rich and numerous derivatives in the Celtic and Germanic tongues.’ From *Kings, Beasts and Heroes*, 87(n).

⁴⁶⁹ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 350.

⁴⁷⁰ Hall, ‘Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle’, 115.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

select the warriors to fall in the battle.⁴⁷² In terms of the function of the Beasts of Battle, the first interpretation of the Valkyrie's role seems closer to that of the raven (and the eagle), which never singles out an individual warrior to be slain in the surviving Anglo-Saxon poetry.⁴⁷³

The phrase 'handmaidens of Odin' ties the Valkyries in another way to the Beasts of Battle – in acting as servants of Odin and doing his bidding, they mirror the role played by his two ravens, Huginn and Muninn.

If the *Exodus scop* has indeed intended the audience to associate the raven with the Valkyrie in this passage, there is a discernible touch of irreverence for the northern deities in thus linking them with the carrion-tearing birds. Frank comments, 'the Old English poet here reduces the Norse battlefield goddesses to a swarm of greedy, noisy birds, a secularisation or euhemerisation of Norse story'.⁴⁷⁴ Ryan appears to view the transformation from the other perspective; that is, rather than Valkyries being degraded to ravens, he sees the symbolism of the ravens being made more meaningful and terrible by their implied transfiguration into war-goddesses. He writes, 'we can here see the terrible carrion birds of battle being slowly transformed into female followers and worshippers of Woden'.⁴⁷⁵

Four lines before the passage under examination (158b), the *scop* employs the term *guð hwearfode*, variously interpreted as 'the battle rolled on', 'the battle drew nigh' or even 'the battle revolved'. This implies an advancing or seething mass of armed soldiers.⁴⁷⁶ Ryan, who translates this phrase as 'war turned again and again', notes that this sort of statement is uncommon in Old English verse. He suggests that the *scop* is referring to the Old Norse *guthr* or *guth*, the name of a particular Valkyrie. Ryan writes, 'it is possible that such a personified notion existed in Old English, where it might have the sense of a bird-like shadow, a presence, which, like the raven, is wheeling overhead'.⁴⁷⁷ The term *waelceasega* a mere four lines later strengthens this theory and would appear to refer to the same presence, if Ryan's interpretation of *guð* is to be accepted. Essentially, the role of the raven and the Valkyrie *guthr* were the same

⁴⁷² Lukman, 'The Raven Banner', 134.

⁴⁷³ Folklore has it that crows in the Faeroe Islands were believed to have a meeting once a year wherein they decided which humans were going to die (Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 278), while in the Norse *Landnamabok* part 2 chapter 33, a raven's croaking outside a house 'presages violent death' (Hume, 'Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 61). Both of these anecdotes appear to corroborate the raven's role as 'chooser of the slain'.

⁴⁷⁴ Frank, 'Skaldic Tooth', 350.

⁴⁷⁵ Ryan, 'Othin in England', 472.

⁴⁷⁶ Hall, 'Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle', 116.

⁴⁷⁷ Ryan, 'Othin in England', 469.

– they wheel in the sky, appearing either before battle as an omen of doom or during/after the conflict to choose the slain. The use of the proper noun *guð* as a personified kenning for ravens is therefore appropriate and strongly associative in this context.

Hall lists the occurrences of the variously-spelled Old English *wælcyrige* as glosses for a number of mythological figures in Latin texts, all of whom decide on the fate of warriors in some way:

[*Wælcyrige* occurred as a gloss for the] Latin goddess of war (Bellona), to the furies (Euryinis, Tisiphona, Allecto), to a gorgon, and, possibly, to the fates; in late OE the word evidently refers to witches ... OE glossators drew upon Germanic tradition and the *wælcyrigan* were war-goddesses who (among other things) decided the fate of warriors.⁴⁷⁸

Bellona, the furies and the fates all had in common the ability to pronounce the doom of men and ‘choose the slain’ – it is notable that the Old English glossators used *wælcyrige* as the closest cultural equivalent to these classical figures.⁴⁷⁹ The question raised by such a close analysis of word-choice is whether or not the *scops* (and indeed the audience) were aware of the etymology of these words. It is entirely possible that they did, judging by some of the riddles in the *Exeter Book* in which one must know the etymology in order to appreciate the punning.

Drihtneum

Drihtneum (‘troop-corpses’) has been linked to the Old Norse by Tolkien, Hall and Frank. The latter writes that ‘*dryhtneas* recalls the frequent use in skaldic raven kennings of the definer *nar* “corpse”, the Old Norse cognate of the much rarer Old English *ne* (e.g., *na-gagl* “corpse-crow”, *na-haukr* “corpse-hawk”, *na-skari* “corpse-bird”, *nas gammr* “vulture of the slain”, *nas nagr* “bird of the slain”)’.⁴⁸⁰ Through this use of cognates, whether intentionally Scandinavian or otherwise, the *Exodus scop* skilfully associates the troop-corpses with the corpse-crow, inextricably binding the body on the slaughterfield with the carrion-eater hovering above.

Taken together, the terms *cwyldrof*, *wælceasega*, *guð hwearfode* and *dryhtneas* would appear to form a strong associative link with Scandinavian literature. The antiquity of this poem

⁴⁷⁸ Hall, ‘Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle’, 116. Ryan (‘Othin in England’, 474) also discusses classical equivalents and notes that the word ‘has the notion of witch or sorceress, the pairing *Wælcyrigan* and *wiccan* being common’.

⁴⁷⁹ Meaney writes that ‘some similarity was felt by the early English between the carrion bird and a kind of semi-divine, wholly terrifying supernatural woman’. (‘Woden in England’, 112.)

⁴⁸⁰ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 350.

(composed as early as 700) suggests that the *scop* and his audience were situated comparatively close to their pagan past; a past that involved centuries-long worship of Odin. The description of the beasts is somehow rawer and more striking than its later counterparts, some of which came to develop a somewhat clichéd and conventionalised feel. Ryan writes of the *Exodus* Beasts of Battle passage:

It is in [an] archaic portion of the poem, as the vocabulary and the metre indicate. We might say of the style that it is new and unhackneyed, that the language has the freshness of a time when it was not a mere collection of traditional phrases and useful half-lines.⁴⁸¹

A point to remember when unearthing Old Norse associations in Anglo-Saxon poetry is that at the time many of these poems were written down, the whole of central and north England was Scandinavian, existing under the *Dena lagu* ('Danelaw'). One would not have to have gone far to encounter the culture and poetry of the north, which means the context of passages such as *Exodus* 162a–8b was more immediate than modern readers might suppose, with many Anglo-Saxons being familiar with (and potentially influenced by) Old Norse poetry and mythology.

***Exodus* and the cult of Odin**

The cult of Odin, with its fascinating cast of deities and intricate narratives, must have 'long had a grip on the imaginations of the Angles and Saxons ... [this] may be seen from the way in which the beliefs and customs associated with it continue through the centuries.'⁴⁸² One such custom is the use of ravens as a symbol of sacrifice to Odin, as they were known for 'receiving and rejoicing over sacrificial victims,'⁴⁸³ whether on the gallows or the battlefield. In this light, the presence of the hovering raven-Valkyrie adds the sinister association of human sacrifice to the poem. Ryan adds that:

From the Old Norse sources, and as early as Tacitus, we are told that Woden was worshipped by sacrifices, often of the whole of the opposing army. There is some slight evidence that the first settlers in Britain practised the rite of total immolation of an enemy host. Certain entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in early years and for the late Danish invasions give this impression; for example the entry for 491: *This year Ælla and Cissa laid*

⁴⁸¹ Ryan, 'Othin in England', 468.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 478. This reflects the intermingling of Anglo-Saxon and Norse cultures under the Danelaw.

⁴⁸³ Hilda Ellis-Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 98. Hume ('Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 61) writes that 'the two ravens which appear in *The Saga of King Olaf Tryggvason* (chapter 71) as Jarl Hakon sacrifices to Odin are taken by Hakon as a sign that Odin has accepted the sacrifice and will grant him victory'.

*siege to Pevensey and slaughtered everyone living there. Not one single Briton was allowed to remain alive.*⁴⁸⁴

According to Meaney, King Ongentheow may have also intended to sacrifice the entire enemy host to Odin in *Beowulf* 2939–41 when he threatens the Geats with ‘hanging as well as with the sword’ in the morning.⁴⁸⁵

The hovering presence above the *Exodus* slaughterfield therefore brings with it associations not only of the heathen gods but of the terrifying rites of Odin worship. The *hræfn* may have raised, for the *scop*’s audience, the spectre of a Pevensey-type massacre and the sacrifice of the entire host to the pagan god. Ryan writes that the raven-Valkyrie is a ‘rather blurred’ echo of the fading cult of Odin, but it retained its sinister associations as it was passed down in the folk-memory and finally written down by the *Exodus* scribe. ‘The terrors of the heathen gods’, Ryan writes, ‘had still a strong hold of the popular imagination ... here we may feel that the detested cult of Woden ... is not far away.’⁴⁸⁶

It is possible that, apart from a superficial similarity in vocabulary, the *Exodus scop* intended no such connection with Norse culture, its parallel Beasts of Battle tradition and the cult of Odin. Hall writes that it is ‘unwarranted to assume that the theme owes its origin to Woden-worship’,⁴⁸⁷ pointing out the lack of explicit connections to the pagan deities across the whole body of Anglo-Saxon writings: ‘Nowhere in the literature is a wolf or raven connected with Woden or any other deity.’⁴⁸⁸ The *Exodus scop*’s use of *wælceasega* does resonate with the Valkyrie tradition, but Hall writes that contextually the Valkyrie and the cult of Odin have no place here. He argues that ‘chooser of the slain’ should be taken at face value: ‘the only slaughter-choosing the raven is likely to concern itself with is selecting which morsels of carrion to devour’.⁴⁸⁹ The passage contains no references to Odin or to his Valkyries, and the *scop* makes no attempt to prepare the audience for the sudden insertion of Norse mythological figures in the narrative. Hall, however, does not take into account the possibility of an implicit reference to *guth* being abroad (line 158b), as discussed above.

Meaney also disagrees with Ryan’s 1963 article, citing the lack of proof of a Norse connection. She points out that Odin-worship in England gave way to Christianity between 600–700, and although it was re-imported by the invading Vikings from the middle of the 10th century until

⁴⁸⁴ Ryan, ‘Othin in England’, 474.

⁴⁸⁵ Meaney, ‘Woden in England’, 111.

⁴⁸⁶ Ryan, ‘Othin in England’, 477.

⁴⁸⁷ Hall, ‘Exodus 166b, CWYLDROF; 162–67, The Beasts of Battle’, 114.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

the conversion of Knut, ‘it is doubtful if his worship could ever have gained a real foothold in England.’⁴⁹⁰ In response to Ryan’s assertion that Odin-worship ‘long had a grip on the imagination of the Anglo-Saxons’,⁴⁹¹ Meaney warns, ‘... it would be unwise to imagine anything more than attenuated half-memories of paganism, however much accompanied by strong superstitions, persisting after the late-8th century.’⁴⁹² Yet a half-memory is a memory nonetheless: the *Exodus* Beasts of Battle passage may very well have stirred these half-memories in its audience and raised a host of sinister associations with their pagan past and its fascinating mythology as contained in the *Edda*.

Wolves as symbols of Nordic doomsday

According to *Voluspa*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Lokasenna*,⁴⁹³ Odin will be swallowed by the giant wolf Fenrir at the onset of *Ragnarok*, or the end of the world.⁴⁹⁴ Having a deity perish in this manner could suggest that the Old Norse poets regarded such a death as glorious rather than ignominious, much as Christ’s brutal crucifixion became a symbol of religious strength and glory rather than humiliation or defeat. The king of the Æsir can be reduced to carrion yet retain his dignity, buoyed up by a literary tradition of glory in death and no shame in becoming food for the wolves after battle. As stated above (p.125) in the excerpt from *Bjarkamal*, ‘Thus should fall princes dauntless in war’.⁴⁹⁵

Fenrir’s position at the centre of *Ragnarok* adds an eschatological element to the body of associations surrounding the Scandinavian wolf: this beast can symbolise not only death for individual warriors; it can mean the end of all things. The closest Anglo-Saxon equivalent of ‘doomsday’ Beasts of Battle occurs in *Beowulf* 3024a–7b, where the exultant wolf, raven and eagle are evoked to herald the end of a nation.

Berserkirs and the Beasts of Battle

The Scandinavian raiders who swept onto British shores carried with them paraphernalia that was terrifyingly meaningful for the Anglo-Saxons: their Beasts of Battle were lifted from the

⁴⁹⁰ Meaney, ‘Woden in England’, 105. Meaney writes that during the Vendel Period it was ‘very likely’ that Sweden and England shared the idea of a connection between the war god and the two birds of prey, but ‘there is nothing to show that the connection would have persisted in the minds of the English once they had been Christian for more than two or three generations’, (Ibid., 112).

⁴⁹¹ Ryan, ‘Othin in England’, 478.

⁴⁹² Meaney, ‘Woden in England’, 109.

⁴⁹³ Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 263.

⁴⁹⁴ It is possible that Odin (or ‘Woden’, cognate with the Latin *vat-es* or ‘prophet’) dies at this point because he is now redundant – at the end of the world there is no more future to see.

⁴⁹⁵ Jones, *Kings, Beasts and Heroes*, 158–9.

poetry and carried into battle on their garments and banners. *Berserkirs* ('bear-shirts') would charge into combat wearing bear- or wolf-skins, while the presence of the raven banner in battle was well-documented by the poets of both nations. The totemic use of the wolf and raven meant that in a sense the Norse warriors *became* these creatures – in his *History of the Danes*, Saxo Grammaticus describes the *berserkirs*' practice of drinking the blood of a wolf or bear to gain its strength before battle:

Straight away bring your throat to its steaming blood and devour the feast of its body with ravenous jaws. Then new force will enter your frame, an unlooked-for vigour will come to your muscles, accumulation of solid strength soak through every sinew.⁴⁹⁶

To the Anglo-Saxons it would seem that they were being charged by the Beasts of Battle themselves, symbols of impending slaughter and doom in human form.⁴⁹⁷ Whether or not the *berserkirs* believed that wearing a wolf's skin or drinking its blood would impart the attributes of that creature (much like gaining strength through the wearing of boar-tusks or other boar-imagery in Germanic warrior culture), the meaning would not be lost on the enemy – thus the description of the Maldon Vikings as *wælwulfas* (slaughter-wolves).

Viking-age literature suggests that the Scandinavians themselves associated their *berserkir* warriors with wolves (and bears) and consciously encouraged their enemies to make this association to endow their fighters with the terror wrought by these beasts. Snorri states in *Ynglingasaga* that the *berserkirs* 'acted like mad dogs and wolves'.⁴⁹⁸ They are referred to as 'wolf-skins' or 'wolf-coats' (*ulfhedinn*) in *Grettirs Saga*,⁴⁹⁹ *King Harald's Saga*, *Hrafnsmál* and *Vatnsdæla Saga*.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁶ Peter Fisher, trans., *The History of the Danes* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), 25. James Frazer provides a similar account: 'In Norse legend, Ingiald, song of King Aunund, was timid in his youth, but after eating the heart of a wolf he became very bold'. See *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1922).

⁴⁹⁷ Homer's *Iliad* contains the following description of the Myrmidons as wolves: 'Prince Achilles, ranging his ranks of Myrmidons, arrayed them along the shelters, all in armour. Hungry as wolves that rend and bolt raw flesh, hearts filled with battle-frenzy that never dies – off on the cliffs, ripping apart some big-antlered stag, they gorge on the kill till all their jaws drip red with blood, then down in a pack they lope to a pooling, dark spring, their lean sharp tongues lapping the water's surface, belching bloody meat, but the fury, never shaken, builds inside their chests though their glutton bellies burst.' Fagles, trans., *The Iliad*, book 16, lines 185–94.

⁴⁹⁸ Lee Hollander, trans., *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 10.

⁴⁹⁹ Denton Fox and Hermann Palsson, trans. *Grettir's Saga* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 3.

⁵⁰⁰ Hilda Ellis-Davidson, 'Shape-Changing in the Old Norse Sagas', in Joshua Porter and William Russell, eds., *Animals in Folklore* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), 132–3.

Berserkirs may have played a significant part in the origins and dissemination of werewolf mythology in northern Europe – there is certainly an aspect of shape-shifting inherent in the donning of animal garb and mannerisms. *Völsunga Saga* records the theft of two wolf-skins belonging to ‘spell-bound skin-changers’ by Sigmundr and Sinfjolti, in order to ‘change into wolves themselves so that they might go berserking in the woods’.⁵⁰¹ *Egils saga Skallagrímsonar* describes the old *berserkir* Ulfr becoming wolf-like every evening:

But every day, as it drew towards evening, he would grow so ill-tempered that no-one could speak to him, and it wasn’t long before he would go to bed. There was talk about his being a shape-changer, and people called him *Kveld-Ulfr* [‘evening wolf’].⁵⁰²

Possible associations between the Beasts of Battle wolves and lycanthropy are further explored in chapter five. The name *Kveld-Ulfr* is also discussed above (see p.132) in relation to the term *cwyldrof*, referring to the ‘bold at nightfall’ wolf in *Exodus* 166b.

Along with the horror of a shape-shifting enemy, an Anglo-Saxon defender watching a *berserkir* gang bearing down upon his position may very well have been reminded, through the *berserkirs*’ wolf-garb and wolf-mannerisms, of the many negative associations attendant upon the wolf. The presence of this Beast of Battle guaranteed bloodshed, slaughter, defeat and grisly scavenging – yet the *berserkirs*, in taking on the role of this beast themselves, moved the wolf from its function as an observer on the fringes of battle to that of an active combatant, an army of Beasts of Battle enthusiastically creating the very carrion they normally wait for, albeit impatiently.

The Vikings of *The Battle of Maldon* could be characterised as such – animalised warriors who complete the Beasts of Battle triad, otherwise lacking a wolf in this particular poem. Other instances of a Beast of Battle actively participating in a slaughter (as distinct from eating carrion) are absent in Old English and Norse literature, but can be found in the Welsh poem *Rhonabwy’s Dream*, in which Owein commands his ravens to attack and slaughter King Arthur’s troops (see pp.146–8).

The raven banner

Another example of a Beast of Battle lifted from the poetry and brought onto the battlefield was the symbol of the raven banner. A heraldic device, the triangular flag was carried into battle as a personal emblem of Viking leaders. It is specifically noted in the entry for the year

⁵⁰¹ Ronald Finch, ed., *The Saga of the Volsungs* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), 10–11.

⁵⁰² Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, ed., *Egil’s Saga* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1977), 21.

878 in *The Peterborough Chronicle* – the capture of the raven banner was seemingly thought to be an important inclusion, as it is the only detail (apart from the number of casualties) recorded about the battle in Wessex.

ANNO dcccclxxviii ... 7 þes ilcan wintra wæs iweres broðor 7 healfdenes on westsexum on defenanscire. 7 hine mon þær sloh. 7 dccc manna mid him, 7 xl manna his heres, 7 þar wæs se guðfana genumen þe hi ræfen heton.

878 ... And in that same winter a brother of Ivar and Halfdene was in Wessex in Devonshire, and there he was slain, and with him eight hundred and forty men of his army. And there the banner was captured which is called 'Raven'.

Like the shape-shifting wolf-skins of the *berserkirs*, the raven *guðfani* ('war-flag') was thought to have magical properties – perhaps, as Bodvarsdottir suggests, due to the association of the raven sigil with pagan magic and Odin's raven companions, Huginn and Muninn.

... one can conjecture that the Danes regarded the raven symbol as signifying that the god of war, Óðinn, was on their side, and that the Anglo-Saxons regarded the raven banners of the Danes as mighty power symbols since they stress the magical qualities of the banners. The Anglo-Saxons probably thought that the banners were imbued with the evil powers of pagan idols, since the Anglo-Saxons were aware of the significance of Óðinn and his ravens in Norse mythology.⁵⁰³

The Annals of St Neot gives a similar account of the 878 battle, but dwells on the origins and magical powers of the flag.⁵⁰⁴ Asser's *Vita Alfredi Regis* gives an almost identical account. Specifically, the raven would flap its wings if there was to be victory, and hang motionless if the Viking army was to be defeated:

It is said that three sisters of Hingwar and Habba, the daughters of Ragnar Loðbrókr, had woven that banner and gotten it ready during one single midday's time. Further it is said that if they [the Vikings] were going to win a battle in which they followed that *signum*, there was to be seen, in the center of the *signum*, a raven, gaily flapping its wings. But if they were going to be defeated, the raven dropped motionless. And this always proved true.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ Bodvarsdottir, 'The function of the beasts of battle', 112.

⁵⁰⁴ David Dumville and Simon Keynes, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Vol. 17: The Annals of St Neots with Vita Prima Sancti Neoti* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 71–81.

⁵⁰⁵ Lukman, 'The Raven Banner', 141.

Whether the raven sigil was truly coming to life or simply appearing to ‘flap’ in the wind, the story of its magical ability to predict victory or defeat is corroborated in the *Encomium Emmæ Reginæ* (also known as the *Gesta Cnutonis Regis*), with the added detail that the banner appeared blank until it was carried into battle, at which time the raven sigil would materialise and, through motion or inaction, prophesy the outcome of the battle. The army of King Knut carried a banner onto the field at the Battle of Ashington, described in the *Encomium Emmæ Reginæ* as follows:

For the Danes had a banner possessed of a wonderful property, which although I believe it will seem incredible to the reader, nevertheless, because it is true, I will insert it for him for the sake of truth. For although it was woven of a very plain bright silk and had no figure embroidered on it, yet always in time of war a raven seemed as it were to appear on it, in victory opening its beak and beating its wings, restless in its feet, but very quiet and drooping in its whole body in defeat.⁵⁰⁶

The banner-raven’s excitable animation when victory is assured mirrors the physical characteristics of the greedy Beasts of Battle raven. Asser’s raven is described as ‘gaily flapping its wings’ while Knut’s raven seemed to be ‘in victory opening its beak and beating its wings, restless in its feet’. Like the Anglo-Saxon raven, the banner raven is greedy and joyous in anticipation of the carrion that is sure to come, and if it were not confined to its small triangular banner it would be wheeling and screaming with the eagle above the slaughterfield.

There is a noticeable difference between the partiality of the two ravens. The Anglo-Saxon raven appears and celebrates (with its companions) no matter whether the outcome of the battle is victory or defeat for the protagonist army – it rarely shows allegiance or a preference for one group over another. Its appearance is prophetic, but only of the fact that there is going to be slaughter. The banner-raven, in contrast, celebrates only when there is a victory for the Viking army and ‘drops motionless’ or becomes ‘very quiet and drooping in its whole body’ when they are to suffer defeat. The first description appears to suggest that the banner itself hangs slack and the raven loses its appearance of magical animation, while the latter seems to describe the raven as still magically moving on its own accord, but slumped, depressed by defeat and the realisation that there will be no feast after this battle.

The Old Norse banner-raven will not feast on the bodies of its nation’s army, while the Anglo-Saxon raven has no such qualms. The description ‘Anglo-Saxon raven’ is in fact misleading, as this raven is without allegiance; a force of nature existing outside of politics, unconcerned

⁵⁰⁶ Trans. Bodvarsdottir, ‘The function of the beasts of battle’, 111.

whether the corpse it is feasting upon belonged to the victorious or defeated army. This points to a major difference in the two cultures' usage of the Beasts of Battle – the Anglo-Saxons saw them as an outside entity, impartial and untameable, while the Scandinavians claimed the Beasts of Battle as their own (and on *their* side) through their adoption of wolf-skins, raven banners and their host of powerful associations.

Before the 1066 Battle of Stamford Bridge, as Harald Hardrada's fleet departed for England, ravens and eagles appear in a vision experienced by one of his men, as described in the *Saga of Harald Hardrada*:

On the stem of every ship in the fleet he saw a bird, all of them were eagles and ravens; a huge witch standing on an island quoth: 'The King, going westward, will meet with many skeletons, to my benefit, the raven will find enough to eat on the ships'.⁵⁰⁷

According to the Icelandic *Níal's Saga*, a similar experience occurred during Brothir's sea-crossing from the Isle of Man to Dublin before the Battle of Clontarf (1014), following a rain of blood. In this case, the ravens are equated with devils in a warning against pagan practices:

The third night ... the men were attacked by ravens with iron beaks and claws, the men defending themselves with shields and swords during the whole night; and ... one man on every ship was killed. Frightened by the strange happenings, Brothir sought the advice of his fellow-chieftain who ... explained: 'The raining blood is a portent of battle, and the attacking ravens signify the devils you are worshipping. Be sure that they will draw you to the pains of hell!'⁵⁰⁸

In both accounts, the birds appear as augurs of slaughter, fulfilling their function as prophetic Beasts of Battle before two famously bloody conflicts. The ravens physically attacking Brothir's men is an unusual occurrence in Norse and Anglo-Saxon sources but a similar attack can be found in Celtic analogues such as *Rhonabwy's Dream*.

The raven banner also featured in the Battle of Stamford Bridge as the personal standard of Harald Hardrada. Much like precious or magical swords in Germanic folklore,⁵⁰⁹ the banner was given a name, *Landøyðan* ('Land-Destroyer').⁵¹⁰ The prophetic quality of the banner is lauded in a conversation between Harald and Sveinn Forkbeard. Again, the Norse banner-raven

⁵⁰⁷ Lukman, 'The Raven Banner', 149.

⁵⁰⁸ Thorsteinn Gylfason, ed., *Njal's Saga* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1998).

⁵⁰⁹ Such as the magical sword 'Hrunting' given to the hero in *Beowulf* 1455–8.

⁵¹⁰ Lukman, 'The Raven Banner', 149.

has the ability to predict the outcome of a battle, a step further than the Anglo-Saxon raven that can prophesy only the advent of slaughter.

Sveinn asked Haraldr which of his possessions ... he valued most highly. He answered that it was his banner, *Landøyðan*. Thereupon Sveinn asked what virtue it had to be accounted so valuable. Haraldr replied that it was prophesied that victory would be his before whom this banner was borne; and added that this had been the case ever since he had obtained it.⁵¹¹

In the clash between Hardrada and the Earls of York immediately before the Battle of Stamford Bridge, the raven banner is given a central part in the narrative. Hardrada raises *Landøyðan* and attacks so fiercely that ‘nothing held against it’ (the banner):

But when King Haraldr saw that the battle array of the English had come down along the ditch right opposite them, he had the trumpets blown and sharply urged his men to the attack, raising his banner called *Landøyðan*. And there so strong an attack was made by him that nothing held against it.⁵¹²

Despite the chaotic pace of the Battle of Stamford Bridge, the narrator takes the time to describe the movements of the raven banner as it is passed from hand to hand. At the outset of the battle, Hardrada has *Landøyðan* raised and Frírek is specifically named as its bearer. The army and the king’s retinue form a shield-wall, and the two most precious figures are placed within the protection of the wall – the king and his banner. Later, Hardrada is killed by an arrow through the throat, but his men manage to save the raven banner as they fall back. Earl Tostig now raises *Landøyðan*. In the closing moments of the battle Eysteinn seizes the banner for the final charge before he and Hardrada’s army are defeated.⁵¹³

Yet this was not the last raven banner that the victor, Harold Godwinson, would have to face. It was present among the battle paraphernalia of William, Duke of Normandy, at the Battle of Hastings, identifiable in at least two panels of the Bayeux Tapestry – firstly carried by a Norman knight, and secondly lying broken on the ground in the panel depicting the deaths of Harold Godwinson’s brothers.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹¹ Saga of Harald Hardrada from Hollander, *Heimskringla*, ch. 22.

⁵¹² Ibid., ch. 85.

⁵¹³ Ibid., ch. 88–93.

⁵¹⁴ ‘The elegant black bird with the curved beak and the yellow claws [is present] among the birds in the upper border of the Bayeux tapestry’. Lukman, ‘The Raven Banner’, 133.

The idea of a war-banner being greatly valued is not uncommon⁵¹⁵ – since classical times the loss of a standard in battle has been regarded as tantamount to defeat. It is a source of great shame for a military unit to lose a standard (and, conversely, a great coup to capture an enemy's flag). As seen in *Sigurðarsonar*, if a standard-bearer falls, another is always ready to take his place and keep the banner raised. The authors of *Orkneyingasaga* and *Njáls Saga* add a dark twist to the banner's powers – its magic in these tales takes the form of a curse, bringing death to any individual who bears it. Before going to war, Sigurðr is given the magical sigil by his sorceress mother, who tells him:

'Now, take this banner. I've made it for you with all the skill I have, and my belief is this: that it will bring victory to the man it is carried before, but death to the one who carries it.' It was a finely made banner, very cleverly embroidered with the figure of a raven, and when the banner fluttered in the breeze, the raven seemed to be flying ahead.

Earl Sigurðr ... set out for Skittern to confront Earl Finnleik. The two sides formed up, but the moment they clashed, Sigurðr's standard-bearer was struck dead. The Earl told another man to pick up the banner but before long he had been killed too. The Earl lost three standard bearers, but he won the battle.⁵¹⁶

The same sigil accompanied Sigurðr to the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. Again, his mother's curse means death for anyone who carries the banner:

Kerthjalfad ... burst through Earl Sigurðr's ranks right up to the banner, and killed the standard-bearer. The Earl ordered someone else to carry the standard, and the fighting flared up again. Kerthjalfad at once killed the new standard-bearer and all those who were near him. Earl Sigurðr ordered Þórstein Hallson to carry the standard, and Þórstein was about to take it when Ámund the White said, 'Don't take the banner, Þórstein! All those who bear it get killed!'

'Hrafn the Red,' said the Earl, 'you take the standard.'

'Carry your own devil yourself!' said Hrafn.

⁵¹⁵ The church adapted the battle-banner into its religious iconography – draped crosses are a Christianised version of the battle banner, a standard to lead 'soldiers of Christ' into spiritual battle. See the hymn *Vexilla Regis* ('Banner of the King').

⁵¹⁶ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, eds., *Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), ch. 11.

The Earl said, 'A beggar should carry his own bundle!' He ripped the flag from its staff and tucked it under his clothing. A little while later Ámund the White was killed, and then the Earl himself died with a spear through him.⁵¹⁷

Sigurðr's curse is one of the few negative portrayals of the raven in its context as a Scandinavian battle sigil. Rather than using its magic to prophesy victory for its master, this banner-raven is dangerous, untrustworthy and untameable. A raven that betrays its bearer accords more with the Anglo-Saxon view of the bird – impartial about the battle's outcome, so long as there is carrion to enjoy. Hume notes that the raven banner's 'actions and feelings ... are tied to those of men; the banner raven is not as independent of man as those birds of battle [in *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Brunanburh*]'.⁵¹⁸ An exception to this conjecture is the blithe-hearted raven of *Beowulf* 1799a–1803a (discussed in chapter two) – while not strictly a Beast of Battle, the actions and feelings of this carrion-eater are linked to the warriors awakening joyfully in Heorot after Grendel's defeat.

The Celtic Beasts of Battle – parallel traditions

In her discussion of parallel traditions in Old English, Norse and Celtic verse, Jesch concludes that as far as the Beasts of Battle are concerned, the Norse (skaldic) and Celtic passages have more in common with each other than they have with the Old English equivalents. She takes as an example the Old Welsh poem *Y Gododdin*, probably composed around 600.

Despite the chronological and linguistic gulf between *The Gododdin* and skaldic verse, they are, I would suggest, more similar in their uses of the beasts of battle than either is to the same topos in OE poetry.⁵¹⁹

Jesch surmises that the similarities may be due to two reasons: firstly, the Celtic poets, like the Scandinavians, were writing at a point in their history much closer to their warrior past than the Anglo-Saxons. Secondly, both traditions (skaldic and Celtic) had as their core function the praising of individual warriors or leaders.⁵²⁰ Three sources will be used below to explore the

⁵¹⁷ Gylfason, ed., *Njal's Saga*, ch. 157.

⁵¹⁸ Hume writes that written accounts of the raven banner appeared quite late in the Anglo-Saxon period and that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (E) reference in the year 878 'has the air of explaining the phenomenon to an audience unfamiliar with it', and thereafter the bulk of raven banner accounts belong to the 11th century. It is therefore difficult to postulate whether the audiences of the earlier Anglo-Saxon poems knew of the raven banner, although it may well have been used in battle before the first written accounts. 'Function of the "Hrefn Blaca"', 62.

⁵¹⁹ Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 260.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 260.

Celtic Beasts of Battle theme: *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* ('The War of the Irish with the Foreigners'), *Rhonabwy's Dream* (from the *Mabinogion*) and *Y Gododdin*.⁵²¹

Firstly, though, a parallel can be found that echoes the prophetic abilities of the Anglo-Saxon beasts. Gerald of Wales writes in his 12th-century *Journey Through Wales*:

According to vulgar tradition, these mountains [of Snowdonia] are frequented by an eagle who, perching on a fatal stone every fifth holiday, in order to satiate her hunger with the carcasses of the slain, is said to expect war on that same day, and to have almost perforated the stone by cleaning and sharpening her beak.⁵²²

There are differences between the traditions, namely that the Gerald of Wales passage seems to refer to a specific eagle (rather than generic eagles, as employed by the Anglo-Saxons),⁵²³ who regularly visits a significant site in order to make its prophecies. It alights on a 'fatal stone' in the heights of Snowdonia, worn down over the years by the eagle eagerly sharpening its beak in anticipation of carrion. The Anglo-Saxon eagle, along with its companions, never appears unless an army is present and always hovers (or circles) above its intended meal.

The similarities lie, however, in the intentions of the eagle. In both traditions, the eagle is able to predict that its hunger will be satiated; that is, it will have its fill of carcasses on the slaughterfield. The feeling of eagerness, so palpable among the screaming and often joyful Anglo-Saxon beasts, can also be felt in Gerald's description, with the clockwork regularity of the Welsh eagle's appearance (every fifth holiday) and the frenetic sharpening of its beak wearing down the very stone upon which it is perched. The fact that the army is not actually present in the Celtic description is tempered by the immediacy of the coming slaughter-feast – the eagle expects war to break out 'on that same day'.

Rhonabwy's Dream

The *Mabinogion*, a Welsh manuscript (dated 1375–1400) rich in Arthurian legend, contains some important references to the eagle's fellow carrion-bird, the raven. *Rhonabwy's Dream* details a game of chess between Arthur and Owein, played out on the battlefield as the heroes move their pieces around the board. Lukman summarises the action as follows:

⁵²¹ James Todd, ed., *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with The Gaill* (Rolls Series, London: Longmans, 1867); Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Alfred Jarman, ed., *Aneirin: Y Gododdin* (Dyfed: Gomer Press, 1988).

⁵²² Lewis Thorpe, trans., *Gerald of Wales: The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), book 2, ch. 10.

⁵²³ Naming a particular eagle aligns this passage more closely with the Scandinavian tradition of using specific beasts (such as Huginn, Munnin or Fenrir) as a kenning for the wider species (see p.129).

Messengers for Owein arrive successively, with still more alarming reports: Owein's ravens were being harassed and attacked by Arthur's men. The most notable of the ravens had been killed, others wounded and molested to the extent that not one of them could lift its wings one fathom from the ground ... Undisturbedly the players continue their game until Owein, observing the increasing rage of the messengers, gives this order to the messenger: 'Go to the place where you see the battle is hardest and raise the standard on high, and God's will be done!' ... And even as it was raised, the ravens too rose into the air in passion, rage and exultation, to let wind into their wings and to throw off their weariness. And having recovered their strength and their magic powers, in rage and exultation they straightaway swooped down to earth upon the men who had earlier inflicted hurt and injury and loss upon them. Of some they were carrying off the heads, of others the eyes, of others the ears, and of others the arms; and they were raising them up into the air, and there was a great commotion in the air, what with the fluttering of the exultant ravens and their croaking, and another great commotion what with the cries of the men being gashed and wounded and others being slain ... Arthur bade Owein call off his ravens, but he declined the first and the second time; the third time Arthur's emotion was so intense that he crushed the golden pieces that were on the board till they were all dust. And Owein bade Gwres lower his banner. And therewith it was lowered and all was peace.⁵²⁴

Elements from this extract do not strictly correspond with the Beasts of Battle theme, although the basic framework of ravens on the battlefield certainly raises associations between the two traditions. The Celtic ravens, firstly, appear to be a part of Owein's army, perhaps magically controlled by the chessboard and the banner. Indeed, their ownership is made clear as they are referred to as 'Owein's ravens'. They take orders as any soldier would, a far cry from the impartial, wild ravens described by the Anglo-Saxon *scops*. Owein was traditionally associated with ravens – at the conclusion of 'The Lady of the Well' (from *The Mabinogion*), Owein's warrior retinue is named the 'Flight of Ravens'.⁵²⁵

Secondly, the ravens in *Rhonabwy's Dream* physically attack the live warriors, something that is never found in the Anglo-Saxon tradition and only rarely to be found in the Norse equivalent (such as Brothir's sea-crossing in *Níál's Saga*, discussed on p.142).

Thirdly, the intentions of the ravens appear to differ from the Anglo-Saxon and Norse Beasts. There is no clear mention of their actually feasting on the slain – they are more intent on

⁵²⁴ Lukman, 'The Raven Banner' 143–144. For the full text of this passage see Davies, ed., *The Mabinogion*, 222–4.

⁵²⁵ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, 138 and 255(n).

gashing, wounding and slaying the enemy, fulfilling their unnatural role of Owein's soldiers rather than their natural role of carrion-eaters. The gory detail of the ravens' attack could, however, be read as an exaggeration of the real behaviour of the birds when feasting on the battlefield dead. Although the ravens would not be strong enough to 'carry off' decapitated heads and arms (eagles and wolves might), they would certainly have been observed tearing at human eyes, ears and other body parts in the aftermath of a battle.⁵²⁶

Lastly, the commotion caused by the ravens in *Rhonabwy's Dream* ('there was a great commotion in the air ... and another great commotion what with the cries of men') is similar to the 'clamour' or 'uproar' in *The Battle of Maldon* (lines 106–7): 'A din was upraised there ... there was clamour on the earth'. The Anglo-Saxon beasts in the majority of their appearances are described as making a great commotion; howling, shrieking, croaking, screaming or even singing in anticipation of the feast.

Owein's standard has some parallels with the banners of the Norse chieftains (discussed on pp.139–45), but is not a raven banner as such. The poet gives no description of the standard in this passage, so we cannot know if the embroidery includes a raven sigil.⁵²⁷ However, Owein's association with ravens does make this a possibility. There is no question that the ravens respond directly to the actions of the standard-bearer, rising into the air 'even as [the standard] was raised' and retaining their strength and magical powers until it was lowered once again. This brings to mind the magically-animated banner-raven of King Knut (as described in the *Encomium Emmæ Reginae*),⁵²⁸ flapping its wings and dancing with excitement when victory is assured. The reinvigoration of the ravens is wonderfully described: they rise into the air 'in passion, rage and exultation, to let wind into their wings and to throw off their weariness'.⁵²⁹ Nothing can stand in the way of their furious attack until Owein orders that the standard be lowered. The raising of the raven banner in the Old Norse *Haralds Saga Sigurðarsonar* has the same effect on the Viking warriors – when King Hardrada raises *Landøyðan*, 'so strong an attack was made by [his warriors] that nothing held against it'.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁶ Another appearance of the raven/crow in a Celtic battle narrative can be found in *The Battle of Argoed Llwyfain*, quoted in Calder and Bjork, *Sources and Analogues*, 157: 'Before Aroed Llwyfain was many a corpse; crows grew red from the gore of the dead, and the war-band charged with the chieftain. I shall sing to their victory for a year!' Again, the Celtic narrator makes use of gory descriptions to create powerful imagery.

⁵²⁷ According to Davies, there are ravens on the coat of arms of the family of Sir Rhys ap Thomas of Abermarlais, which claimed descent from Owein and his father Urien, so it is possible that the raven was indeed present on Owein's banner. See Davies, *The Mabinogion*, explanatory note to p.221.

⁵²⁸ Trans. Bodvarsdottir, 'The function of the beasts of battle', 111.

⁵²⁹ Davies, *The Mabinogion*, 222–4.

⁵³⁰ Hollander, *Heimskringla*, ch. 85.

Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh

Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh ('The War of the Irish with the Foreigners'), is an Irish account of the Battle of Clontarf (1014). As the battle reaches its furious climax, the poet details the appearance of a terrifying bird-like figure over the slaughterfield. This screaming *badb*, along with a host of other supernatural beings, is apparently summoned into being by the passion and ferocity of the terrible battle below. The writer attests:

... And it will be one of the wonders of the day of judgement to relate the description of the tremendous onset. And there arose a wild, impetuous, precipitate, furious, dark, frightful, voracious, merciless, combative, contentious *badb*, screaming and fluttering over their heads. And there arose also the satyrs, and the idiots, and the maniacs of the valleys, and the witches, and the goblins, and the ancient birds, and the destroying demons of the air and of the firmament, and the feeble demoniac phantom host; and they were screaming and comparing the valour and combat of both parties.⁵³¹

The *badb* has been identified by translators as a bird of prey – a 'carrion crow', a 'scald crow', 'a vulture' or 'a raven'.⁵³² But it is more than this – the *badb* 'arises' above the battlefield like a creature magically summoned, and arrives at the head of a long line of supernatural beings. Lukman links the appearance of the *badb* to the classical Furies, which would appear as agents of supernatural fate in Roman 'poetical descriptions of extraordinarily hard and furious battles'.⁵³³ He writes that the *badb* was observed over the battlefield in similar Irish accounts. This suggests that the Irish poets and historians would employ the *badb* for its ability to add significance to a battle – its appearance signals to the audience that this was a momentous confrontation and that the fighting was particularly furious.⁵³⁴ The Anglo-Saxon *scops* may have made use of the Beasts of Battle for similar reasons – not only a decorative trope, the appearance of the beasts signalled that the conflicts they depicted (such as those in *The Battle of Maldon*, *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *Elene*) were momentous military events.

The description of the cacophony that arises upon the appearance of the Clontarf *badb* is overwhelming – more so even than the uproar of the beasts in the Anglo-Saxon *Battle of Maldon* and the clamour of the ravens in the Celtic *Rhonabwy's Dream*. The protracted line of adjectives describing the fury of the *badb*, followed immediately by the long list of

⁵³¹ Lukman, 'The Raven Banner', 146.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵³⁴ Other appearances of the *badb* in battle include *The First and Second Battles of Mag Tuired*, and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, battles in which it sowed fear and confusion among the troops. See also *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, in which Morrigan alights on Cú Chulainn's shoulder in the form of a raven.

supernatural beings (all described as ‘screaming’), invokes for the reader a startlingly vivid and chaotic scene.

The supernatural host, we are told, ‘compar[ed] the valour and combat of both parties’ of the Clontarf conflict. Unlike the belligerent ravens in *Rhonabwy’s Dream*, the *badb* and its companions are relegated to the role of spectators, albeit very noisy ones. In this respect their role is similar to that of the Anglo-Saxon beasts, yet they are screaming not about carrion, but about the performance of the warring armies. Perhaps in ‘comparing the valour’ of the warriors, the *badb* is in effect behaving like the *Exodus* raven-Valkyrie, ‘choosing the slain’ (that is, singling out the most valorous warriors).⁵³⁵

It is interesting to consider that both of the groups involved in this conflict had their raven-figure in the battle – the Irish had their supernatural *badb*, screaming and fluttering over their heads, while the Scandinavians carried into battle their magically-animated raven banner, also possessed of supernatural powers. The Clontarf raven banner bears Sigurðr’s curse (discussed on p.144), and is fatal for those who carry it: ‘At Clontarf, on Holy Friday 1014, Sigurd had to carry the Raven-sign himself and he fell.’⁵³⁶ The preponderance of raven-imagery in this historic battle is further proof of this particular bird’s deep-seated association with slaughter and warfare, even across cultural boundaries.

Y Gododdin

Perhaps the richest source of raven, eagle and wolf imagery in a Welsh battle-poem is the Old Welsh *Y Gododdin*, composed around 600 and preserved in a 13th-century Welsh manuscript (the *Book of Aneirin*).⁵³⁷ The poem commemorates the disastrous battle of Catraeth, which is thought to have taken place near present-day Catterick in North Yorkshire in the 6th century. A force of three hundred *Gododdin* was assembled in Edinburgh and feasted for a year before attacking an overwhelming enemy force (thought to be Angles). The vast majority were slaughtered, with only three men surviving to tell the tale. This provided the bard with fertile ground for both elegiac and skaldic-style poetry, with no fewer than eighty warriors individually lamented and praised.

⁵³⁵ The *badb* was thought to be an incarnation of the goddess Morrigan, known for spreading confusion in battle and also for foreshadowing carnage or the death of an individual. A parallel can be drawn between the raven-goddess of Celtic mythology and the raven-Valkyrie of northern legend, both of whom are associated with fate, doom and battle.

⁵³⁶ Lukman, ‘The Raven Banner’, 149–50.

⁵³⁷ Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 259.

Jesch comments upon this poem's strikingly skaldic feel: "[*Y Gododdin*] is 'crucially very similar to skaldic poetry in its social function ... composed to commemorate and praise dead warriors.'⁵³⁸ She notes that the battle is variously referred to as a 'ravens' feast', 'raven's gain' or 'wolf feast'.⁵³⁹ This can be seen as the composer's elegiac method of poetically imparting the futility of this battle: the only beings to derive any benefit from the clash were the Beasts of Battle.

The poem is presented as a series of eulogistic vignettes, praising the actions and/or lamenting the death in battle of a long procession of warriors. Most are identified by name, such as lines 440–1: 'For his warriors, Gwyddien was an eagle; fiercely he protected them with his spear'⁵⁴⁰ and lines 974–6: 'In the front rank, Gwawrddur was a palisade. His hand fed the birds; I honour him, great leader'.⁵⁴¹

As Jesch points out, *Y Gododdin*'s similarity to Old Norse verse is illustrated by the poet's skaldic treatment of the Beasts of Battle.⁵⁴² Like Viking heroes, individual Celtic warriors are praised with assertions that they 'fed' the carrion-eaters. Examples from the battle include: 'In the clash of armed men, he made food for eagles'; 'When Caradog charged into battle ... he fed the wolves by his hand'; 'Through his fury he brought a feast for the birds from the uproar of battle'; 'The beaks of grey eagles esteemed his hand; in his fury he fed birds of prey'; 'He fed black ravens on the rampart of a fortress, though he was no Arthur ... his hand fed the birds'; and (from *The Gorchan of Cynfelyn*), 'Cynfelyn the wrathful, the bold one, foremost with spear, feeder of birds on bloody corpses'.⁵⁴³

A dissimilarity between *Y Gododdin* and skaldic verse, also noted by Jesch, is the portrayal of individual warriors as food for the beasts, rather than their benefactors. It seems surprising that the poet would choose to give some of his heroes such an ignominious end, presented as they are between descriptions of magnificent warriors who died in the act of triumphantly feeding the enemy to the waiting carrion-eaters. The unfortunate Celt in lines 272–3 'was food for ravens, he was benefit to the crow ... before he was left at the fords',⁵⁴⁴ while the narrator in *Domnall Brecc* saw 'great sturdy men who came with the dawn, and the head of Domnall

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 259.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 259.

⁵⁴⁰ Jarman, *Y Gododdin*, lines 440–1.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., lines 974–6.

⁵⁴² Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 260.

⁵⁴³ Jarman, ed., *Aneirin: Y Gododdin*, lines 214–15; 327–30; 571–3; 630–1; 971–6; 1082–5.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., lines 272–3.

Brecc; ravens gnawed it'.⁵⁴⁵ The poet's intention here would appear to be elegiac – the death of these warriors was a tragedy, not a triumph, in what was after all a disastrous battle.⁵⁴⁶

The *Gododdin* warriors are praised by the poet through identification with beasts, including the wolf and eagle. Examples of warriors being likened to wolves include: '[he was] a wolf in fury'; 'he was joyful defending his position, the wolf of the host'; while warriors are identified with eagles in lines such as: '... a warrior, ensnarer of the enemy, the swoop of an eagle in the estuaries when fed'; 'the eagle of graceful movement'; 'for his warriors, Gwyddien was an eagle; fiercely he protected them with his spear'; 'his enemies fear his weapon, a fierce eagle, laughing in battle'; and 'an unyielding anchor amid the battle-host, an invincible eagle of wrathful men'.⁵⁴⁷

The 'joy' of the beasts to which the warriors are likened (the 'joyful' wolf of the host and the 'laughing' eagle) is echoed in the Anglo-Saxon *Beasts of Battle*, who would scream their joy as they circled the slaughterfield (see *The Battle of Brunanburh* 63b and *Exodus* 162a). Twice within the opening lines of *Y Gododdin*, warriors are praised for being more eager to attend a battle than a celebration, such as a wedding or funeral: 'Quicker to the field of blood than to a wedding, quicker to the ravens' feast than to a burial...',⁵⁴⁸ and 'quicker to wolf-feast than to a nuptial, quicker to the raven's gain than to the altar'.⁵⁴⁹ This unlikely linking of carrion beasts with nuptials reminds us of the Valkyrie Sigrun in *The Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*, who likens her marital joy to that felt by carrion birds who 'know of slaughter / steaming food'⁵⁵⁰ (see p.71).

The three cultures discussed in this chapter did not develop in isolation – there was contact in both war and peacetime, and a borrowing or sharing of literary ideas would almost certainly have taken place. The English, Norse and Celts all make use of some version of the *Beasts of Battle* theme, yet at the same time the tradition is treated very differently. It is in hints such as the Old Norse vocabulary and treatment of the beasts in *Exodus* 162a–8b that we can find our strongest evidence of shared usages of the theme as the literature of the cultures came into contact with one another.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., lines 995–6.

⁵⁴⁶ Jesch notes that the description of warriors being consumed by ravens reminds the audience that *Y Gododdin* 'is as much an elegy as a eulogy'. 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 260.

⁵⁴⁷ Jarman, ed., *Aneirin: Y Gododdin*.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., lines 23–6.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., lines 62–3.

⁵⁵⁰ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 139.

Contributions to knowledge in this field over the course of this chapter include the creation of new linkages between Old English, Old Norse and Celtic poetry through an examination of their contrasting usages of the shared theme of the Beasts of Battle. It has been demonstrated that the prophetic nature of the beasts was not limited to the Old English usage, with examples such as the ravens of *The First Poem of Helgi Hundinsbani* and the beak-sharpening eagle of Gerald's *Journey Through Wales*. The examination of Old Norse animal symbolism on the battlefield (such as the garments of the *berserkirs* or Harald Hardrada's raven banner) contributes to our understanding of the symbolism of the Beasts of Battle in Old English battle-poetry.

The employment of the beasts by the poets of three very different cultures points to their suitability as strong images appropriated from the natural world for inclusion in retellings of human conflict. The following chapter examines the ways in which these beasts exist 'outside' of human society and how symbols of the wild are interwoven through the poetic narratives of the Anglo-Saxons with such dramatic effect.

Chapter 5

Wulf on wealda – denizens of the wild

Having speculated upon the possible intentions behind the poetic application of the Beasts of Battle theme, the question still remains as to why these three particular creatures were chosen from the natural world's extensive menagerie.⁵⁵¹ This question has been partly answered in chapter one – the wolf, raven and eagle were known to scavenge for carrion-meat after battles and as such the motif has its roots in realism, but there is a deeper association which resonates with these three beasts – fear.⁵⁵² A lingering dread of these creatures is still discernible in contemporary encounters, particularly in respect to the wolf and raven, while the eagle is feared to a lesser extent.⁵⁵³ This fear, which is coupled with fascination, can be attributed in part to the fact that the three beasts exist outside of human civilisation, beyond halls and walls, in the wild. Yet through their frequent poetic appearances as Beasts of Battle and realistic acts of scavenging, the wolf, raven and eagle cross frequently into the human sphere.

This chapter focuses upon the concept of the 'wild' in reference to the three Beasts of Battle, broken down into a number of associated human fears. Firstly, the notion of the wild itself is examined, looking at how the natural world was more immediate and threatening to the Anglo-Saxons than the substantially domesticated wilderness most Western people experience today. Secondly, the concept of a border between civilisation and the wilderness is employed – this border marks the edge of human fears and there is a sense that the Beasts of Battle cross this line to invade the civilised space whenever they make an appearance in the poetry.

Descriptions of the wild are often intertwined with darkness, particularly in *Exodus* and *Beowulf* in which hostile or unfriendly creatures stalk the night. This leads to a discussion of monsters and the ways in which the Beasts of Battle can be read as behaving in the same manner as marauders such as Grendel. The Anglo-Saxon fascination with the exotic is also explored, with a focus on lycanthropy and *The Wonders of the East*. This chapter concludes with an examination of how humans can also be represented as belonging to the wild, living

⁵⁵¹ Neville writes, 'In fact not many animals, whether literary or native, appear regularly in poetry; being noticeable, useful, or even dangerous, does not guarantee a place in an Old English poem.' 'Representations of the Natural World', 10.

⁵⁵² It is important to avoid generalising on the nature of fear, as clinical data on such a universal human experience is difficult to attain. The argument that the beasts were feared as part of the 'wild' is based upon Lapidge's 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', 373–402. Lapidge's theory on the elements that make Grendel terrifying is built upon psychiatric studies of fear by William James, Sigmund Freud and others. This chapter expands on Lapidge's work by applying his theory to the Beasts of Battle (see pp.166–7).

⁵⁵³ Modern-day attitudes toward vultures are more likely to be representative of the Anglo-Saxon response to eagles.

outside of civilisation. Warriors were often portrayed in the poetry as ‘wild’ or ‘wolf-like’ in battle, while outlaws were seen as denizens of the wild and were often depicted as more akin to animals than humans.

‘The wild’ in Anglo-Saxon England

It is difficult for a contemporary reader to appreciate the Anglo-Saxon attitude toward the wild, which can perhaps be best described in terms of dichotomies – inside/outside, light/darkness, us/them, friend/stranger. The wild, or areas outside of human control, teemed with dangers both real and imagined from the animal and human worlds. Neville writes of the comparative fragility of civilisation in a wilderness that was seen as an ever-present threat to the Anglo-Saxons:

... a fearful defensiveness with respect to natural phenomena may appear inevitable: wind and precipitation battered against flimsy structures erected as defence, disease struck with its invisible weapons, the vegetable world opposed human beings in their need to eat, small animals leached away that which was wrestled from the land and wolves haunted the wilderness.⁵⁵⁴

This portrayal gives a sense of the Anglo-Saxons being in a continual state of conflict with the world around their settlements.⁵⁵⁵ The perceived dangers of the wild encouraged a parochial world-view which existed well into the 19th century – travelling any real distance in Anglo-Saxon England was uncommon and the environment outside one’s town or village and its immediate surrounds was seen as hostile, dangerous and unknown.

Perhaps this is why the concept of the ‘bogeyman’ remains so effective – if you ventured beyond the walls or perimeter of civilisation, you ran the risk of being killed and devoured by creatures of the wild. The fear of the body being defiled by a wild animal lies deep in the human psyche.⁵⁵⁶ This is also what makes stories such as that of Grendel’s night-incursions upon Heorot so terrifying, as this particular bogeyman dares to cross the perimeter and brings the violence of the wilderness into the hall, purportedly the centre of civilisation and safety. The Beasts of Battle can be seen as making the same transgressions, bringing the wild and its

⁵⁵⁴ Neville, ‘Representations of the Natural World’, 7. See also *wilde* (wild) and compounds incorporating *ut* (outside) in Bosworth-Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 739 and 746.

⁵⁵⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien suggests that Beowulf’s battles against the three monsters represent ‘man at war with the hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in time’. From ‘*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*’, *PBA* 22 (1936): 245–95.

⁵⁵⁶ See William James, ‘The Physical Basis of Emotion’, first published 1894, reprinted in *Psychological Review* 101 (1994): 205–210. See also Adah Maurer, ‘What children fear’, *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 106 (1965): 265–277.

outrages into the human sphere and devouring fallen warriors on the slaughterfield. In this sense, the beasts are also bogeymen, a vaguely described, dark unknown used in a terrifying manner.

Crossing the border between civilisation and the wild

Building upon the above concept of the Anglo-Saxons living in outposts of civilisation in a hostile natural environment, one can imagine the inhabitants of any given village or town being acutely aware of where human control ends and the wild begins.⁵⁵⁷ This border may have been a man-made barrier such as the walls of a town, or a natural feature such as the edge of a forest or marshland.⁵⁵⁸

Perhaps the Anglo-Saxon conception of ‘the wild’ simply referred to the area beyond any individual’s personal experience. Animals and birds from beyond this border were therefore a part of this unceasing hostility towards civilisation.⁵⁵⁹ Domesticated livestock brought into the human sphere subsequently became subject to attack by wild animals. Grendel’s attacks on Hrothgar’s hall mirror a wolf’s attack on an unprotected flock – he crosses the border from the wild into civilisation and kills with impunity until he is challenged by Beowulf.⁵⁶⁰

The *Beowulf scop* gives a number of descriptions of the landscape from which Grendel emerges – the monster is described as *mearcstapa* (‘border-stalker’) and a creature of the

⁵⁵⁷ ‘A central concern of the [*Beowulf*] poet ... is with human perception of the external world’. Michael Lapidge, ‘Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror’, 374.

⁵⁵⁸ The burgeoning field of Animal Studies has produced a number of articles on the human-animal border, including Rebecca Cassidy, ‘On the human-animal boundary’, *Anthrozoös* 14 (2001): 194–203; Glen Elder, Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, ‘Race, place, and the human-animal divide’, *Society and Animals* 6 (1998): 183–202; Harriet Ritvo, ‘Border trouble: Shifting the line between people and other animals’, *Social Research* 62 (1995) 481–98; Lynda Birke and Jo Hockenhull, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Investigating Human-Animal Relationships* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Angela Creager and William Jordan, eds., *The Animal-Human Boundary: Historical perspectives* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002); Barbara Noske, *Beyond Boundaries: Human and Animals* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997); Chris Philio and Chris Wilbert, eds., *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, eds., *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands* (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

⁵⁵⁹ Gibson, writing of the human impulse to create barriers between itself and its neighbours (both animal and human), points out: ‘Significantly the original meaning of the word *fence* is the same as that of *defence*, the act of defending. But *fencing* can also mean an aggressive act, as in the use of a sword.’ From Graeme Gibson, *The Bedside Book of Beasts*, 215. The fear of outsiders wishing to cross one’s fence can also be traced in the etymology of *gæst*, which not only means ‘guest’, but also ‘enemy’ or ‘stranger’ (cognate with *hostis* – ‘stranger’). See ‘Guest’ in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Interestingly, the *OED* gives an alternative definition of ‘guest’ as ‘a parasite animal or vegetable’ – see discussion of worms and decay in chapter two pp.79–83.

⁵⁶⁰ The *Beowulf scop* highlights that Grendel did not recognise human law, making the monster impossible to reason with or form a treaty with. See pp.171–6 for a more detailed discussion of what it meant to exist outside of human law in Anglo-Saxon England.

wulfhleopu ('wolf slopes'). This imagery paints a fascinating picture of Grendel's haunts, feeding the audience's curiosity about this monster that is further satisfied later in the poem when we are invited into Grendel's underwater den.⁵⁶¹ Grendel is thus given a background – more so, it can be said, than the hero Beowulf, who arrives on the Danish beach as if from a void. Beowulf's background is soon filled in through his exchange with the coast guard and later in the hall, but at his first appearance he is more of a stranger to Hrothgar's kingdom than Grendel, whose mere is only a few hours' journey from Heorot.⁵⁶² When Beowulf steps onto the beach with his armed retainers, he is effectively performing an incursion over Hrothgar's border, and the coast guard reacts appropriately in treating the Geats as potential invaders before welcoming them as allies (251b–4a):

<i>Nu ic eower sceal</i>	Now I must know
<i>frumcyn witan ær ge fyr heonan</i>	your origin, before you go hence,
<i>leassceaweras on land Dena</i>	spies advancing further
<i>furpur feras.</i>	into the land of the Danes.

Mearcstapa ('border-stalker') is perhaps the most evocative of the phrases used to describe Grendel – what border is the poet referring to? Is it the border (or 'marches') of Hrothgar's kingdom? *Mearc* may refer to the border between human-controlled civilisation and the animal-controlled wild, or more evocative still, the world's-end – surely a place where ogres, dragons and descendants of Cain (*Caines cynne*) would thrive and plot against civilisation. *Stapa* ('stalker') suggests a repetitive act – Grendel is drawn again and again to this border, enraged by the sound of revelry in the hall (*þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde hludne in healle*)⁵⁶³ to the point where he crosses the border with devastating consequences. The Beasts of Battle are most often presented as lurking at the periphery/border of the narrative; stalking the edge of the woods (*wulf on wealda*)⁵⁶⁴ or hanging back from the battle (*laðum on laste*),⁵⁶⁵ but always giving the impression (like Grendel) that they will soon cross the border to enter the human centre and feed upon carrion. Having the wolf, raven and eagle stalk the fringe of the action (coupled with consistently vague and shadowy descriptions)⁵⁶⁶ adds to the fear and mystery generated by their appearance across so many poems.

⁵⁶¹ *Beowulf* 1492–1625.

⁵⁶² *Nis þæt feor heonan milgemearcas* ('... it is not that far hence in mile-marks'), *Beowulf* 1361b–2a.

⁵⁶³ 'He that every day heard noise of revelry, loud in the hall', *Beowulf* 88a–9a.

⁵⁶⁴ 'The wolf in the forest', *Brunanburh* 65a.

⁵⁶⁵ 'In the wake of/following the hostile ones', *Elene* 30a.

⁵⁶⁶ The effective use of vague imagery is also discussed on pp.123–4.

The wolf is presented against the background of the forest in four separate Beasts of Battle passages – *Brunanburh* 65a (*wulf on wealda*), *Elene* 28a (also *wulf on wealda*), *Elene* 113a (*holtes gehleða*) and *Judith* 206a (*wulf in walde*). The traditional portrayal of wolves as belonging to the woods⁵⁶⁷ creates an associative link between the beast and the wooded environment. The woods are therefore represented as a place not only uninhabited by humans, but very much inhabited by ravaging wolves and thus dangerous territory. *Holtes gehleða*, or ‘the companion in the forest’, is enough of a departure from the *wulf on wealda* formula to warrant further consideration. The phrase could be read to suggest that the wolf would act as a guide and protector in the otherwise hostile forest,⁵⁶⁸ but it is more likely that the phrase is being used ironically, in that the wolf is a ‘friend’ to those it will soon devour. It is also possible to give this phrase a skaldic reading, wherein warriors (such as the son of Sigmund)⁵⁶⁹ are described as ‘the friend of wolves’ because they are destined to provide the beasts with much carrion. The most likely purpose of the phrase *holtes gehleða*, however, is as a reference to the wolf’s companionship with the other two members of its triad, the scavenging eagle and raven, which appear immediately beforehand (*Elene* 110b–12a).

The wolf and *herefugolas* (‘war-birds’) of *Exodus* 168 are described as *mearcweardas*, or ‘border-guardians’. The term is evocative of outlawry and dwellers in the wilderness such as Grendel or the protagonists of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. Frank translates *mearc* as ‘borderlands’, with the generalised meaning of ‘uninhabited territory’, encompassing the *weald* as part of this territory.⁵⁷⁰ The phrase ‘border-guardians’ sits somewhat uncomfortably within the context of the wild – surely civilised territories would be guarded against attack from the borderlands, rather than the borderlands being guarded against civilisation.⁵⁷¹ It is possible that, instead of Frank’s ‘uninhabited territory’, the *scop* is envisaging the wild as a sort of animal (or outlaw) kingdom, with the *Exodus* Beasts of Battle protecting the borders from human incursion. This resonates with Grendel’s role as the ruler of a wilderness that is no less of a kingdom than that of Hrothgar and his Spear-Danes.

The term *wulfhleopu* (‘wolf-slopes’)⁵⁷² links Grendel to the body of associations held by wolves such as outlawry, insatiety and devilry. The phrase suggests an environment not only frequented by wolves, but dominated by them; a place where mankind is unwelcome and

⁵⁶⁷ See Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 350.

⁵⁶⁸ See the account of St Columban threatened by wolves in the woods – chapter three pp.101–2.

⁵⁶⁹ See discussion of *The First Poem of Helgi Hundinsbani*, chapter four p.127.

⁵⁷⁰ Frank, ‘Skaldic Tooth’, 338–55.

⁵⁷¹ Frank suggests that the *mearcweardas* merge with the Egyptian *heorowulfas* (‘sword-wolves’) in line 181a (*Ibid.*, 350).

⁵⁷² *Beowulf* 1358a.

imperilled. Grendel, however, walks there with impunity, perhaps due to his wolf-like nature. The wolf-slopes are immediately preceded by the description *dygel lond* ('secret land'), adding to the fear and mystery of this alien place. Place-names incorporating 'wolf' or 'raven' are often so named due to their connection with violence. Such usage can be found in *Beowulf* 2925 – the battle at *Hrefnawudu* ('Ravenswood') was disastrous for the Geats, leading to the death of Haethcyn and Ongentheow's liberation of his queen. The place-name seems fitting for a scene of carnage, where Geatish carcasses would have provided a feast for the winged scavengers.⁵⁷³ Many Anglo-Saxon place names featuring the wolf, raven and eagle are extant in modern-day Britain,⁵⁷⁴ with differing degrees of inherited associations with their animal namesakes.

The beasts' association with the fear of darkness

As put forward in the list of dichotomies at the beginning of this chapter, civilisation and the wild can be thought of in terms of light and darkness. For modern readers living in an urban environment it can be difficult to imagine the menace of the evening darkness surrounding Anglo-Saxon settlements, teeming with threats both real and imagined.⁵⁷⁵ Illumination would have been patchy even within towns and villages. Thus we hear Anglo-Saxon poetic praise of sheltering halls such as Heorot (*medoærn micel / healærna mæst*),⁵⁷⁶ a place of protection from the darkness outside that provides company, light, warmth and music (*þær wæs hearpan sweg, swutol sang scopes*).⁵⁷⁷

One can imagine the invisible border marking the edge of the wild contracting nightly from the dark periphery of the woods to outside the townsfolk's very doorsteps, before expanding again with the advent of dawn. Grendel and his *brimwylf* ('sea-wolf') mother attack only at night, while scavengers such as wolves and foxes grow *cwyldrof* ('bold at nightfall'), taking livestock

⁵⁷³ Daniëlli writes that similar geographical descriptions can be found in the Old Norse *Völundarkviða*, in which 'Wolf-dales' and 'Wolf Lake' are mentioned in the beginning of the lay, thus 'preparing the audience for a grisly story to follow'. She notes that 'wolf-forest' can be found as a kenning for battlefield in stanza 16 of *The First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*. From 'Wulf, Min Wulf', 510. *Völundarkviða* is translated as 'wolf-lair' in Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 116.

⁵⁷⁴ See P.G. Moore, 'Ravens (*Corvus corax corax* L.) in the British landscape: a thousand years of ecological biogeography in place-names', *Journal of Biogeography* 29 (2002): 1039–54.

⁵⁷⁵ Northern European attitudes toward darkness are perceptible in the Norse version of the apocalypse, wherein the giant wolf Fenrir swallows the sun and plunges the world into eternal darkness and winter (creating a further associative connection between the wolf and darkness). This stands in sharp contrast with the fire and brimstone of the southern European/Christian apocalypse, suggesting that the nightmare of cold and darkness without relief was more relevant to the inhabitants of northern Europe. See chapter four p.137 for a discussion of *Ragnarok*, and chapter three pp.98–9 for a similarly frosty description of hell in *Blickling Homily XVI*.

⁵⁷⁶ 'Grand mead-hall' / 'Best of royal halls', *Beowulf* 69a/78a.

⁵⁷⁷ 'There was the harmony of the harp / the sweet song of the poet', *Beowulf* 89b–90a.

and poultry from right outside the human dwellings. *Cwyldrof* is a key term in this discussion – beasts such as the wolf which are little threat in daylight hours are emboldened under the cover of darkness and enter the contracted human sphere. To the inhabitants in the hall listening to the howling of wolves in the night, the creatures’ attendant associations (such as their link with the diabolical) must surely have seemed all the more potent.

The Beasts of Battle themselves are presented in the poetry as dark or colourless, enhancing their mysterious nature and reinforcing the elegiac power of these passages. The *scops* may have used these dull shades deliberately, as a bright colour would seem out of place in a passage that is otherwise elegiac and drained of hope – in *Beowulf* 3020a–7b, for example, the melancholy statement *nu se herewisa hleahtor alegde, gamen ond gleodream* (‘now the lord has laid aside laughter, mirth and revelry’) is followed by the appearance of *se wonna hrefn* (‘the dark raven’), appropriately cloaked in funereal black to mourn the predicted passing of the Geats. The wolf of *Brunanburh* 64b is *þat græge deor* (‘that grey beast’),⁵⁷⁸ while in line 61b of the same poem the raven is *sweartan* (‘black’), and described as such in seven other passages.⁵⁷⁹ The only flash of light in these otherwise dark creatures is the *earn æftan hwit* (‘white-tailed eagle’) in *Brunanburh* 63a. The beasts are thus a part of the hostile darkness, vaguely described and difficult to glimpse. Their shadowy nature and lack of colour are particularly evident when compared with the panther and its coat of many colours, as described in the *Physiologus*:

<i>ðæt is wrætlic deor, wundrum scyne</i>	That is a wondrous beast, wondrously beautiful
<i>hiwa gehwylces; swa hæleð secgað,</i>	in every colour. Just as people tell us,
<i>gæsthalge guman, þætte Iosephes</i>	inspired men, that Joseph’s
<i>tunece wære telga gehwylces</i>	coat was variegated with hues
<i>bleom bregdende, þara beorhtra gehwylc</i>	of every shade, each shining
<i>æghwæs ænlicra oþrum lixte</i>	before the sons of men brighter and more unique
<i>dryhta bearnum, swa þæs deores hiw,</i>	than the other, so does the colour of this beast

⁵⁷⁸ Griffith writes that the plumage of the birds and particularly the coat of the wolf may be analogous to the armour of warriors – ‘the compound elements *pad* and *hama* [“plumaged” and “coated”] elsewhere refer to mailcoats (*Beowulf* 1895 “*scirhama*” and 2258 “*herepad*”, *Waldere A* 17 and *Judith* 192 “*byrnhoma*”, *Elene* 992 “*goldhama*”) ... armour, like the wolf, is often grey (*Beowulf* 334 and 2153, *Judith* 327)’. From Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality’, 190. This shared usage of compound elements adds to the interchangeability of warriors and beasts, as discussed on pp.51–4.

⁵⁷⁹ The raven is referred to as ‘dark’ on at least eight separate occasions: *se wanna fugel* (*Genesis* 1983b), *se wonna hrefn* (*Beowulf* 3024b, *Judith* 206b), *hrefn blaca* (*Beowulf* 1801a), *se swearta hrefen* (*Soul and Body I* 54b, *Brunanburh* 61b, *Finnsburh* 35a, *Genesis A* 1441b), from Fred Robinson, ‘Notes on the Old English *Exodus*’, *Anglia* 80 (1962): 367(n). In *Genesis A* the darkness of Noah’s disobedient raven is mentioned three times within eight lines, stressing its impure nature and contrasting its appearance with that of the white dove.

<i>blæc brigda gehwæs, beorhtra ond scynr</i>	shine with every diversity, gleaming wondrously
<i>wundrum lixeð, þætte wrætlicra</i>	so clear and fair that each of the colours
<i>æghwylc oþrum, ænlicra gien</i>	is ever lovelier than the next, glows beautifully
<i>ond fægerra frætwum bliceð,</i>	in its splendour, more rare, more beautiful,
<i>symle sellicra.</i>	and more wondrous. ⁵⁸⁰

Part of the *scops*' reluctance to describe the beasts actually feasting on human carcasses (as opposed to only expressing their desire to do so) may be that this gruesome act is best carried out under the cover of darkness, when the scavengers have the freedom of the abandoned slaughterfield. While darkness figuratively swallows the scene of carnage, the Beasts of Battle literally swallow the dead warriors – this link between the dark-cloaked beasts and the inescapable coming of night furthers their association with inevitability and fate. Three Beasts of Battle passages (listed below) take place in darkness, providing an appropriately gloomy setting for the scavengers. In this respect, the beasts are not strictly representative of their true-to-life counterparts – while the wolf is known for its eerie nocturnal howling, both the raven and eagle are diurnal.⁵⁸¹ This lack of realism could be read as a technique to further enhance the beasts' negative associations, but may simply point to a somewhat mechanical application of the theme without reference to the context of day or night.⁵⁸²

The night-setting is atmospherically portrayed in *Finnsburh* 7b–8a following Hnaef's evocation of the beasts: *Nu scyneð þes mona waðol under wolcnum* ('... now the moon shines, wandering beneath the clouds'),⁵⁸³ while *Exodus* 162a–8b contains a number of references to night, giving this particular Beasts of Battle passage the strongest association with darkness. The border-guardians *hreoþon middum nihtum* ('scream in the middle of the nights') and are *cwyldrof* ('bold at nightfall'), singing a celebratory *æfenleoð* ('evening-song'). *Brunanburh* lines 13b–20a appear to suggest that the battle lasts for the course of a day, with the description of corpses littering the field after the sun *sah to setle* ('sank to rest'). Thus the *Brunanburh*

⁵⁸⁰ *The Panther* 19b–30a.

⁵⁸¹ The Beasts of Battle passages that take place at dawn would appear to be more realistic as far as the raven is concerned, as it is known for its harsh croaking in the morning. In *Judith* the Hebrew army issues from Bethulia to attack the Assyrians at dawn to the delight of the wolf, raven and eagle, while the *Beowulf scop* speaks of *morgenceald* spears immediately before his concluding evocation of the beasts. The blithe-hearted raven of *Beowulf* 1802, as discussed in chapter two pp.68–72, sings its joy at dawn.

⁵⁸² See introduction pp.20–1 for criticism of mechanistic usage of the Beasts of Battle theme.

⁵⁸³ There is a potential contradiction here between the night-setting of *Finnsburh* and the raven's *sealobrun* ('glossy') feathers – a possible explanation is that the raven's feathers are shining in the moonlight, or perhaps the *scop* is referring to the feathers shining in the light of the next morning, as *hig fuhton fif dagas* ('they fought for five days').

beasts may not have emerged to feast until the sun had set on the slaughterfield and the victors turned for home.

<i>siðþan sunne up</i>	... from the time the sun,
<i>on morgentid, mære tungol,</i>	in the morning, illustrious star,
<i>glad ofer grundas, godes condel beorht,</i>	glided up over the earth, bright candle of God,
<i>eces drihtnes, oð sio æþele gesceaft</i>	of the eternal Lord, until that noble creation
<i>sah to settle. þær læg secg mænig</i>	sank to rest. There many men lay
<i>garum ageted, guma norþerna</i>	destroyed by spears, men from the north,
<i>ofer scild scoten, swilce Scittisc eac,</i>	shot over the shield, and Scots too,
<i>werig, wiges sæd.</i>	weary and sated with battle.

While the wolf-like Grendel cannot be classified as a Beast of Battle, it is notable that all of his attacks take place *syððan niht becom* ('when night came'), stalking out of the darkness to attack the high hall. Even as he approaches Heorot he presents a hazy image – *Da com of more under misthleopum Grendel gongan* ('Then came from the moor under the misty cliffs Grendel walking'), *wod under wolcnum* ('... he advanced beneath the clouds') – retaining a shadowy mysteriousness much like that used to enhance the fear of the Beasts of Battle. He is called the *deorc deapscua* ('the dark death-shade') and *se þe in þystrum bad* ('he who dwelt in darkness').⁵⁸⁴ All of the above references to darkness and shadow could be interchangeable with the phraseology used to describe the scavenging wolf, raven and eagle.

Fear of the monstrous

The fear of monsters is closely related to the fear of darkness and is similarly universal. The two go hand-in-hand – from the childhood fear of monsters lurking in the darkest corners of one's bedroom to the folklore of countless cultures brimming with night-dwelling fiends. As mentioned above in relation to the Beasts of Battle, darkness adds to the mystery and fear of the monstrous, and a creature such as Grendel seen in the clear light of day may have been rather less terrifying than the same being glimpsed creeping *under misthleopum*.⁵⁸⁵

The *OED* defines *monstrous* as 'Of things, material and immaterial, deviating from the natural order; unnatural.'⁵⁸⁶ It is difficult to apply the 'unnatural' label to the Beasts of Battle, as by

⁵⁸⁴ There is an echo here of Isaiah 9:2 – 'the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light', (*Douay-Rheims Bible*). Hell is referred to in Matthew 8 as a place of darkness, while the oft-quoted 'shadow of death' equates mortality with darkness.

⁵⁸⁵ Arguably, Grendel's most frightening characteristic is that he refuses to obey human law and is thus impossible to reason or negotiate with – see discussion of Grendel and outlawry on pp.175–6.

⁵⁸⁶ 'Monstrous' in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition.

eating carrion on the battlefield they are simply acting according to their nature and not deviating from the above-mentioned natural order. This is the important distinction: the Beasts of Battle are *not* monsters, but are merely associated with the monstrous through their poetic portrayal. This is achieved through their shadowy nature and primary role in the poetry as consumers of human corpses. This act is surely what lies at the base of what makes a monster ‘monstrous’ – no matter what its appearance or other particulars, the most fearful act a creature can perform is to devour a human being.⁵⁸⁷

Neville writes of the abundance of supernatural (or monstrous) beings in *Beowulf*, *The Whale*, *Maxims II* and *Guthlac*:

... in these texts it is not possible to separate natural from supernatural phenomena:
devilish sea-monsters (*niceras*), whales, wolves, demons (*pyrsas*), deer, blood-thirsty, man-shaped creatures (the Grendelkin), birds – all inhabit the same landscapes and interact with human beings in parallel ways.⁵⁸⁸

These ‘interactions’ usually involve the creatures threatening humans, or humans hunting and killing the creatures.⁵⁸⁹ This reinforces the idea (discussed above) of the natural world in Anglo-Saxon England being seen as a constantly belligerent force to be feared or resisted, but never ignored.

Scops often allowed realism to take second place to exaggeration and even fantasy (as is the case in *The Wonders of the East*) and their poetic representation of the natural world was often imbued with dangers and terrors well beyond what the audience was likely to encounter in reality.⁵⁹⁰ The primary reason for such departures from reality may well have been the decision to exaggerate for the sake of a good story, a time-honoured tradition among storytellers. As Neville points out, in reality the Anglo-Saxons had little to fear from English animals, the most formidable of which were the bear, the wolf and the wild boar.

⁵⁸⁷ Examples of monstrous devourers of humans can be found in *Beowulf*, *The Whale* and *Andreas*.

⁵⁸⁸ Neville, ‘Representations of the Natural World’, 2.

⁵⁸⁹ Orchard notes that there exists a ‘mutual mistrust’ between men and literary animals, evidenced in *The Wonders of the East* where the creatures are repeatedly described as fleeing from or devouring humans. See Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 27.

⁵⁹⁰ Neville writes: ‘While it may be true that the Anglo-Saxons drew upon more than fear and paranoia when representing natural phenomena in their poetry, it is equally true that they drew upon less than their complete experience of the physical environment. The physical reality of “the natural world” could play a very small role in determining what of it was represented and how it was represented.’ ‘Representations of the Natural World’, 9.

[The bear and the wolf] deserve healthy, health-preserving respect, but are unlikely to have been responsible for large numbers of deaths. Along with the wild boar, which was still common, and perhaps more dangerous because of its aggressiveness, they were the only animals likely to make the Anglo-Saxons feel threatened.⁵⁹¹

Yet, as evidenced in the theme of the Beasts of Battle, the non-aggressive wolf, raven and eagle are feared and loathed while the dangerous boar, which was known for fatally goring humans, was celebrated in both art and literature.⁵⁹² One reason for this disparity would appear to be a respect for the boar's strength and determination, much admired in northern cultures with literary heroes such as Beowulf and Sigmund. The scavenging nature of the beasts, on the other hand, may have been regarded as cowardly and, particularly in post-conversion England, unclean.

Werewolves

The interchangeable Viking-wolves in *The Battle of Maldon* lines 96a–9b⁵⁹³ bring another monster to mind – the ever-popular werewolf.

<i>Wodon þa wælwulfas (for wætere ne murnon),</i>	The slaughter-wolves advanced (for they
	paid no heed to water),
<i>wicinga werod, west ofer Pantan,</i>	the Viking band, west over the Panta,
<i>ofer scir wæter scyldas wegon,</i>	over the shining water they carried their shields,
<i>lidmen to lande linde bæron.</i>	seafarers bore their shields to land.

The term *wælwulfas* ('slaughter-wolves') is phonetically close to the term 'werewolves' (literally 'man-wolves'), first used by Wulfstan as a synonym for the devil in *Homily 16b*. The labelling of the Vikings as wolves in *Maldon*, coupled with the wolf-like (or bear-like) garments worn by *berserkirs* and their bestial behaviour,⁵⁹⁴ all combine to make a comparison between the *wælwulf* and *werewulf* seem inevitable.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁹² Such as the boar-crested Benty Grange helmet and *Maxims II* 19b–20a; *Beowulf* 303b, 1111–12a, 1286b, 1453a, 1328a (Ibid., 8).

⁵⁹³ See chapter one pp.51–3 for a detailed discussion of this passage.

⁵⁹⁴ 'Their eyes glared as though a flame burned in the sockets, they ground their teeth, and frothed at the mouth, they gnawed at their shield rims, and are said to have sometimes bitten them through, and as they rushed into conflict they yelped as dogs or howled as wolves.' From Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Book of Werewolves* (London: Smith and Elder, 1865, reprinted with an introduction by Nigel Suckling in 1995), 40. The 12th-century Lewis Chess Set (discovered 1831) includes a figurine of a shield-biting *berserkir*.

Similar compounds for fierce fighters can be found in *Exodus* and *Genesis*: *heoruwulf* (‘fierce wolf’), *herewulf* and *hildewulf* (both ‘war-wolf’).⁵⁹⁵ These kennings and the fierce aspect of belligerents such as the Maldon *wælwulfas* give a sense of the crossover between human and animal behaviour, reinforced by the *scop*’s usage of metaphor – he does not claim the Vikings *acted like* slaughter-wolves, but states the Vikings *were* slaughter-wolves. In a sense this is fitting, as violence and particularly the act of war has long been regarded as the most bestial aspect of human civilisation (or lack thereof). Through the perpetration of violence, the belligerents of *Maldon*, *Brunanburh* and *Elene* cross the above-mentioned border between civilisation and the wild and take on the characteristics of beasts.⁵⁹⁶ The usage of *wulf*-compounds demonstrate the aptness of comparing warriors to this particular creature; the warriors move in packs, fighting in snarling fury, and after battle they scavenge the bodies of the dead for armour and valuables.

The animalistic behaviour of *berserkirs* in battle was a deliberate tactic to advantageously exploit the fearful associations of beasts such as the wolf and paralyse their enemies with fear.⁵⁹⁷ In doing so, the *berserkirs* not only added to the superstition surrounding themselves, but further augmented negative associations with the wolf by building upon an inaccurate reputation for aggressiveness, fits of fury and fatal encounters with human beings.⁵⁹⁸

Human scavengers on the wælstow

Another way in which warring humans behave like the Beasts of Battle as portrayed in the poetry is through their scavenging of corpses. In a culture in which wealth was generally worn on one’s person, the frequent mention of scavenging (or looting) after battles is unsurprising. Gold (usually in the form of *hringas* or ‘rings’/‘bracelets’) was even worn into battle, as having more gold on one’s person indicates the wearer has accumulated wealth won in past battles and

⁵⁹⁵ *Exodus* 181 (*heorawulfas*); *Genesis* 2015 (*herewulfa*) and 2051 (*hildewulfas*). See Daniëlli, ‘*Wulf, Min Wulf*’, 506.

⁵⁹⁶ Popular usage of ‘wolfish’ to describe savagery/brutality in mankind is demonstrated in the phrase *Homo homini lupus est* (‘man is wolf to man’), first attributed to Plautus’ *Asinaria* (195BC).

⁵⁹⁷ Daniëlli, ‘*Wulf, Min Wulf*’, 515.

⁵⁹⁸ Daniëlli sums up this reputation in her description of the wolf as ‘... a kenning well known to the audience that would be used to indicate the cruelty and destruction that was an integral part of the heroic times ... The *Edda*, the *Volsungasaga* and other Old Norse myths, combined with the terms from ancient Norse and Anglo-Saxon legal texts make it very clear that ... *Wulf* stands for war, violence, treason, crime, cruelty, blood revenge, shape shifting, and bestial behaviour’, (Ibid., 515 and 522.) Crossley-Holland similarly observed, ‘no other monster so embodied destruction’, along with Jesch, who writes ‘The wolf means death, destruction, anything opposite to humanity’. Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Norse Myths* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 193; Jesch, ‘Eagles, Ravens and Wolves’, 278.

is therefore an adversary to be feared.⁵⁹⁹ The stripping of corpses' armour and valuables has a long literary tradition, from *The Iliad* to the margins of the Bayeux Tapestry. The wolf-like berserkirs are described scavenging in lines 159a–61b of *The Battle of Maldon*:

<i>Eode þa gesyrwed secg to þam eorle;</i>	Then an armed man went towards the earl;
<i>he wolde þæs beornes beagas gefecgan,</i>	he wished to seize this warrior's bracelets,
<i>reaf and hringas and gerenod swurd.</i>	Take plunder and rings and ornamented sword.

A similar account can be found in *Genesis A* 2013b–17b which describes the sacking of Sodom and Gomorra, wherein the plundering Elamites are referred to as *herewulfas* ('war-wolves'). This passage is analysed in chapter one pp.38–42 and is reproduced here for ease of reference:

<i>We þæt soð magon</i>	We can relate that true history further,
<i>secgan furður, hwelc siððan wearð</i>	as to what was the fate of the
<i>æfter þæm gehnæste herewulfa sið,</i>	war-wolves after the battle,
<i>þara þe læddon Loth and leoda god,</i>	who carried off Lot and the goods of the people,
<i>suðmonna sinc, sigore gulpon.</i>	the treasures of the Southmen, and exulted in victory.

Another example of battlefield scavenging occurs in *Beowulf* 1210a–14a, which describes the history of the *breostgewaedu ond beah* ('mail-shirt and ring') that the grateful Hrothgar bestows upon the hero after his defeat of Grendel. The *scop* refers to the body of the item's original owner coming into the possession of his enemy, who *wæl reafeden æfter guðsceare* ('plundered the corpse after the battle-carnage'):

<i>Gehwearf þa in Francna fæþm feorh cyninges</i>	The king's corpse passed into the possession
	of the Franks,
<i>breostgewædu ond se beah somod</i>	the mail-shirt and the ring together;
<i>wysan wigfreca wæl reafeden</i>	less worthy warriors plundered the fallen
<i>æfter guðsceare. Geata leode</i>	after the battle-carnage; the people of the Geats
<i>hreawic heoldon.</i>	controlled the place of slaughter.

The approach of the unknown

The charge of the scavenging Viking-wolves bears strong similarities to the approach of Grendel (*ða com of more under misthleopum Grendel gongan, godes yrre bær*)⁶⁰⁰ with its

⁵⁹⁹ This display of prowess is similar to the way in which individuals in Norse poetry are 'followed' by wolves and ravens, indicating their status as victorious warriors and their ability to 'feed' their attendant scavengers.

⁶⁰⁰ 'Then came from the moor under misty cliffs Grendel walking, God's wrath he bore', (*Beowulf* 710a–11b).

powerful alliteration, the feeling of dread and the Vikings' unstoppable, inexorable approach.⁶⁰¹ Lapidge's *Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror* is a valuable study on the effectiveness of Grendel's approach, wherein he argues that the *scop* deliberately plays upon two innate human fears – firstly, the fear of the unknown, and secondly, the *approach* of the unknown.⁶⁰² These two fears are equally applicable to the Beasts of Battle, and it is very likely that they are deliberately portrayed in a dark and mysterious manner to enhance their frightfulness and to keep the audience from becoming familiar with or indifferent to the theme.

In *Beowulf* we do not gain a complete picture of Grendel's physical appearance until we have read the entire poem.⁶⁰³ The *scop* withholds this information and feeds it to the audience piece by piece, deliberately keeping his monster in the dark and difficult to envisage.⁶⁰⁴ Lapidge writes:

Fear of the unknown is one of the most innate and primeval of all human instincts ... It is because the monster lies beyond our comprehension, because we cannot visualise it at all, that its approach is one of the most terrifying moments in English literature.⁶⁰⁵

While the wolf, raven and eagle are identified in some of the Beasts of Battle passages by physical characteristics such as *urigfeðera* ('dewy-feathered', *Elene* 29a), *saluwigpadan* ('dark plumaged', *Brunanburh* 61a) and *græghama* ('the grey-coated one', *Finnsburh* 6a), these terms were most likely part of a set of formulas that the *scop* could draw upon at need, and do little to dispel the beasts' shadowy nature. Interestingly, the *Beowulf* *scop* identifies the Beasts of Battle only as (*wonna*) *hfren*, *earn* and *wulf*, keeping detail to a minimum in line with the dearth of clues as to Grendel's physical form. The combination of the unknown qualities of the beasts and the inexorability of their approach constitutes a nightmarish scenario equal to the

⁶⁰¹ Britton, 'The Characterization of the Vikings,' 86. See chapter one pp.51–4 for a discussion of the Viking/wolf juxtaposition in *The Battle of Maldon*. Ryan similarly writes that Grendel and the Beasts of Battle can be seen as interchangeable, pointing to *Beowulf* lines 650–1 in which 'shadowy shapes of darkness came stalking', (Ryan, 'Othin in England', 480).

⁶⁰² Michael Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', 373–402. Lapidge bases his argument on robust psychological studies, including Freud's studies on fear and William James' *Principles of Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1890), in which the author identifies one of the characteristics of horror as glimpsing 'moving figures half discerned' (v.2, p.419). See also Graham Davey, Angus McDonald and Bradley Reimann, 'A cross-cultural study of animal fears', *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 36 (1998): 735–50.

⁶⁰³ We learn the monster's name comparatively early in the poem (line 102b) – Lapidge suggests this is a deliberate strategy of the poet to identify without describing, noting that the name itself means nothing and gives no clue to the creature's physical appearance. 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', 378.

⁶⁰⁴ '... The *Beowulf* poet's oblique and allusive presentation of Grendel is a crucial feature of his art ... [the poet] is careful to protect our (and Beowulf's) sense of the monster's incomprehensible nature'. *Ibid.*, 377, 382.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 383.

approach of Grendel. One difference to recognise when comparing the treatment of Grendel and the Beasts of Battle is that after the build-up of tension and fear in the early stanzas of *Beowulf*, we experience a denouement when Grendel so spectacularly bursts into the hall, slaughtering and gorging himself upon his human victims. As the wolf, raven and eagle are never actually described feasting on the slain in Old English poetry, we can assume that they were a device to build rather than resolve tension – the *scop*'s audience has to wait until the battle is won or lost for relief.⁶⁰⁶

The Beasts of Battle as Death personified

The Beasts of Battle can also be interpreted as a poetic representation of Death, moving the theme well into the realm of the symbolic.⁶⁰⁷ Rather than a cowed figure wielding a scythe, Death comes by wing or on four paws to tear at the bodies of the recently-slain.⁶⁰⁸ Many of the associations discussed in earlier chapters continue to apply if the beasts are read as a manifestation of Death – fear, fate and the sense of inexorability. The connection between the *Exodus wælceasega* ('chooser of the slain') and Valkyries also makes strong sense if the raven is seen in this light, as the Valkyries themselves play the role of Death in Norse folklore when they guide fallen heroes from the battlefield to their reward in Valhalla.

Animals in Old English poetry can be interpreted as abstract symbols, with one possible reading of Grendel being a symbol for sickness.⁶⁰⁹ The Beasts of Battle might also be interpreted as a symbol of corruption and decay, although the worm was more likely to be employed for this role (see chapter two pp.79–83). Whether abstracts such as Death and Corruption are seen as 'monstrous' is open to discussion, but they are certainly both feared. The personified Death has been portrayed in widely different ways, from the terrifying, silent figure in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* to the gentle, persuasive motif in Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*. Assuming that the Beasts of Battle provoked a similarly varied response in the *scop*'s audience, they may have been viewed by some as necessary agents of fate, while others saw them as the ultimate terror on the battlefield.

⁶⁰⁶ Once again, the subtlety employed when describing these beasts (little detail of their appearance and no description of the beasts actually feeding on corpses) serves to add to the effectiveness of the Beasts of Battle passages.

⁶⁰⁷ See Ryan, 'Othin in England', 480. Brodeur described Grendel's approach as 'A hair-raising depiction of death on the march'. A.G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 90.

⁶⁰⁸ Like modern representations of Death, the beasts themselves do not actually kill their chosen targets but appear in anticipation of their demise.

⁶⁰⁹ '[Grendel personifies] the unhealthy air from the fens invading the king's hall and carrying off his retainers one by one', from Hilda Ellis-Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 18.

The Wonders of the East

The most exotic creatures in Anglo-Saxon literature reside in *The Wonders of the East*, a book of *mirabilia* that describes a number of monstrous beings in far-off lands. This ‘cataloguing’ of the monstrous may have been one way in which the Anglo-Saxons responded to their fear of the unknown, although reading the descriptions therein, one gets the sense that they were created to entertain rather than terrify.⁶¹⁰ The fascination with exotic zoology is to a lesser degree reflected in the frequent appearance of the Beasts of Battle – despite their being familiar, everyday creatures at the time, stories of bloodthirsty beasts are undeniably entertaining, even if they appear for only half a line of poetry. Familiarity with the three beasts may explain why they are not accorded supernatural abilities in the poems (such as the panther’s ability to summon followers with its wonderful scented breath and the phoenix’s gift of rejuvenation through fire) – they generally behave as a wolf, raven and eagle should. It is all the more surprising, therefore, when these creatures display behaviour outside the norm, such as when the wolf recognises the holiness of St Edmund and protects his decapitated head from further harm.⁶¹¹

The Wonders of the East differs greatly from the Beasts of Battle passages in the detail of its descriptions.⁶¹² The cataloguist provides a number of physical and behavioural characteristics for each of the beasts (often accompanied by an illustration), as demonstrated in the following examples:

þa deor habbað eahta fet, 7 wælkyrian eagan, 7 twa heafda. Gyf hi hwylc mann gefon wile, þonne hiera lichoman þæt hy onælað.

The wild beasts [of Lentibesia] have eight feet, Valkyrian eyes, and two heads. If any person wants to catch them, then they set their bodies alight.

Deos steow næddran hafað. þa næddran habbað twa heafda, ðæra eagan scinað nihtes swa leohte swa blacern.

⁶¹⁰ This is not to say that all supernatural creatures are entertaining rather than terrifying. Malicious creatures in parallel cultures include the Celtic *banshee* and the *badb* (discussed in chapter four), while Denmark’s folklore included the *Valravn* (‘raven of the slain’), described as a raven that gains human knowledge after eating the hearts of dead warriors on the battlefield, or alternatively as a vampiric being that seeks to consume the blood of children. See Lukman, ‘The Raven Banner’, 135.

⁶¹¹ See discussion of Ælfric’s *Passion of St Edmund*, chapter three pp.99–101.

⁶¹² *Scops* ‘were not always averse to detailed portraiture of animals and birds ... though allegorical form might have encouraged the elaboration of surface detail’. From Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality’, 186.

... This place [Hascellentia] has snakes. The snakes have two heads, whose eyes shine at night as brightly as lanterns.

Eac swylce þær beoð cende Healfhundingas ða syndon hatene Conopoenas. Hi habbað horses manan 7 eoferes tuxas 7 hunda heafda, 7 heora oruð byð swylce fyres lig.

Also there [in the south of Egypt] half-dogs are engendered that are called *Conopenae*. They have the mane of a horse, the tusks of a boar and dogs' heads, and their breath is like a fiery flame.

Ðær beoð akende men, ða beoð fiftyne fotu lange 7 hi habbað hwit lic y tu neb on anum heafde, fet 7 cneowu swiðe read, y lange nosu y sweart feax.

There are men who are born there [in Locotheo] that are fifteen feet tall and have a white body and two faces on one head, exceedingly red feet and knees, and long noses and black hair.

Ðonne syndon on Brixonte wildeor þa hattan Lertices. Hi habbað eoseles earan 7 sceapes wulle 7 fugles fet.

Then there are wild animals on the Brixonte [river] that are called *Lertices*. They have the ears of an ass, sheep's wool, and bird's feet.

On ðære dune bið þæt fugelcynn þe Grifus hatte. Ða fugelas habbað feower fet 7 hryðeres tægl 7 earnes heafod.

On that mountain is the type of bird that is called *Gryphon*. These birds have four feet and a cow's tail, and an eagle's head.

The detail in which these exotic creatures are described highlights the fact that the physical particulars of the Beasts of Battle are left somewhat to the imagination. As discussed above, they are only vaguely sketched, adding to their mystery and terror.⁶¹³ The difference between the beings in *The Wonders of the East* and the Beasts of Battle is that the latter group exists in reality – an audience that hears tell of supernatural creatures such as the *Conopenae* and *Lertices* knows that they are unlikely to ever encounter them, but a poem containing the slaughter-greedy wolf, raven and eagle is all the more effective as these creatures are potentially a part of the everyday human interaction with the natural world.

⁶¹³ The monsters of *The Wonders of the East* are described much more thoroughly than Grendel, yet the latter is more frightening due to his shadowy nature (even though his physical appearance may have been less hideous than, say, the dog-headed *Conopenae*).

Outlawry and the Beasts of Battle

Despite the myriad dangers of the natural environment, violent death in Anglo-Saxon England was more likely to come at the hands of a human, whether a desperate outlaw or a foreign soldier.⁶¹⁴ Unfriendly humans, however, were a known danger, while the creatures of the wild were unfamiliar, mysterious and therefore more feared. As discussed above, wolves are juxtaposed with the *Maldon* Vikings to enhance their terror through the assimilation of the beast's most fearful associations. This technique is also used in the poetry to impart outlaws with similar associations. *Wulf* is employed as a kenning for outlaws or used in reference to outlawry in *Maxims I* and *II*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and numerous Old Norse lays.⁶¹⁵

Exile and outlawry are recurrent themes used to great elegiac effect across the Old English poetic canon. *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* all dwell on the experience of exile and longing. Some of the relevant poems are in first-person and demonstrate the Anglo-Saxon view of exile as a fate arguably worse than death – to live friendless and outside of society was a subject of lamentation. As such, the wolf, a symbol of the destruction of civilisation and 'anything outside the human world and culture',⁶¹⁶ became associated with exile and outlawry, a connection not in evidence with the other two Beasts of Battle.

The wolf is equated with outlaws in lines 146a–7b of *Maxims I*:

<i>Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to gefaren,</i>	Friendless, the unhappy man
	takes wolves as companions,
<i>fela fæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð.</i>	a beast most treacherous. Very often
	that companion will rip him apart. ⁶¹⁷

The *fela fæcne deor* ('beasts most treacherous') are the only comrades given to a man without friends, with the promise of violent betrayal due to their treacherous (or wolfish) nature.

Treachery is a human trait and cannot exist in the animal world, yet the wolf, through

⁶¹⁴ Neville writes that 'however unpleasant, the natural environment was less hostile than the human environment. Yet it is represented as a power more terrifying than human threats.' From 'Representations of the Natural World', 8.

⁶¹⁵ It is interesting to speculate upon the word 'outlaw', with its Old Norse origin (*út-laga*). Perhaps this is not a mere borrowing of vocabulary from a neighbouring culture, but a deliberate reference to Viking ravagers, who committed their outrages 'outside' Anglo-Saxon law. Through this association, outlaws in England would be feared and despised as much as the foreign ravagers. See also *anhaga* in Bosworth-Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 42.

⁶¹⁶ Jesch, 'Eagles, Ravens and Wolves', 278.

⁶¹⁷ The passage continues with a description of the insatiety of the wolf – it circles the grave with lamentations not for the dead, but for its own unceasing hunger (see pp.63–4).

portrayals such as the above, has come to acquire this unpleasant association. Wolves in Old Norse poetry could also symbolise betrayal or not respecting treaties, as seen in stanza 8 of *The Lay of Atli* (*Atlakviða*), where the protagonists receive a ring entwined with wolf's hair, warning them that they will soon be betrayed.⁶¹⁸

The subtlety of this message – a ring wound with wolf's hair – demonstrates the potency of the wolf's association with treachery. This lightness of touch is more often seen in Old English Beasts of Battle passages, wherein the glimpse of a wolf's coat or flash of an eagle's dewy feathers was enough to summon a raft of associations, both positive and negative.⁶¹⁹

The perceived treachery of wolves is evoked again in stanza 35 of *Sigrdrífumál* from the *Elder Edda*.

<i>þat ræð ec pér it tíunda, at þú trúir aldri</i>	This counsel I give, that you should never trust
<i>várom vargdropa,</i>	the oath of an outlaw's son,
<i>hvárstu ert bróður bani,</i>	whether he [the outlaw] is his brother's bane
<i>eða hafir þú feldan föður:</i>	or whether he killed his father:
<i>úlfr er í ungom syni.</i> ⁶²⁰	a wolf often sleeps in his son. ⁶²¹

The wolf is again evoked in reference to outlawry in *Maxims II* 19b–20a.⁶²²

<i>wulf sceal on bearowe,</i>	The wolf must live in the wood,
<i>earm anhaga.</i>	a miserable recluse.

The wolf's solitary status is presented as an absolute, one of many divinely-ordained laws of the natural world listed in the *Maxims*. Similarly, lines 42a–3b of the same poem suggest that monsters (such as Grendel) have no choice – he is condemned to exile in the fens and by leaving his realm and entering Heorot he is acting unnaturally:

<i>þyrs sceal on fenne gewunian</i>	The monster must live in the fen,
<i>ana innan lande.</i>	solitary within the land.

One notable effect of the portrayal of outlaws as wolves was that the association went both ways. While outlaws were seen to possess wolfish traits such as greed and rapacity, wolves (as

⁶¹⁸ Daniëlli, 'Wulf, *Min Wulf*', 513.

⁶¹⁹ See discussion of Anglo-Saxon subtlety in the use of Beasts of Battle on p.126.

⁶²⁰ Pulsiano, Phillip and Wolf, Kirsten, 'The "Hwelp" in *Wulf and Eadwacer*', *ELN* 28 (1991): 4.

⁶²¹ Lines 16–17 of *Wulf and Eadwacer* have been interpreted similarly: *uncerne earne hwelp bireð wulf to wuda* ('our wretched whelp Wulf bears to the woods'), with the suggestion that the child is destined to 'follow the father in the tracks of outlawry', (Ibid., 6).

⁶²² As noted in Greenfield, 'Theme of "Exile"', 201.

portrayed in the poetry) assimilated human characteristics such as treachery, cunning,⁶²³ malice and pathos. As such, reading the Beasts of Battle wolf as a desperate outlaw lurking in the forest associates the scavenger with human motivations and adds greatly to its menace.

The link between wolves and human outlawry was so pervasive that it was written into Norwegian law, as described by Salisbury:

In the early Middle Ages, domestic animals and their owners were linked in mutual responsibility, but wild animals were exempt from such ties. The Norwegian laws said, 'Bears and wolves are outlawed everywhere, for no man wants to be answerable for their doings'. By outlawing these animals, the Norwegians placed them outside the human community, exempt from its bonds of mutual obligation.⁶²⁴

The idea of placing beasts outside the human community by applying a human legal status is problematic – calling a wolf or bear an 'outlaw' would appear to label it human by association. This treatment of animals as human in the eyes of the law brings to mind the medieval practice of prosecuting animals in a court of law, often resulting in exile or execution of the animal.⁶²⁵ Outlaws were branded *skóggarmaðr* (literally 'forest man') in Old Norse law, imparting to them a strong association with the forest-dwelling wolf, including its status as a quarry.⁶²⁶

A short analysis of *Wulf and Eadwacer* shows how deeply-rooted was the association between wolf and outlaw. The poem is concerned with the nature of exile, the popular interpretation being that the narrator is pining for her 'Wulf' to come and rescue her and their *hwelp* from the hated Eadwacer. Several critics suggest that 'Wulf' is a kenning for outlaw⁶²⁷ based upon Old

⁶²³ The narrator of *Deor* tells of Iormunrekk with his 'wolfish mind', also mentioned in stanza 2 of *Guthrún's Lament*: 'a wolfish man indeed', (Daniëlli, 'Wulf, Min Wulf', 510.)

⁶²⁴ Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 39. Similarly, the term *wluesheved* ('wolf's head') is used to describe an outlaw in the laws of Edward the Confessor. Baring-Gould, *The Book of Werewolves*, 129.

⁶²⁵ See Edward Evans, *The Criminal Persecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (London: Heinemann, 1906). Baring-Gould writes that the sentence for an Anglo-Saxon outlaw was 'he shall be driven away as a wolf, and chased so far as men chase wolves farthest.' The outlaw in this case is associated with a characteristic of the wolf that is not seen in its manifestation as a Beast of Battle, but most likely reflects the wolf in reality – that of a harried, hunted animal, unwelcome wherever it goes. Baring-Gould, *The Book of Werewolves*, 49.

⁶²⁶ 'The name itself [*skóggarmaðr*] implies that the person was an unrecognised, non-social being identified with and absorbed into the wilderness, hence the term *vargr* 'wolf' to designate his outlaw status. In effect, this punishment amounted to a death sentence, for a *skóggarmaðr* could be killed with impunity (i.e., hunted down as a wolf). From Pulsiano and Wolf, 'Wulf and Eadwacer', 3.

⁶²⁷ Daniëlli, 'Wulf, Min Wulf', 508; Pulsiano and Wolf, 'Wulf and Eadwacer', 1–9; William Schofield, 'Signy's Lament,' *PMLA* 17 (1902): 262–95; Peter Orton, 'An approach to *Wulf and Eadwacer*', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1985): 223–58. Daniëlli gives a further example of the use of the term 'wolf' for outlaws in Old Norse: 'The words *ulfr* and *vargr* were used for an outlaw and

Norse analogues in which the son of an outlaw is referred to in a similar manner, including *The Short Lay of Sigurth*:

Brynhild advises her husband Gunnar not only to kill Sigurth but also his little son, ‘the cub of the wolf’... Moreover, the compound *vargdropi* ... means ‘wolf-dropping’ or ‘the cub of a wolf’, as a reference to the son of an outlaw.⁶²⁸

The legal status of a *hwelp* or *vargdropi* is expanded upon in the section on inheritance (*Arfapattr*) in the Old Norse *Codex Regius*, although the term is not used to describe the son of an outlaw in existing Anglo-Saxon law codes.⁶²⁹

þat barn er oc eigi arfgengt er kona su getr er sec er orðin scogar maðr. þo at hon geti með sinom boanda osekiom oc heitir sa besingr. þat barn er oc eigi arfgengt er sa maðr getr er secr er orðin scogar maðr. þoat hann geti við sini kono siálfs. sa maþr heitir vargdrops.

‘That child is also not a lawful heir got by a woman under penalty as a full outlaw, even though she gets him by her husband who is not under penalty, and he is called a “cribbling”. That child is also not a legitimate heir got by a man under penalty as a full outlaw, even though he has the child by his own wife. Such a child is called a “wolf’s cub”.’⁶³⁰

A reading of *Wulf and Eadwacer* with reference to the above strengthens the interpretation that ‘the female speaker of the poem has a child (*hwelp*) got by a man (Wulf) under penalty of full outlawry’.⁶³¹ The outlaw’s status is further linked to that of a wolf by the narrator’s concern that Wulf will be slaughtered *willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð* (‘if he approaches a band of men, they will kill him’). The exile Wulf is thus reduced to the level of a hunted quarry, and, like his namesake, he will be killed if he dares leave the wilderness to approach a band of men (*þreat*), representatives of civilisation.⁶³² Eadwacer himself could be read as a symbol of civilisation and authority, Wulf as a symbol of the wild and outlawry, and the narrator in the hopeless situation of being caught in-between the two states. The linkage of the wolf in *Wulf and Eadwacer* to outlawry and human violence may have resonated with hearers of the Beasts of Battle passages who were also familiar with this poem, strengthening the negative associations of the wolf, its status as an outsider and perhaps hinting (once again) at an Old Norse connection.

Sigmund’s ancestor Sigi was called a wolf because he had killed a slave ... Sigmund and his son Sinfjötli lived as werewolves in the forest for some time’ (*Wulf, Min Wulf*, 507).

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 507.

⁶²⁹ Pulsiano and Wolf, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, 3.

⁶³⁰ Trans. Daniëlli, *Wulf, Min Wulf*, 507.

⁶³¹ Pulsiano and Wolf, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, 5.

⁶³² Ibid., 6–7.

Grendel as outlaw

Arguably a sentient being, Grendel is seen as terrifying because he refuses to acknowledge human law or treaties and is thus impossible to deal with (154b–8b):

<i>sibbe ne wolde</i>	He did not want peace
<i>wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga,</i>	with any man of the Danish contingent,
<i>feorhbealo feorran, fea þingian</i>	to desist in life-destruction, to settle it with payment,
<i>ne þær nænig witenas wenan þorfte</i>	none of the counsellors had any need to hope
<i>beorhtre bote to banan folmum.</i>	for noble recompense from the slayer's hands.

As *Caines cynne*, Grendel is descended from the original outlaw banished by God and fears no human consequences for his outrages. In lines 154b–8b the *scop* makes the point that Grendel does not pay *wergild* (monetary compensation for murder), seemingly a crime more heinous than the murder itself.⁶³³ In line 1352b Grendel *wræclastas træd* ('trod the path of an outlaw'). In line 449 we are told he *eteð unmurnlice* ('eats unmournfully'), while *fæhðe ond fyrene* ('violence and viciousness') *no mearn fore* ('grieved him not'), because he *wæs to fæst on þam* ('was too entrenched in these'). The above criteria used to label Grendel an outlaw apply almost equally to the Beasts of Battle. While the intelligent Grendel deliberately refuses to treat with Hrothgar and chooses not to adhere to human law, the non-sentient beasts *cannot* adhere to the law. Whether or not they are animals acting only on instinct, however, is muddled by anthropomorphised depictions such as their discussing the feast in *Beowulf* 3021a–7b, and human-like reactions to battlefield slaughter such as *weorces gefeah* ('[they] rejoiced in [their] work') in *Elene* 110b.⁶³⁴ *Beowulf* 3021a–7b also demonstrates a lack of conscience in the beasts, much like Grendel's 'unmournful' lack of regret for the human lives he takes. Like Grendel, the Beasts of Battle fear no consequences or human retribution for their acts, existing as they do outside of the law.

When Grendel bursts through the door of Heorot he compounds his crimes by ripping a sleeping warrior limb-from-limb (*slæpendne rinc slat unwearnum*) and drinking his blood (*blod edrum dranc*), a vampiric act specifically prohibited in scripture (see pp.93–4).⁶³⁵

⁶³³ 'According to Anglo-Saxon (and Germanic) law the household of a murdered person was entitled to monetary compensation ('wergild') from the murderer. This system saved society from the endless bloodletting of reciprocal vengeance. Grendel's not paying wergild confirms his utter disdain for human decency, just as Hrothgar's generous wergild payment (ll. 459–72) confirms his civilised status.' Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson, *Beowulf: An Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 53(n).

⁶³⁴ While the anthropomorphised Beasts of Battle have a voice, Grendel remains silent, one of many characteristics that make him antithetical to everything human.

⁶³⁵ The closest parallel to Grendel's vampirism among the fourteen Beasts of Battle passages occurs in *Genesis A* 2159b–61b, wherein the *nefugas* ('birds of prey') are described as *blodige* ('blood stained'), glutted with the slaughter of armies. See also the note on the blood-drinking *Valravn*, p.169.

Dismemberment, as reflected in English legal codes from the Anglo-Saxon period well into the early modern era, is arguably the most shameful capital punishment, reserved for the worst criminals or rebels against the crown. William Wallace, for example, was hanged, emasculated, eviscerated, beheaded, then cut into parts, with his head displayed on a pike on London Bridge and his limbs sent to four different parts of the kingdom as an example to others. Grendel's tearing apart of the sleeping warrior is thus a humiliation and echoes what would have happened when the Beasts of Battle consumed corpses in the aftermath of slaughter. Even if the slain warrior had not been dismembered in the battle itself, the beasts (particularly the wolf) would have been capable of chewing off a limb in the act of devouring the corpse. Again, the beasts are never described feasting on the slain in detail, and the *scops* certainly never go as far as detailing the removal of limbs from corpses, but this would have been the reality in the aftermath of battles, and a fact known to the *scop*'s audience.

To conclude this chapter, the association with fear is a key reason why the wolf, raven and eagle were seen as suitable for their roles as Beasts of Battle. This fear can be attributed to their dwelling in the wild and the Anglo-Saxon response to creatures therein. Their regular incursions onto the slaughterfield to feast on human carrion can be read as the crossing of a border between the wilderness and civilisation. Fear of the beasts is further intensified by their association with darkness, referring both to the element in which they dwell and their dark coats or plumage. Closely associated with darkness is the link to the monstrous, with the beasts comparable to Grendel and the fantastic creatures of *The Wonders of the East*. The *scops*' juxtaposition of human and animal traits, wherein humans are described as bestial and beasts are endowed with human characteristics and motivations, is demonstrated chiefly by the wolf's synonymy with battle-frenzied *berserkirs* and outlaws dwelling on the fringes of society. Of the many associations of the Beasts of Battle discussed in this thesis, that of 'fear' is arguably the most palpable, with a skilful *scop* taking full advantage of this association to thrill and fascinate his audience while driving forward the action of the narrative.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to understand the purpose of the frequent inclusion of the Beasts of Battle in so many of the surviving Old English poems. To answer this question, the ways in which an Anglo-Saxon audience may have responded to the theme have been examined, along with the associations the theme may have held. This is an important area of scholarship because it aims to shed light on the compositional process and understand some of the choices made by Anglo-Saxon *scops*, moving the argument beyond the dictates of oral-formulaic theory. The research presented here advances the understanding of the theme not only in Anglo-Saxon studies, but in related fields such as medieval, folkloric and animal studies.

Much of the theory about associative meaning must by necessity be speculative in nature due to the challenges outlined in the introduction to this thesis.⁶³⁶ This includes the unstable nature of poetry from the oral tradition, the scarcity of surviving material and the difficulty of dating the texts with any measure of accuracy. This thesis has undertaken, however, to use the little surviving material that is available to gain an impression of an audience's possible reactions to the theme. Firstly, it has been beneficial to examine my own reaction to the Beasts of Battle – after all, something about these beasts was intriguing enough to warrant further research of this topic – yet this reaction is difficult to define. The poetically-described sight or sound of the wolf, raven, (and to a lesser extent) eagle still contain echoes of meaning, elusive but worth pursuing: a sense of mystery, awe at some of nature's 'wildest' creatures, and a barely-perceptible feeling of trepidation.⁶³⁷ We can speculate that over a millennium ago the Anglo-Saxons would have had similar, but stronger, reactions to the theme due to their living closer to a warrior past, the realities of living in an untamed, hostile environment with both animal and human threats lurking in the wilderness, and their more meaningful relationship with the animal world. The frequent poetic linkage of the theme with scenes of slaughter further strengthens the association with trepidation or fear.

Major points and original contributions to research

Preparation for this thesis involved researching and pulling together all (to my knowledge) of the existing scholarship on the Beasts of Battle, and examining different views to discover

⁶³⁶ See p.10.

⁶³⁷ Gibson writes of this elusive feeling of trepidation: 'Despite our "civilised" condition the unremembered animal past can rise within us, as when we're wakened by the snarls and sharp yips of raccoons in a darkened garden outside the window. There's absolutely no danger, but the sheer animality of those voices threaten us'. *Bedside Book of Beasts*, 89.

areas worthy of further consideration. It provides an overview of the current state of research in this area and suggests new directions for future research by opening up the topic to reinvigorated discussion.

To summarise the major points raised throughout the thesis, chapter one argues that the primary association of the theme is that of impending slaughter and doom. This is not a surprising conclusion in itself and agrees with the consensus of scholars since Magoun's 1955 article on the Beasts of Battle.⁶³⁸ This argument is expanded, however, by establishing that slaughter/doom is only one possible association of many, laying the framework for the exploration of multiple associative connections throughout the thesis. The thesis contributes to research in this area by seeking to expand the number of possible interpretations of the Anglo-Saxon wolf, raven and eagle whilst being careful not to constrict our understanding of the beasts with a single associative label.

Chapter one also includes an investigation of the elegiac tone of the theme, created through the *scops*' choice of vocabulary, placement in the narrative and linkage with the concept of fate. It is argued that the beasts can be read as agents of fate or personifications of death, functioning much like the modern-day Grim Reaper. The placement of the theme before, during or after battle is treated as a deliberate strategy of the *scops* to create an atmosphere of doom or elegy. The 'naturalistic' placement of the beasts is explored in detail with the purpose of understanding the effects of realistic and unrealistic usage and how this may have altered an Anglo-Saxon audience's reaction to the theme.

Chapter one concludes with a thorough analysis of the fourteen relevant passages with a focus on their association with doom, fate and elegiac effect. Associative connections across the poems are also explored, as we cannot discount the possibility that the Beasts of Battle passages reference each other. It is impossible, however, to know if the *Finnsburh scop*, for example, would have been familiar with the appearances of the beasts in *Elene* or *Judith*.

Chapter two deliberately contradicts some of the associations raised in chapter one by arguing that another possible function of the Beasts of Battle was their association with scorn, exultation and victory. If the beasts are invoked to create a doom-laden sense of anticipation of slaughter or to mourn the fallen after defeat in battle, it follows that the reverse applies for the victors. The beasts, therefore, can also be used to generate excited anticipation about upcoming conflict and to celebrate victory on the field. Furthermore, the reality of how the

⁶³⁸ See Magoun, 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle', 81–90.

beasts will despoil the corpses adds a feeling of scorn for the dead, or a final insult for the unburied foe.

This argument is developed through an investigation of what it would actually have meant for a corpse to be deliberately left unburied in Anglo-Saxon times and the significance of reducing a human being to the level of carrion meat. The argument is put forward that the beasts are not always presented as impartial, contradicting their traditionally-accepted role by previous researchers as unbiased agents of fate. The celebratory and greedy ‘mood’ of the beasts is explored through the vocabulary employed by the *scops* such as *grædigne* (‘greedy’) and *fus* (‘eager’), along with the various noises we are told they make in anticipation or celebration of the feast.

Chapter two also argues that the celebratory beasts can be read as skaldic, or as a device to praise the victors of battle. This concept is examined further in chapter four, wherein the ways in which Old Norse heroes were lauded are explored, with descriptions of wolf, raven and eagle companions that follow the warriors in anticipation of a meal. Chapter two includes a detailed analysis of the intended purpose of the ‘blithe-hearted’ morning raven in *Beowulf* – although not strictly adhering to the Beasts of Battle criteria, this raven is almost certainly related to the theme and is used to great effect in lightening the mood of the narrative and praising the victorious hero.

Chapter three seeks to demonstrate that the Beasts of Battle theme was malleable and adaptable to change, with the wolf, raven and eagle gaining a rich vein of allegorical meaning and new associative connections after the conversion of England. It explores the ways in which Judeo-Christian narratives of the beasts, often very different to pagan-Germanic representations, might have altered the reaction of an Anglo-Saxon audience to this theme. The wolf, for example, gained Christian associations with uncleanness and the diabolical, no doubt strengthening the audience’s distaste for the animal when it was evoked by a *scop* in anticipation of battle. Not all of the imported associations, however, were negative – chapter three includes a large amount of positive imagery from the Christian tradition such as miraculous intervention, where one of these beasts acts against its savage nature to serve or protect a Christian figure such as St Edmund or St Benedict.

After a discussion of similar usages of the Beasts of Battle theme in Old Norse and Celtic literature, chapter four argues that associating the theme with foreign/enemy peoples (such as Viking raiders with their wolf-coats and raven banners) would have impacted upon an Anglo-Saxon audience’s response to this theme. Old Norse elements can be traced in the Beasts of

Battle passage in *Exodus* 162a–8b with compounds including *cwyldrof*, *wælceasega* and *drihtneum* suggesting an Anglo-Saxon taste for the neighbouring tradition.⁶³⁹ Further contributions to research on this topic include an exploration of the ways in which the Anglo-Saxon beasts are presented in a more subtle manner than the Old Norse and Celtic equivalents, making the detail of the passages more meaningful and increasing the importance of their associative connections.

Chapter five focuses on the concept of ‘the wild’ and how the Beasts of Battle are one of many human fears contained therein. The beasts exist outside of human control in a belligerent natural environment that would have been regarded as a constant menace by Anglo-Saxons venturing beyond the safety of their habitation. An original contribution to research in this chapter is the employment of the image of a ‘border’ between the wild and human civilisation, reading the appearances of the beasts on the battlefield as a violent incursion over this border. Conversely, human beings can be seen as crossing the border between civilisation and the wild when they go to war.

The fear of the unknown is reflected in the three beasts’ lack of descriptive detail and association with darkness, while the Anglo-Saxon fear of (and fascination with) the monstrous is reflected in texts such as *The Wonders of the East*. Chapter five expands upon Lapidge’s exploration of how the *Beowulf* scop used the monster Grendel to play upon basic human fears, applying this concept to the Beasts of Battle. Finally, the ‘wild’ or ‘outside’ status of the beasts is linked with human outlawry, particularly the wolf which came to represent the outlaw’s state with associations of savagery, treachery and fear.

Future research opportunities

In writing this thesis it has been necessary to confine my field of interest to the theme of the Beasts of Battle itself and relevant related areas of study that have associative connections with the theme. As a result, there are a number of research opportunities that have fallen outside the scope of my argument but are certainly worthy of investigation.

Firstly, the analysis of the wolf, raven and eagle is confined to literary appearances only, but research has revealed references to some fascinating artwork which may or may not depict them in their roles of Beasts of Battle. Apart from a treasury of appearances in the artwork of illustrated manuscripts, the beasts are depicted in other mediums such as the Bayeux Tapestry (touched upon in this thesis but not discussed in detail) and a host of archaeological treasures

⁶³⁹ See chapter four pp.130–5.

such as the Sutton Hoo purse lid, the Anlaf Coin, the Gammin Casket, the Heggen prow-ornament and the Ramsunaberget Runestone. There is an opportunity for these representations to be analysed in close conjunction with the surviving literary sources to further enhance our understanding of how the Anglo-Saxons viewed and responded to these beasts.

Secondly, the focus of this thesis has been on the literature of the Anglo-Saxons and neighbouring or imported cultures that may have had an impact upon the theme – Germanic, Old Norse, Celtic and Judeo-Christian. To build a better understanding of general responses to the three beasts, however, a future research opportunity could be to expand this investigation to non-European cultures. Similar stories of the raven and the flood, for example, have been shown to exist in Arabic folklore by Korotayev and in Native American folklore by Rooth.⁶⁴⁰

Lastly, there is an opportunity to trace the development of the theme after the Anglo-Saxon era. A summary of some later usages of the theme has been included below, some of them hundreds of years apart, but this sampling is by no means exhaustive. A future researcher could examine what effect the Norman invasion and subsequent decline of the Old English language had upon the theme and attempt to trace the final usage of the wolf, raven and/or eagle in their role as Beasts of Battle, whether it be in Old, Middle or Modern English.

Positive versus negative imagery

After viewing the beasts through the interpretative lenses of doom, elegy, scorn, victory, the Christian context, neighbouring cultures, fear, the wild and outlawry, the question remains as to whether we can definitively label the theme as positive or negative. Taking into account the small amount of primary material available and analysing the areas focused upon in this thesis, we must conclude that the theme is overwhelmingly negative with some positive exceptions. This thesis argues that the enduring perception of negativity around the wolf, raven and eagle adds to the effectiveness of those few episodes in which they are portrayed in a positive light, for example the blithe-hearted raven of *Beowulf* 1799a–1803a, or beasts in scripture acting against their savage nature in miraculous obedience to holy figures.

One only has to look at modern-day responses to these creatures to see evidence of continuing negativity – the wolf in particular has been harried to extinction in many parts of the world (including Britain) due, in part, to its negative perception in the psyche and folklore of many

⁶⁴⁰ Andrey Korotayev et al, 'Return of the White Raven: Postdiluvial Reconnaissance Motif A2234.1.1 Reconsidered', *Journal of American Folklore* 119 (2006): 203–35. Anna Rooth, *The Raven and the Carcass. An Investigation of a Motif in the Deluge Myth in Europe, Asia and North America* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1962).

cultures, including the medieval notion of lycanthropy.⁶⁴¹ The raven, due to its dark appearance, intelligence and cultural position as a harbinger of doom continues to carry fearful associations, as famously illustrated in 1845 by Poe's raven tapping at the window.⁶⁴² The strength of the raven's negative associations is tangible in this 18th-century quote from George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon:

This bird [the raven] has always been famous; but its bad reputation has been owing, most probably, to its being confounded with other birds, and loaded with their ill qualities. It has ever been regarded most disgusting. Filth and rotten carcasses, it is said, are its chief food; and when it gluts its appetite on live prey, its victims are the weak or useful animals, lambs, leverets, etc., yet it sometimes attacks the large animals with success, supplying its want of strength and agility by cunning; it plucks out the eyes of buffaloes, and then, fixing on the back, it tears off the flesh deliberately: and what renders the ferocity more detestable, it is not incited by the cravings of hunger, but by the appetite for carnage.⁶⁴³

The eagle no longer carries with it as strong a negative perception as the other two members of the Beasts of Battle triad, but (as discussed earlier) the modern-day response to vultures is likely to be more indicative of an Anglo-Saxon audience's reaction to the eagle. Perhaps the human distaste for carrion-eaters makes negative perceptions toward the three beasts inevitable, particular when they are labelled 'unclean' in our religious texts.

Usages of the theme after the Anglo-Saxon era

Although it is tempting to use the term 'theme survival' to describe the continuing usage of the wolf, raven and eagle in the centuries following the Anglo-Saxon era, this would not be strictly correct as the elements that make up the theme are constrained by the specific criteria of oral-formulism. However, a reader with a knowledge of the Beasts of Battle cannot help but associate some notable passages in later English literature with the Old English theme. It is appropriate to draw this thesis to a close with some brief examples (spread throughout the past

⁶⁴¹ Wolves were hunted to extinction in England and other parts of the world due to their taking livestock. The comparatively recent conservation movement, however, is fast changing centuries-old negative attitudes towards the wolf.

⁶⁴² Lukman writes that the raven's pecking on the window is still regarded as an omen of death in many parts of Scandinavia (from 'The Raven Banner', 135).

⁶⁴³ Buffon, Comte de Georges-Louis Leclerc, *Natural History of Birds, Fish, Insects and Reptiles* (London: H.D. Symonds, 1797).

millennium) of how the theme developed and later came to be used by some of the greatest writers of the English language.⁶⁴⁴

To begin with the close of the Anglo-Saxon era, carrion-eaters can be discerned in the Bayeux Tapestry hovering over the scene of the last stand at Hastings. As discussed in chapter four, the raven also appears on the invaders' banners earlier in the tapestry.⁶⁴⁵ The theme certainly survived the Conquest – both Laborde and Ryan note a passage in the 13th-century Middle English poem *The Owl and the Nightingale* (lines 389–90), in which the owl claims to behave like a Beast of Battle:

When bold men go to war and make their expeditions far and near, when they overrun
many peoples, performing at night their good pleasure, then I follow in their train and fly by
night in their company.⁶⁴⁶

Renoir has highlighted a 15th-century usage of the theme, or something quite like it, in lines 3712–22 of John Lydgate's *Life of Saint Alban and Saint Amphibal*.⁶⁴⁷ All of the elements are present in this passage – the wolf and eagle attend a battlefield strewn with carrion, but rather than devouring the bodies the three beasts are commanded by Christ to act against their savage nature and guard the Christian corpses from despoilment by other carrion-eaters. This passage strongly echoes the story of the wolf guarding the decapitated head of St Edmund in Ælfric's *Passion of St Edmund*.⁶⁴⁸

[The pagans] cast hem to bestis, of malis and disdeyn,
To sich as wer disposed to ravyne,
Without reverence lik an old careyn,
They ageyn hem so felly gan maligne;
But Christ Ihesu, most gracious and benygne,
To preserve his martirs bi myracle,
Ageyns panynymes hath shewid an obstacle.

⁶⁴⁴ This list of later Beasts of Battle-type usages is not an attempt to summarise ten centuries of British poetry – it is merely intended to suggest that analogues of the theme have continued to be used in one form or another well after the end of the Anglo-Saxon era.

⁶⁴⁵ See Laborde, 'The Style of *The Battle of Maldon*', 412.

⁶⁴⁶ Trans. Ryan, 'Othin in England', 478–9.

⁶⁴⁷ Alain Renoir, 'Crist Ihesu's Beasts of Battle', 455–9. Lydgate's usage of the theme is also highlighted by Honegger (*Form and Function*, 290).

⁶⁴⁸ Miraculous intervention is discussed in detail in chapter three. Both Lydgate and Ælfric's narrative involves the slaughter of a Christian or group of Christians by pagans, with carrion-eaters subsequently guarding the corpses from further harm.

A wolff cam don with sturdy violence,
 Terryble of look, and furious of cheer,
 Geyn bestis wilde to make resistance,
 Toward the seyntis that thei cam no neer,
 An egle also with persant eyn cleer,
 Planyng aloft, as all men biheeld,
 From touche of fowlis kept al day the feeld.⁶⁴⁹

It would appear that Lydgate was familiar with the theme of the Beasts of Battle and it is likely he was also familiar with the concept of miraculous intervention. Like Ælfric, he relies upon the negative associative connections of the wolf and eagle to make the beasts' unnatural obedience and restraint all the more miraculous and surprising for the reader. As Renoir writes, the dead bodies are 'spared the various and sundry desecrations usually inflicted upon the unburied victims of slaughter. The [beasts] are thus metamorphosed from harbingers of death into protectors of the faithful'.⁶⁵⁰

At least three references to the beasts can be found in Shakespeare, firstly in *Othello* (Act IV, Scene 1, lines 20–1), in which the raven's association with impending death is clear:

O, it comes o'er my memory
 As doth the raven o'er the infected house,
 Boding to all!⁶⁵¹

Cassius' speech before the Battle at Philippi in *Julius Caesar* (Act V, Scene 1, lines 79–88) contains instances of both eagles and ravens – the former read as a sign of victory while the latter are seen as heralds of impending slaughter and defeat. It is interesting to see two of our Beasts of Battle interpreted in such contrasting manner within the one passage, although eagle symbolism in Ancient Rome was very different to that of Anglo-Saxon England.

Coming from Sardis, on our former ensign
 Two mighty eagles fell, and there they perched,
 Gorging and feeding from our soldiers' hands;
 Who to Philippi here consorted us.
 This morning are they fled away and gone;

⁶⁴⁹ John Lydgate, *The Life of Saint Alban and Saint Amphibal*, ed. John E. Van Der Weshuizen (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974).

⁶⁵⁰ Renoir, 'Crist Ihesu's Beasts of Battle', 457.

⁶⁵¹ Oscar Campbell, Alfred Rothschild, Stuart Vaughan, eds., *Othello by William Shakespeare* (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), 112.

And in their steads do ravens, crows and kites
Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us,
As we were sickly prey; their shadows seem
A canopy most fatal, under which
Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost.⁶⁵²

Lady Macbeth invokes the raven as a harbinger of death as she plots the murder of Duncan in *Macbeth* (Act I, Scene 5, lines 41–3). The croaking raven adds to the sense of inevitability, being one of many devices used by Shakespeare to show the hand of fate in the chain of events leading up to the murder.

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements.⁶⁵³

To keep with the Scottish theme, *The Twa Corbies* is a ballad thought to have originated in the early 17th century, and involves a conversation between ravens who discuss breakfasting on the carcass of a slain knight. In an English version of the ballad (*The Three Ravens*), the ravens' intentions are thwarted by a loyal hound and hawk⁶⁵⁴ that guard the corpse of their master until his lover (a 'fallow doe') bears his body away for burial. The Scottish version (quoted below) is more bleak, as the knight is abandoned by his beasts and by his lover, leaving the ravens free to gorge on his corpse. The language is also more detailed and gruesome as the birds go into gleeful specifics about perching on the knight's bones, plucking out his eyes and using his hair for their nests.

As I was walking all alane,
I heard twa corbies makin a mane;
The tane unto the ither say,
'Whar sall we gang and dine the-day?'

⁶⁵² William and Barbara Rosen, eds., *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (New York: Signet Classics, 1970), 122–3.

⁶⁵³ Margaret Kortes, ed., *Macbeth* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1988), 41.

⁶⁵⁴ The rook Corbant and his wife Sharp-beak are similarly deprived of their meal by the trickery of Caxton's Reynard the Fox, who pretended to be a carcass to lure them within striking distance: 'We tasted and felte his bely / but we fonde the non no lyf / tho wente my wyf and herkened and leyde her ere to fore his mouth for to wite yf he drew his breeth whiche mysfyllle her euyl. / For the false felle foxe awayted wel his tyme and whan he sawe her so nygh hum / he caught her by the heed and boote it of'. From Norman Blake, ed., Caxton: *The History of Reynard the Fox* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 52, lines 26–34.

'In ahint yon auld fail dyke,
I wot there lies a new slain knight;
And nane do ken that he lies there,
But his hawk, his hound an his lady fair.'

'His hound is tae the huntin gane,
His hawk tae fetch the wild-fowl hame,
His lady's tain anither mate,
So we may mak oor dinner swate.'

'Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,
And I'll pike oot his bonny blue een;
Wi ae lock o his gowden hair
We'll theek oor nest whan it grows bare.'

'Mony a one for him makes mane,
But nane sall ken whar he is gane;
Oer his white banes, whan they are bare,
The wind sall blaw for evermair.'⁶⁵⁵

The chattering ravens bring to mind the Beasts of Battle passage in *Beowulf* 3020a–7b and the final stanza sits very much within the Anglo-Saxon elegiac tradition, but *The Twa Corbies* is more reminiscent of the Old Norse equivalent of the theme, particularly the ravens of *Haraldskvæði* or *Helgi Hundingsbani*.⁶⁵⁶

Perhaps the most famous raven in poetry can be found in Edgar Allen Poe's 1845 poem *The Raven*. The grief-maddened protagonist attributes familiar associations to the raven, including intelligence, stateliness, devilry, augury, a knowledge of the supernatural and a link with 'the saintly days of yore':

... Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door –

⁶⁵⁵ Arthur M. Eastman, ed., *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (W.W. Norton & Co: New York, 1970), 80.

⁶⁵⁶ See chapter four. Similarly, the gruesome detail of *The Twa Corbies* is more reflective of the Old Norse tradition than the Anglo-Saxon theme.

Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door –
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
‘Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,’ I said, ‘art sure no craven.
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore –
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!’
Quoth the raven, ‘Nevermore.’ [...]

... ‘Prophet!’ said I, ‘thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us – by that God we both adore –
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore –
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels name Lenore?’
Quoth the raven, ‘Nevermore’ ...⁶⁵⁷

Supplying us with an account of carrion-birds in a modern-era *wælstow* (‘place of slaughter’), Hector Hugh Munro (Saki) describes the crow family adapting without fuss to the horrific uproar of the Western Front. While Munro does not actually state whether the birds feed on the bodies of soldiers, it is notable that the traditional connection between the raven and the battlefield is still being made a full millennium after the end of the Anglo-Saxon era. Reading the passage below, one cannot help but be reminded of line 107b in *The Battle of Maldon*, wherein the *scop* summarises the clamour of the warring armies and the screeching/howling scavengers with the term *wæs on eorðan cyrm* (‘there was clamour on the earth’).

... The rook is normally so gun-shy and nervous where noise is concerned that the sharp banging of a barn door or the report of a toy pistol will sometimes set an entire rookery in commotion; out here I have seen him sedately busy among the refuse heaps of a battered village, with shells bursting at no great distance, and the impatient-sounding, snapping rattle of machine-guns going on all round him; for all the notice that he took he might have been in some peaceful English meadow on a sleepy Sunday afternoon. Whatever else German frightfulness may have done, it has not frightened the rook of North-Eastern France; it has made his nerves steadier than they have ever been before, and future generations of small boys, employed in scaring rooks away from the sown crops in this region, will have to invent something in the way of super-frightfulness to achieve their purpose. Crows and magpies are nesting well within the shell-swept area, and over a small

⁶⁵⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven: Tales and Poems* (London: Penguin, 2013), 292–6.

beech-copse I once saw a pair of crows engaged in hot combat with a pair of sparrow-hawks, while considerably higher in the sky, but almost directly above them, two Allied battle-planes were engaging an equal number of enemy aircraft.⁶⁵⁸

Ambiguity of multiple associations

The result of this research has been to multiply the associative possibilities of the wolf, raven and eagle, opening up this topic to further thought and discussion. The large number of associations flagged throughout this thesis leaves many questions unanswered as to the *scop*'s intentions and the audiences' reactions, but this ambiguity is not necessarily problematic – ambiguity is a desirable poetic device which expands the potential meanings of the text. Poetry, after all, should have multiple possible meanings.

One danger inherent in any research of this nature is that of over-interpretation, or finding meaning where the poet intended none. It is important to stress that the multiple associations discussed throughout this thesis are speculative, as we cannot conceivably know the *scops*' intentions or an audience member's reactions to the theme. It is possible that there are associations raised in the preceding chapters that were never made by an Anglo-Saxon reader or listener, and equally possible that the average audience member may have made no associative connection with the Beasts of Battle whatsoever. The following delightful passage by Alberto Manguel illustrates the risk of over-interpretation:

Outside my window is a cardinal. There is no way of writing this sentence without dragging in its tow whole libraries of literary allusions. The frame of the window and the margins of the page entrap the bird that serves as a sign for any bird, just as any bird serves as a sign for any idea. Noah's dove, Macbeth's rooks, Horace's swans, Omar Khayyam's pigeons, Theocritus's nightingale, Count Fosco's canaries – they are no longer birds but usages of birds, feathered with words and meaning. My cardinal of symbolic colour and symbolic name bleeds now across this page as it did a moment ago across the sky. I wonder, corrupt with reading, if there ever was a moment when this sentence – *outside my window is a cardinal* – was not an artifice; when the blood-red bird on a steel-blue tree was quietly surprising, and nothing urged me to translate it, to domesticate it into a textual enclosure, to become its literary taxidermist. I wonder if there ever was a moment when a cardinal outside my window sat there in blazing splendour signifying nothing.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁸ Hector Hugh Munro, *The Short Stories of Saki* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1930), 615.

⁶⁵⁹ Quoted in Gibson, *Bedside Book of Birds*, 17.

To bring this discussion back to Anglo-Saxon England, we will conclude by visualising the setting in which the Beasts of Battle may have been invoked – the *scop* weaving his tale in the smoky mead-hall, thinking on his feet and adapting his delivery to capture the attention of his audience, drowsy after the feast. The sequence of narrative events is clear in his head, but the real artistry is employed through embellishments – those formulaic phrases that have been painstakingly memorised to add associative meaning to various themes and images as they emerge in the story. The *scop* has been carefully building the tension as he approaches the violent climax of the narrative and, at just the right moment, he calls upon the Beasts of Battle, signalling something to his audience in doing so. That ‘something’ depends entirely on the background and experience of the individual audience members, and whether they have encountered the wolf, raven or eagle before in an oral performance or in the real world.

To most audience members in the *medoærn micel*, the beasts herald upcoming slaughter, doom and elegy, but may also suggest any number of associative connections. Perhaps the beasts bring an expectation of victory to one listener, while another associates them with scorn for the defeated as he or she is reminded of the grisly aftermath of the Anglo-Saxon victory at Brunanburh. An audience member steeped in the Christian tradition, on the other hand, potentially has a millennium of allegorical interpretation to draw upon – is the wolf a diabolical figure or is it capable of human understanding and holy obedience? Is the raven truly beloved by God as we are told in Luke 12:24, or is it treacherous and gluttonous as demonstrated by the raven that disobeyed Noah to feast on waterlogged carcasses? Does the eagle symbolise Christ, and if so, how can we reconcile this with the reality of the bird tearing at human carcasses in the aftermath of battle? Yet another audience member may have witnessed the slaughter and ferocity of a Viking raid, and cannot hear of the Beasts of Battle without associating them with the Norse raiders. Other individuals would associate the beasts with the wild, the fearful source of dangers both real and imagined. The beasts may be read by some as outlaw figures, encouraged by the frequent linkage of the wolf with the state of outlawry.

These are just a few of the many possible associative connections that may have been made by members of an audience upon hearing the theme – we cannot truly know how any one listener may have reacted. We *can* conclude with confidence, however, that the Old English Beasts of Battle were almost certainly employed to raise a narrative event in the poem (such as an impending battle) to a higher level of significance – the appearance of the beasts was a signal to the audience to sit up and take notice.

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Appendix A: Abbreviations

ANQ: American Notes and Queries
ASE: Anglo-Saxon England
CSASE: Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
CCSL: Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
EETS: Early English Texts Society
ELH: English Literary History
ELN: English Language Notes
ES: English Studies
JEGP: Journal of English and Germanic Philology
MA: Medieval Archaeology
MLN: Modern Language Notes
MLR: Modern Language Review
MP: Modern Philology
N&Q: Notes and Queries
NM: Neuphilologische Mitteilungen
OEN: Old English Newsletter
PBA: Proceedings of the British Academy
PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
RES: Review of English Studies
SP: Studies in Philology
SS: Scandinavian Studies
TAPA: Transactions of the American Philological Association

Appendix B: The Beasts of Battle passages

The Battle of Brunanburh 60a–5a

<i>Leton him behindan hræw bryttian</i>	They left behind them to share out the carrion
<i>saluwigpadan, þone sweartan hræfn,</i>	the dark-plumaged one, the black raven,
<i>hyrnednebban, and þane haswanpadan,</i>	horny-beaked, and the dusky-plumaged,
<i>earn æftan hwit, æses brucan,</i>	white-tailed eagle, enjoying the carcasses,
<i>grædigne guphafoc and þat græge deor,</i>	the greedy war-hawk and that grey beast,
<i>wulf on wealda.</i> ⁶⁶⁰	the wolf in the forest.

The Battle of Maldon 106a–7b

<i>þær wearð hream ahafen, hremmas wundon</i>	A din was upraised there; ravens wheeled about,
<i>earn æses georn; wæs on eorðan cyrm.</i> ⁶⁶¹	the eagle greedy for carrion. There was clamour on the earth.

(The Battle of Maldon 96a–99b)⁶⁶²

<i>Wodon þa wælwulfas (for wætere ne murnon),</i>	The slaughter-wolves advanced (for they paid no heed to water),
<i>wicinga werod, west ofer Pantan,</i>	the Viking band, west over the Panta,
<i>ofer scir wæter scyldas wegon,</i>	over the shining water they carried their shields,
<i>lidmen to lande linde bæron.</i>	seafarers bore their shields to land.

Beowulf 3021a–27b

<i>Nu se herewisa hleahtor alegde</i>	Now the lord has laid aside laughter, mirth and revelry.
<i>gamen ond gleodream. Forðon sceall gar wasan</i>	Therefore, many a morning-cold
<i>monig, morgenceald, mundum bewunden,</i>	spear shall be encircled by fingers,
<i>hæfen on handa, nalles hearpan sweg</i>	raised up by hands, nor shall the sound of the harp
<i>wigend weccan, ac se wonna hrefn</i>	awaken the warriors; instead, the dark raven
<i>fus ofer fægum fela reordian,</i>	eager over doomed men, shall relate many things,
<i>earne secgan hu him æt æte speow,</i>	telling the eagle how he prospered at his eating
<i>þenden he wið wulf wæl reafode.</i> ⁶⁶³	while he, with the wolf, plundered the slain.

⁶⁶⁰ John C. Pope, ed. *Seven English Poems*, 2nd edition (New York and London: Norton, 1981), 5–8.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 16–27.

⁶⁶² While *Maldon* 96a–9b is not technically a Beasts of Battle passage, the advancing Viking *wælwulfas* act as a substitute for the wolf, which is otherwise missing from the triad.

Elene 27b–30a

Fyrdleoð agol
wulf on wealda, wælrune ne mað.
Urigfeðera earn sang ahof,
*laðum on laste.*⁶⁶⁴

The wolf in the forest sang a
war-song; it did not hide its slaughter-secret.
The dewy-feathered eagle raised up its song
in the wake of the hostile ones.

Elene 52b–3a

Hrefen uppe gol,
wan ond wælfel.

The raven shrieked above,
dark and slaughter-fierce.

Elene 110b–13a

Hrefn weorces gefeah,
urigfeðra, earn sið beheold,
wælhreowra wig. Wulf sang ahof,
holtes gehleða.

The raven rejoiced in its work,
the dewy-feathered eagle watched the manoeuvres,
the battle of the hostile slaughterers. The wolf raised
up its song, the companion in the forest.

Exodus 162a–8b

Hreopon herefugolas hilde grædige,
Deawigfeðere ofer drihtneum
wonn wælceasega. Wulfas sungon
atol æfenleoð ætes on wenan,
carleasan deor, cwyldrof beodan
on laðra last leodmægnes fyl.
*Hreopon mearcweardas middum nihtum.*⁶⁶⁵

The war-birds screamed, greedy for battle,
dewy-feathered above the troops,
the dark chooser of the slain. Wolves sang
a horrid evening-song in anticipation of the feast;
brazen beasts, bold at nightfall, they awaited
in the wake of the hostile ones the fall of the mighty host.
The border-guardians screamed in the middle
of the nights.

The Fight at Finnsburh 5b–12b

... fugelas singað,
gylleð græghama, guðwudu hlynneð,
scyld scefte oncwýð. Nu scyneð þes mona
waðol under wolcnum; nu arisað weadæda
ðe ðisne folces níð fremman willað.

... the birds sing,
the grey-coated one howls, the war-wood resounds,
the shield answers the shaft. Now the moon shines,
wandering under the clouds; now woe-deeds arise,
which this people's hatred wishes to carry out.

⁶⁶³ R.D. Fulk, R.E. Bjork and J.D. Niles, eds. *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 103.

⁶⁶⁴ Krapp, George Philip, ed. *The Vercelli Book*, Vol. 2 of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 66–102.

⁶⁶⁵ Krapp, ed. *The Junius Manuscript*, Vol. 1 of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 91–107.

*Ac onwacnigeað nu, wigend mine,
habbað eowre linda, hicgeaþ on ellen,
winnað on orde, wesað on mode.*⁶⁶⁶

But awake now, my warriors,
hold your linden-shields, think upon courage,
fight to the vanguard, be strong in spirit.

The Fight at Finnsburh 34b-5a

*Hræfen wandrode,
sweart and sealobrun.*

The raven circled;
black and glossy.

Genesis A 1983b-5a

*Sang se wanna fugel
under deoreðsceaftum, deawigfeðera,
hræs on wenan.*⁶⁶⁷

The dark bird sang
amid the spear-shafts, dewy-feathered,
in anticipation of carrion.

Genesis A 2087b-9a

*Wide gesawon
freora feorhbanan fuglas slitan
on ecgwale.*

Far and wide amid the sword-slaughter
they saw birds tearing at the bodies
of those enemies of free men.

Genesis A 2159b-61b

*... ac nefuglas
under beorhhleoþum blodige sittað
þeodherga wæle þicce gefylled.*

... but the blood-stained birds of prey
are resting on the mountain-slopes,
glutted with the slain of the armies.

Judith 205b-12a

*Þæs se hlanca gefeah
wulf in walde ond se wanna hrefn,
wælgifre fugel; wistan begen
þæt him ða þeodguman þohton tilian
fylle on fægum. Ac him fleah on last
earn ætes georn, urigfeðera;*

At that, the lean one rejoiced,
the wolf in the forest and the dark raven,
the slaughter-greedy bird; both knew that
the men of that nation meant to provide them with
their fill of the doomed ones. But in their wake flew
the eagle, eager for food, dewy-feathered;

⁶⁶⁶ Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds. *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 283.

⁶⁶⁷ A.N. Doane, ed. *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

salowigpada sang hildeleoð
*hyrnednebbā.*⁶⁶⁸

the dark-plumaged one sang a battle-song,
horny-beaked.

Judith 294b–6a

sweordum geheawen
wulfum to willan ond eac wælgifrum
fuglum to frofre.

[the enemy soldiers] hacked down by swords as a
treat for wolves and as a pleasure
for slaughter-greedy birds.

⁶⁶⁸ Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, ed. *Beowulf and Judith*, Vol. 4 of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) 99–109.

