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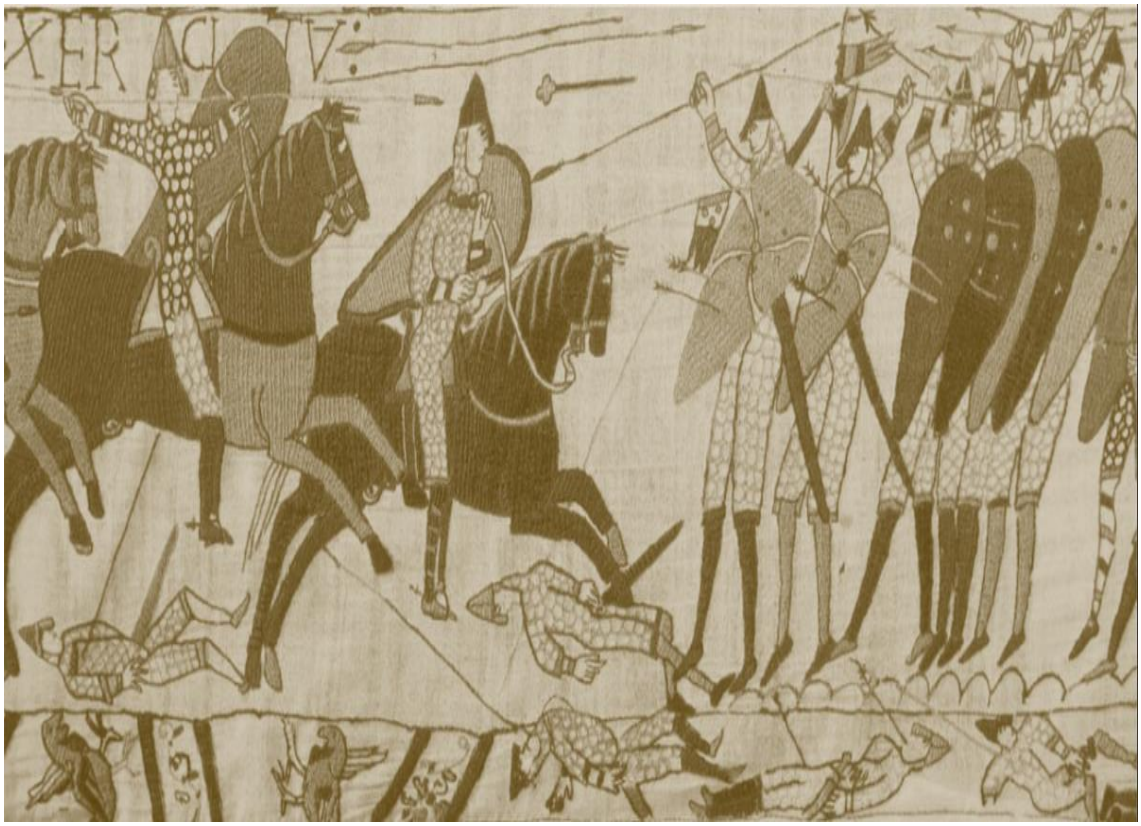

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Plenary Talks

Old English Literature and Culture

Old English Language and Linguistics

Middle English Literature and Culture

Middle English Language and Linguistics

Plenary Talks

Social History and Language Change in Early Middle English: The Case of Lincolnshire

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Abstract

In my presentation, I intend to correlate aspects of the social history of late Anglo-Saxon and early Norman England (c. 900-c. 1200) with the spatial distribution of linguistic innovations in early Middle English, as reconstructed by historical dialectologists (Kristensson 1967, 1995; Laing 2024). Of special interest in this respect are so-called transitional areas that tended to receive features from neighbouring focal zones and, accordingly, yield evidence for a deeper understanding of variability in the period (Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 142). Medieval Lincolnshire is a case in point in so far as linguistic features could have diffused into it from the south, the west and the north. Attention will be given to the following socio-historical aspects (Darby 1977; Sawyer 1998; Dyer 2003; Crick and van Houts 2011): (a) the characteristics of the medieval landscape which, by hindering or favouring communication, may have conditioned the distribution of language variants; (b) aspects of early political history and their possible linguistic sequels, such as patterns of Danish settlement and contacts between OE and ON (Samuels 1989; Townend 2002); and, finally, (c) the specific socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the area which could have favoured the spread of linguistic features by promoting the concentration of people in urban settlements as well as the mobility of speakers and, in general, the loosening of some close-knit networks of interpersonal relations and the establishment of weaker ties between individuals (Milroy and Milroy 1985).

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Old English Verse and the Problem of Textual Authority, with an Excursus on Old Norse and Middle English Alliterative Poetry

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Abstract

The editing of Old English poetry has long been marked by a cautionary approach to textual authority, particularly when it comes to using metre as a guide for emendation. The prevailing view has been that we lack sufficient understanding of vernacular Anglo-Saxon versification to trust it as a reliable basis for textual correction. In this lecture, I revisit this assumption, arguing that recent developments in metrical theory—especially the refinement of Sievers's system—enable us to use metre more confidently as a tool for textual criticism. I will demonstrate how this method can lead to clearer, more coherent readings, offering new emendations for *Beowulf* and other poems. Finally, I will explore how this metrical approach to textual authority can be extended to the editing of alliterative verse beyond Old English, with particular focus on Old Norse and Middle English, where similar editorial challenges arise.

On Dragons and the Standardisation of English

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Abstract

My talk situates the standardisation of English along with the standardisation of other things. So far, the discussion, which began in the late 19th century, has treated the standardisation of English as though it were unique. But lots of things have standardised, and I'm going to be characterising Standard English not as an extraordinary mix of dialectal parts, because there's nothing particularly extraordinary about it, but as a slowing down of language flux (flux being the natural state of language) and an amplification in function and distribution. That's the bit that needs explanation: how and why did the English of the late 14th century start off on its long journey along the path of standardisation. My argument is that the standardisation of English was triggered by an increase in people travelling and writing for purposes of business, which in turn resulted in the disruption of use of Anglo-Norman French, as more and more people did business with each other through the medium of English. As English absorbed more and more Anglo-Norman vocabulary the system amplified, resulting in a slowing-down traffic-jam effect. I will present various theoretical approaches, and allude to dragons for a comparandum of something else that standardised round about the same time.

Old English Literature and Culture

Measurement, Land Holding and Control in *Christ and Satan*

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Abstract

The Old English poem *Christ and Satan* is the final item in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11. The poem focusses on the conflict between God and Satan; it begins with creation and the fall of the angels, then depicts the harrowing of hell, before concluding with the temptation of Christ. Within the manuscript *Christ and Satan* follows the Old Testament poems *Genesis* (*A* and *B*), *Exodus* and *Daniel*, but is a later addition. *Christ and Satan* (and consequently now MS Junius 11) ends with a curious scene: Satan, having failed to tempt Christ with the promise of worldly power, is commanded by God to measure hell with his hands. This 'hell measuring' episode is striking but has proved an interpretative challenge — largely because no Latin source has emerged. In an influential 1981 article Thomas Hill highlights the poet's repeated emphasis on 'measurement' and tentatively suggests the hell-measurement image may be original to the poet, drawing on vernacular tradition, especially the term *Metod* for God (Hill 1981). Measurement, the immeasurable and numbering are certainly very prominent in the poem, whose non-linear narrative includes echoes of wisdom/trivia texts such as the *Collectanea pseudo-Bede* alongside passages of homiletic exhortation (see Ericksen 2002). More recently, Jill Fitzgerald has offered a persuasive reading of Satan's humiliation through a failure of measuring and connected the scene to Rogation rituals marking boundaries, but Rogation and boundary rites were separate practices in Early Medieval England (Fitzgerald 2017). This paper will argue that as hell-measuring is God's response to the temptation, which is about land tenure, more secular boundary rites provide a compelling analogue. By examining how the poem fuses diverse materials concerned with creation, measurement and control, I will argue that *Christ and Satan* depicts God as ultimate land holder, an image which reflects back the concerns of the poem's companions in the manuscript.

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Consuming Humour and Terror in *Andreas*: Lessons from the Mermedonian Hunger Games

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Abstract

The presentation intends to revisit the discussion of the Old English *Andreas*'s potential for humour and irony, which have been approached by scholars and editors of the poem, notably Jonathan Wilcox, Hugh Magennins, and Richard North and Michael D. J. Bintley. By focusing on the emotional reactions of the poem's race of Mermedonians and by employing critical approaches to humour based on humour theories, I will strive to prove that in the depiction of the fictional race of cannibals, the poem relies on the movement between the terror and horror to domesticate and control the non-Christian threat, most likely representing Vikings. The principal motif that I intend to explore is that of consumption in its literal and figurative senses and within its Christian and non-Christian contexts. Food as an element of terror, debasement, wisdom and ridicule is prominently present in the poem. In its symbolic dimension, it becomes a shibboleth for those already enlightened by the divine Word and those still in pagan darkness. As is well known, the motif of the devouring of bodies is frequently present in Old English verse. It is recognizable from numerous poetic representations ranging from the depictions of the beasts of battle to the horrors of *Beowulf*, the *Fastitocalon* of *The Whale*, instances of the Old English riddles, and the repulsive *Gifer* of the *Soul and Body*, to mention only a few. The aspects that characterize these instances are present in *Andreas*, but the unique combination of the terrifying and humorous dimensions of the poem invests them with an additional role, which altogether creates the intended result of the desire for a triumphant conversion, whether of the Mermedonians or Vikings themselves.

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Sermones Lupi in Data: A Corpus Approach to Wulftan's Normative Language

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyse the proliferation of social norms and normative language throughout the work of Wulfstan, with a particular focus on his homiletic writing. Rather than adopting a standard methodological approach, this paper makes use of corpus analysis tools to identify all instances of normative material in Wulfstan's work. By taking this large scale, quantitative approach to this material, this paper seeks to challenge old assumptions about the relationship of the Archbishop of York to social norms and identify potentially new avenues for analysis.

Early corpus explorations into the broader topic of Old English normativity indicate that on average, variants of the words *riht* (meaning right, or correct) and *unriht* (meaning wrong, or incorrect) are used once out of every hundred words in Wulfstanian homilies, which is five times more often than these words are found Ælfrician or the Anonymous homilies.[1] While this can in part be attributed to the relatively narrow lexical range of Wulfstan's rhetorical style, it indicates a particular interest on the part of Wulfstan in expressing ideas of what is wrong, and what is right, in his homilies. Furthermore, in his non-homiletic texts, Wulfstan's *Institutes of Polity* and *The Canons of Edgar* both have amongst the highest rates of frequency for *riht* and *unriht* variants.

This suggests that Wulfstan is one of the Old English writers most concerned with social norms and normativity. What this paper seeks to do is to take this work further; to trace the proliferation of other normative words throughout Wulfstan's texts, and critically to investigate what areas of normativity and social regulation was Wulfstan concerned with, and how did he express those concerns?

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[1] This early research was conducted by Rían Boyle and first disseminated in the paper "Crisis of The Corpus", *International Medieval Congress*, Leeds 2024. This work was based on statistics derived from metadata compiled by Dr. Mark Faulkner. For more details, see Faulkner (2021: 98).

A Mighty Wind and Tongues of Flame: A New Reading of Exeter *Riddle* 30

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Abstract

This paper contends that a spiritual reading of Exeter *Riddle* 30a/b is not contextualised by Easter, as traditional cross-centred solutions imply, but by the season of Ascension and Pentecost, falling forty and fifty days respectively after Christ's resurrection. The typological concerns of Pentecostal homilies cast further light on this poem's intricacies, and we can speculate on a role for this material akin to the sermon-lyrics of the later Middle Ages. The poem's affinity with the wider sub-genre of 'transformation riddles' offers a potent moral message for the biblically attuned reader, and opens up a productive doubleness in the lexical variation between the two extant versions of this text. While this new interpretation pushes back at the dominance of wood-based solutions for *Riddle* 30, it does not work to the exclusion of other existing material interpretations. Rather, the framework motifs of Ascension and Pentecost may offer a multidirectional puzzle appropriate to a particular moment in the liturgical calendar.

'wifa wlitegost': Light, Darkness and Eve's Radiance in the Old English Poem Genesis B

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Abstract

The Old English poem *Genesis B* contains an equally fascinating and controverse description of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Tempted twice by a demon disguised as an angel of God, the progenitors of humanity are finally persuaded by a highly rhetorical speech pronounced by the false angel to Eve. The words spoken by the tempter and their consequences on Adam and Eve rely heavily on the opposition between obedience and disobedience, duty and rebellion and, more relevantly, light and darkness. Symbolically blinded by the words of the tempter, Eve eats the fruit of the dark tree of Death, thus receiving a deceptive vision of the brightness and glory of Heaven (Jager 1988; Mintz 1997). Only after the Fall, this brightness begins to fade from Eve's eyes, being replaced by a vision of the dark sufferance of Hell. The episode of the Fall ends with a long description of the mutated conditions of the first man and woman: the progenitors of humanity are no more able to perceive the Light of God, thus being forced to hide in the darkness as shadowy creatures. The paper will analyse the relevance of light and brightness in the false vision granted to Eve, and the contraposition between the first of the women and Satan as 'light bearers' and 'bright figures'. Even after her fall, in fact, Eve remains the brightest of the wives and the more luminous of the women. Differently from Satan and the rebel angels, Eve is not completely deprived of her heavenly splendour, still remaining a luminous creature of God (Evans 1963a; Evans 1963b; Brown De Vane 2016): for a long time considered as an evidence of the poet's positive attitude towards Adam and Eve, Eve's brightness still represents one of the most debated and uncertain aspects of the verses dedicated in *Genesis B* to the narration of the temptation of Adam and Eve (Burchmore 1985; Hill 2002; Sager 2013).

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God and Woden in *Exeter Maxims B* 62–63a: The Shaping of Belief in Early Medieval England

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Abstract

Exeter Maxims B 62–63a states that *Woden worhte weos, wuldor alwalda, / rume roderas* ('Woden wrought idols, the Almighty wrought glory, the broad skies'). This pithy gnomic apothegm offers a clear example of the conflation of two ideological paradigms: the traditional Germanic ethos and the Christian faith.

This paper aims to analyse the contrast between God and Wodan. Scholars offered different interpretations to line 132. Thorpe translated "Woden wrought idols" (1842: 341); Bouterwek rendered it as "Vôden machte Götzen" and wondered whether *Woden* should be interpreted as Woden or as Velend/Veland (*i.e.*: Weland) (1854: xcviii; xcvii, n.8). Grein observed that "Only Voden and the true God appear to be opposed here: the former created only idols; the latter, however, created glory and the broad heavens" (1858: 343).

According to Strobl (1887: 59-60), *Exeter Maxims B* 62–63a alludes to Psalm 95:5: *omnes dii gentium daemonia; Dominus autem caelos fecit.* In addition to this biblical passage, there are several others in which the glory of God and His creative power—manifested through the *mirabilia Dei*—is celebrated by exalting His act of creating the heavens.

This paper seeks to further develop the discussion by identifying additional potential biblical sources underlying the passage. Specifically, references to Psalms 94:3, 115:2–4, and selected verses from Jeremiah 10 will be analysed to trace a theological pattern that may have influenced the scribe's decision to include a reference to Woden and his magical abilities.

Moreover, this study will engage with the patristic interpretations of the Old Testament passages behind *Exeter Maxims B* 62–63a, acknowledging the influence of the Church Fathers, whose works were widely available in the monastic libraries of pre-Conquest England. Finally, lexical analysis will be undertaken, focusing on key terms and their occurrences across the Old English poetic and homiletic corpora.

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Emotional Othering in the Old English Corpus: Constructing the Unemotional Woman in Early Medieval England

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Abstract

In this study, I apply the concept of emotional othering (Koschut 2020) to the Old English textual corpus. Specifically, I examine how women in Early Medieval England were constructed, in the rare instances in which their anger is acknowledged, as either unemotional, emotionally restrained, or irrationally angry. Using a corpus-based approach, I draw on the *Toronto Dictionary of Old English Corpus* and the anger lexicon outlined by Gevaert (2007) to trace gendered patterns in emotional representations. The analysis is guided by three key questions: (i) why was women's anger largely silenced in medieval English texts?; (ii) on the rare occasions when feminine anger was not suppressed, what onomasiological choices did authors make to represent it verbally?; and (iii) with what purposes?

While earlier studies of anger in Old English (Gevaert 2007; Geeraerts and Gevaert 2008) provide broad semantic and conceptual analyses, few have examined this emotion through a gendered lens (Bremmer Jr 2015; Fox 2020). Building on Fox's observation that the early English were quite familiar with female anger, even if it was not a topic of "significant moralizing discussion" (2020: 141), what I propose is to look at the polarizing extremes in which female anger is portrayed—either omitted or depicted as uncontrolled rage verging on madness—as devices to "other" women, rendering their anger illegitimate and limiting its expression within narrow social boundaries.

Simultaneously, women were often expected to mediate the emotions of others, positioning them as emotional regulators rather than agents. This dual dynamic—restricting women's anger while assigning them responsibility for managing others'—alongside the overall scarcity of female anger in the corpus, further reinforces their construction as emotional others in this society.

This gender-based approach contributes to the study of Old English emotion construals and reveals how emotional expression was shaped by broader cultural ideologies.

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Neither Fish nor Fowl: Fabricated Animals in Old English Literature

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Abstract

Over the last two decades in Old English studies, a growing interest has emerged in the significance of the natural world, particularly the relationship between humans and the non-human in the physical environment. More and more scholars have come to examine how animals and humans interact, using evidence from archaeological investigations, visual art and sculpture, and textual references. The physical terrain in early medieval England, to state the glaringly obvious, contained an abundance and variety of animal life—mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish—and such recognizable animals have been the primary focus of much if not most of the scholarly studies. However, as I write in a forthcoming chapter, outside of the familiar binary of domestic and wild animals another category exists, what might be termed the fabricated.

In this category, creatures breach another standard binary, that of real and unreal: sometimes actual, sometimes imaginary, sometimes a fusion of both. Unlike the animals in the riddles of the Exeter Book or heroic poems such as *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*, which are grounded in an identifiable physical world with physical implications, the fabricated animals—among them the whale, the phoenix, and the panther—exist just outside the ordinary realm of being. This paper will look at the details of these fabricated beasts and discuss their larger cultural implications to suggest what they might tell us about not just the quotidian but also the emotive and affective life of the early English.

Anatomicals in the Anglo-Saxon Laws

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Abstract

400 years before Ælfric included in his glossary the *nomina membrorum*, and long before anatomical words occurred in Old English with a specific medical connotation in a medical treatise (*Leechbook*), several words indicating body parts were included in another kind of source: the early medieval laws. The surviving body of Old English laws shows six centuries of unbroken legislation and has no parallel in any other (legal) corpus written in a Germanic language in the Early Middle Ages (Liebermann 1903-16; Oliver 2002; Oliver and Jurasinski 2021). The laws are precious evidence for the earliest English language and of great importance not only for linguists and law historians but also for cultural scholars and in particular for medical historians. Indeed, within some legislations an important group of decrees is built by catalogs of fines for personal injuries, ordered by type of injury inflicted and anatomically from head to feet, corresponding to the idea of the "architectural mnemonic" (Carruthers 1990) in which memory can tie in with a familiar physical structure (Ong 1982).

With my contribution I would like to analyze the injury catalogues and the anatomicals that occur in the laws for the first time in the English language with a focus on the linguistic (creation of *ad hoc* legal anatomical terms, mostly compounds) and socio-legal strategy of the lawgivers. The injury catalogues hint at processes of reading the material body that are distinct to the eras and regions within which these laws were created (Oliver 2011; Richards 2003). Body parts were not barely compensated according to their physiological value. These sets of laws shed light on several cultural-related aspects of the Early Middle Ages: the value given to male abilities that had a decisive importance for the preservation of the community but also the difficulty to intercept female bodies in the injury catalogues. Finally, the Anglo-Saxon laws contain offences to one's honor, humiliations that violated the physical integrity, but did not affect any physiological function. They are expressed by compounds that reflect the social conventions by which wounds (*wlitewamm*) and gestures (*feaxfang*) were interpreted and valued in early English society.

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The Sigemund Episode: A Bakhtinian Approach to the Digressions of *Beowulf*

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Abstract

This paper examines the *Beowulf* poet's literary technique in constructing the poem's numerous digressions, using the Sigemund episode as the point of study. Drawing primarily on the critical work done by Adrion Bonjour (1950) for the poem's structure, Renée Trilling (2009a; 2009b) and John D. Niles (1983; 1998) for the poem's temporal framing, and Mikhail Bakhtin (2011) for a theoretical framework, this paper argues that the digressions of the poem represent a sophisticated manipulation of space and time that constitute distinct chronotopes, Bakhtin's concept of the interlocked nature of literary space and time. The Sigemund episode, presented as a song in the poem, represents what I have termed "the chronotope of song": a generic device that collapses the historical distance between the mythic past and narrative present. This creates a synchronic space in which the poet is able to enforce the political ideology underlying the poem, that which advocates for a shared Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage. I also draw on John Searle's (2010) work to argue that the *Beowulf* poet conveys this message not just through the poem's narrative content, but in its linguistic form as well. Searle asserts that "language is a basic form of public deontology" (2010: 69): the very creation of *Beowulf* is what brings forth its ideological existence. Ultimately, this paper is concerned with the narrative strategies and conceptual tools employed by the *Beowulf* poet, in both the Sigemund episode and the poem as a whole, to refashion myth into shared reality.

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Drowned at London Bridge: Witchcraft and Land Acquisition in a Peterborough Charter

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Abstract

Charter S. 1377,[1] a document from the late 10th century (though extant only in a 12th-century copy), explains how a particular estate at Ailsworth came to be confiscated from the unnamed widow who owned it. In or just before AD 948, it seems, the widow, along with her son, had attempted to drive an iron stake into a man called Ælfsige, an act to be interpreted probably as violence to his effigy and therefore witchcraft rather than a physical attack.[2] The act having been discovered, the widow was drowned *æt Lundene brigce* (at London Bridge). My paper will address the implications of this curious latter detail for the account as a whole and from a broader cultural perspective. Drawing on historical and archaeological evidence, it will first examine how specifying the location of the drowning participates in the increasing use of conspicuous sites of public execution in early medieval England. Then, taking account of a range of Latin and vernacular literary sources, it will consider the cultural significance of situating the event at a bridge, arguing that the use of this motif contributes to legitimising the forfeiture of the widow's land which eventually passed to Peterborough Abbey. The widow's fatal submersion at a bridge, my paper will suggest, hints at a level of moral reprehensibility that no amount of penance can redeem. The phrase *æt Lundene brigce* thereby serves as a subtle rhetorical strategy to confer moral and spiritual justification on the confiscation of the widow's land and the various transactions by which ultimately it came into the hands of Peterborough Abbey.

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[1] See The Electronic Sawyer (https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/about/index.html). For the charter itself, see Kelly (2009: 275-279).

[2] See also Foys (2020).

Indicative Preterite Plural Endings as a Potential Clue to the Formation History of the Exeter Book

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Abstract

It has been pointed out that spelling system in the Exeter Book is normalised to a certain degree, and the scribe himself may have been involved in the effort of spelling standardisation. In fact, some words are spelled highly consistently. For example, *þurh* 'through' (occurring 270 times) always appears in this spelling with the initial *þ*, and never with *ð*, while *þam* is nearly always *þam* (291x), and rarely *ðam* (4x), never *þæm* or *ðæm*. Yet spelling standardisation in this manuscript is achieved only incompletely and there are many words that escaped the standardising effort. The indicative preterite plural ending is an example of word element that escaped standardisation, since four different spellings are used: *-(d)on*, *-(d)an*, *-(d)un*, and *-(d)um*. The standard West Saxon indicative preterite plural ending is *-(d)on*, and it is predominant in the Exeter Book. Yet unlike other major poetic works and contemporary West Saxon texts, it contains exceptionally high proportion of *-(d)un* and *-(d)um*. It is also notable that these variants of *-(d)on* mostly occur in the first half of the codex, scarcely used in the second half. In this paper, I will discuss the origin of the use of *-(d)un* and *-(d)um* in this manuscript and what their concentration in the first half of the codex could tell us about the origin and transmission of the Exeter Book.

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Hagiography and the Grendel's Mother Episode in *Beowulf*

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Abstract

In recent years, the presence of hagiographic motifs and saintly action have been identified in non-hagiographic Old English texts, notably in relation to two of the monster fights in *Beowulf* (Rauer 2000; Leneghan 2023; Ramey 2024). These studies, coupled with the long-established understanding of a predilection for heroic and steadfast saints in vernacular hagiography, have further illuminated the permeable nature of hagiographic and heroic literature. Such attention to Beowulf's saintly motivations (and even presentation) in relation to his fight with the dragon and with Grendel, and his cleansing of both Heorot and Grendel's mere, encourage a significant readjustment of how we read this poem's artistry and its protagonist. Beowulf's second fight with Grendel's mother, however, has long been recognised as complicating matters by appearing structurally and narratively enigmatic. Is Grendel's mother human or demonic? Is her behaviour justified? Is Beowulf's? By continuing a hagiographic line of enquiry, this paper reveals new insights into the poet's artistry by identifying hagiographical motifs in this episode, and proposes a potential hagiographical analogue. Drawing on earlier and contemporary texts and pointing towards later ones (including the Latin *Life of St Anthony* and the *Passion of St Margaret*), this paper reveals how motifs typically witnessed in female martyr lives are present in Beowulf's intrusion to Grendel's mother's mere and in their ensuing fight. While such motifs have not received critical attention—perhaps due to their less-than-straightforward application—this paper argues they are in keeping with the poet's intentionally enigmatic presentation of Beowulf and Grendel's mother. While the recognition of such motifs may have interesting implications for casting Beowulf as 'chaste' and devout, I do not argue that Beowulf ought thus to be viewed as a saint-like figure. Rather, this paper suggests that the *Beowulf*-poet employed popular motifs to create an engaging narrative.

Swamp-Thing from Hell: Two Grund Terms in *Beowulf*

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Abstract

Grundwyrgen[ne] and *gryrelice grundhyrde* appear as descriptors of Grendel's mother on ll. 1518b and 2136a of *Beowulf*, with both of these terms having been traditionally translated in monstrous terms, as can be seen in the following table.

	Grundwyrgen[ne]	*Gryrelice grundhyrde*
Kemble	She-wolf of the abyss	Savage abyss-keeper of the wave
Tolkien	She-wolvish outlaw of the deep	Dreadful guardian of the whirling gulf
Donaldson	Accursed dweller in the deep	Warden of the deep pool, the grim horror
Chickering	Witch of the sea floor	Keeper of the terrible deep
Heaney	Swamp-thing from hell	Terror-monger
Liuzza	Water witch	Horrible guardian of the abyss
Fulk	Outcast of the deep	Ghastly guard of the bottom of the deep

With very little exception, both descriptors are translated in monstrous terms or in terms which suggest an affinity between Grendel's mother and hell, *grund* often being translated as 'the'—arguably inappropriately—suggestive 'the deep' or 'the abyss'. While such interpretations of *grund* being associated with hell are valid, 'the' is most often the case for religious texts, and when *grund* is accompanied by *helle*, whether in the same sentence or as a compound term. Similarly, its association with the sea is also one that can be questioned in this context, with *grund* referring to the sea-bottom in Old English texts when contextualised with *sæ* or *mere*.

In a similar manner, *grundwyrgen[ne]* and *grundhyrde* are also rendered monstrous, their specific components, *wirgan/wiergan* and *hyrde* taking on the translators' biases surrounding Grendel's mother, when arguably more straightforward and accurate translations can be made.

Employing comparative philology and contextual analysis, this paper will reassess both translated versions and dictionary entries and offer alternative conclusions with regards to their interpretations.

Saintly Suffering: *Andreas*, ll. 1229-1449

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Abstract

This paper will examine the presentation of Andreas' tortured and wounded body in ll. 1229–1449 of the Old English poem *Andreas* (Archivio e Biblioteca Capitolare di Vercelli, Codex Vercellensis CXVII). It will consider how the poet develops the depiction of Andreas' suffering body over the course of his three-day torture. In doing so, this work will seek to explore the ways in which Andreas' experience of torture mirrors Christ's passion.

This paper will take a close-reading approach to the aforementioned extract and will focus on five vignettes within ll. 1229–1449. This method will allow both continuities and shifts in the description of Andreas' body to be charted and for the ways in which the *Andreas* poet accentuates the saint's suffering to be explored. One such technique deployed by the poet is the variety of compounds used to describe Andreas' body. Both 'banhus' and 'bancofa' create a porous presentation of the body as an inanimate container from which the soul can exit at the point of death.[1] These kennings thus enhance the sense of Andreas' bodily vulnerability. Another such technique to be examined is the poet's persistent use of 'flood' imagery to describe Andreas' bloodshed, such as 'weoll waðuman' (l. 1280) which creates a vivid and excessive sense of suffering.[2]

Finally, this work will explore the striking image of flowers blossoming from Andreas' lost blood and will consider this image in comparison with other instances of 'productive' pain in Old English poetry. Parallels will be drawn with instances of the Odor of Sanctity in *Guthlac B* and *The Panther*. Thus, in addition to a detailed close reading of ll. 1229–1449, this paper will also situate Andreas' suffering within the broader Old English poetic corpus.

[1] 'bone house' ('body'); 'bone chamber' ('body')

[2] 'the flood welled'

Translating the Bible in Tenth Century England: A Comparison of the Lindisfarne and Rushworth Glosses with the *Wessex Gospels*

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Abstract

The long 10th century was the golden age of biblical translation in Old English prose. Following the ecclesiastical and educational reforms of King Alfred (r. 871–899), the vernacular came increasingly to serve as the language of church and state. During Alfred's reign, partial translations of the Psalms, Exodus and Acts had been made for lay readers. During the latter part of the 10th century, complete interlinear, word-for-word Old English glosses were added to two 8th-century Latin codices—the Lindisfarne and Rushworth (or MacRegol) Gospels—as an aid to monastic study of Latin and an impetus to *meditatio*. Growing demand for biblical translations in the 10th century also saw the production of the first continuous prose rendering of all four gospels into any modern European vernacular, the *Wessex Gospels*, and a translation-paraphrase of the first seven books of the Old Testament (the Heptateuch). On the basis of the addition of pericope markers in manuscript witnesses, the *Wessex Gospels* have typically been viewed as a translation made for use in the liturgy. This paper argues that the *Wessex Gospels* were part of a wider project which aimed to make scriptural materials accessible to members of the laity. Through comparison with the Lindisfarne and Rushworth Gospels, I propose that the *Wessex Gospels* were composed for private reading by a noble lay patron or by a priest in preparation for preaching. The paper situates the *Wessex Gospels* at a midway point between the Alfredian renderings of the Psalms and Laws and the translation-paraphrase of the Heptateuch, at the centre of the corpus of Old English biblical prose translations designed to be read independently of their Latin Vulgate sources.

þa wundorlican swyftnysse þære sawle: Positive Aesthetic Emotions and the Role of the Senses in Ælfric's Lives of Saints

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Abstract

Today and in the early medieval English world, sight is systematically presented as the first and foremost sense. The sense of sight is at the centre of most literature written in the early medieval period, and this sense is widely considered to be essential in the life of the Christian. However, while several authors emphasise how the modern understanding of this bodily sense differs from how early medieval English people talked and thought about it (Díaz-Vera 2016; Kern-Stähler and Scheuchzer 2016; Fera 2012; Hindley 2016), very little research has been done on the role of the senses in aesthetic experience in Old English literature. Based on recent research on aesthetic emotions and positive aesthetic experience, the purpose of this paper is to explore how the different senses are involved in triggering and eliciting positive aesthetic responses in a collection of texts by Ælfric of Eynsham, his Lives of Saints. Based on careful lexical and textual analysis, this paper explores a series of episodes that describe and narrate emotional responses that range from mild aesthetic pleasure to the experience of the sublime. This paper stresses the importance of sight but also the presence of other figurative and "particular modes of vision" (Díaz-Vera 2016: 54) in Ælfric's hagiography, while at the same time it shows that, in the religious and transformative experiences that are narrated in these texts, smell and hearing are far from peripheral, and sometimes lie at the core of the affective experiences that the saints in this collection and those around them experience.

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Speaking Marks: The Drypoints of the Exeter Book

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Abstract

While drypoint glosses are common in Early English manuscripts (Studer-Joho 2017: 30), other types of drypoints are considerably rarer. Förster (1933) was among the first to address the peculiar drypoints of the Exeter Book, describing them as "a few ornaments which, at a later date, have been incised in the margin of six pages [and that] have no connection with the original scribe. These are of a type rare, if not unique, and appear to have been executed with a stylus, but without any colour or ink" (1933: 60).

Only few scholars have focused on the drypoints of the Exeter Book, identifying previously unnoticed marks (Alger 2006: 153-154; Conner 1986: 237; Drypoint images, 2021; Muir 1989: 277-279; Thomson 2022: 192) and proving that at least some of them predate the manuscript itself (Conner 1986: 236-237). However, apart from some discussions on the punctuation-related and metrical significance of some drypoints (Alger 2010: 58; McGovern 1983: 90-99; Thomson 2022: 189-205), little attention has been given to their purpose and their relationship with the poems of the folios where they appear. Arguably, some of them show a correlation with the manuscript, namely as models employed by the scribe of the Exeter Book for the shapes of the letters and of the ornamental initials, and as interpretative tools devised by mediaeval readers to approach the texts.

This paper aims to provide a study of the drypoints of the Exeter Book, describing them through the digital facsimile of the manuscript, classifying them according to the motifs they display (anthropomorphic figures, animals, letters and decorative signs), and interpreting them as possible paratextual elements. This might shed some light on the nature of the drypoints, on the crafting of the Exeter Book and on the first approaches to the manuscript, thus hypothetically offering new insights on its early history.

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The Disobeying Body: Grendel and the Patristics on the Body

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Abstract

The patristics have differing opinions on the postlapsarian relationship between soul and body, with Augustine of Hippo arguing for the culpability of the soul in every sin committed by the body, and Gregory the Great assigning blame to the body due to an inversion of the heavenly hierarchy. Both, however, agree that the Fall caused the body to act independently from the soul, and thus contrary to the soul's (and God's) will. Such a relationship is exemplified in texts such as Exeter *Riddle 43* and *Soul and Body*, but is also referenced in *Beowulf* regarding Grendel's flight from Heorot. In Beowulf it is written of Grendel that "him se lichoma læstan nolde" (812) as Beowulf holds him fast by the arm. The verb 'læstan' has connotations of duty, or a debt which must be carried out or executed, in this case inferring the hierarchical relationship between body and soul. In this verse, Grendel's body refuses the 'læstan' of his inner person, thus rebelling against himself to his own detriment. Of course, it could be argued that Grendel is unable to move due to Beowulf's strong grip, but the lexical choice of 'læstan' opens up another interpretation: does Grendel's body wilfully act against his soul, and thus causing his downfall? This paper will provide a new reading of Grendel in relation to the patristic tradition of corporeality and original sin.

Heathendom and Devil Worship in Early Medieval English Law

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Abstract

The dawn of written legal production in England is closely interrelated with the rise of Christianity to the island through Augustine's evangelising mission. It is by no mere coincidence that Kent, the first Old English kingdom to embrace the religion in 597 AD, was also the pioneer in codifying its legal heritage (Oliver 2002: 14).

With the increasing prominence of the clergy and Christianity within Early Medieval English society, not only did penitentials and canon law but also secular legislation simultaneously served to consolidate the Church's influence and avert practices associated with the pre-Christian cultural *substratum*, often interpreted as the worship of malevolent entities. Ranging from fasting and public penance to monetary fines (Jurasinski 2015: 22; Oliver 2002: 170), the punishments are indicators of the effort to reform behaviours, integrate individuals into society and establish Christian as the dominant cultural paradigm.

Despite the vast amount of research required to determine how widespread these phenomena were in Early Medieval England being both extensive and multidisciplinary, the laws constitute one of the primary bodies of evidence for the persistence of pagan practices in Early Medieval England (Hutton 2013: 341).

This paper aims to investigate how heathendom and devil worship were addressed in both secular and canon law, providing insights into the evolving legal and moral frameworks shaped by Christian ideology.

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Naming the Divine: Kataphasis in Exeter Book Riddle 66

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Abstract

The solution to Riddle 66 is usually given as Creation. It seems to be an adaption of Aldhelm's Riddle, *De Creatura*, and is one of three Creation riddles in the Exeter Book collection, which according to Erin Sebo, may have been "the most popular riddle in early England" (Riddle Ages Blog). Sebo argues that riddle 66 offers "a new concept of Creation" (Sebo 2014: 152), and Ruth Wehlau points out that it differs to the other Creation riddles because it "barely mentions God" and imagines "Creation as an activity" (Wehlau 1997: 60). Building on the work of Sebo, Wehlau and McFadden, *inter alia*, this paper will argue that Riddle 66 draws on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names* to offer a kataphatic description of God in Trinitarian form so that the multiplicity in union of the Trinity is reflected in the multiplicity in unity of Creation. In so doing, the riddler uses the traditional riddle framework to create a playful and multi-dimensional miniature of the Dionysian work. The paper will also examine whether the other Exeter Book Creation riddles, and indeed Aldhelm's original riddle, can be read in this light or if Riddle 66 is doing things differently.

Imagined Autobiographies: Riddling the Self in Old English Poetry

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Abstract

Thematic and stylistic affinities between the Exeter Book *Riddles* and the discourse of 'Old English elegy' as defined in and by scholarship of the 19th and 20th centuries are well noted in the literature. Bitterli (2009), for example, remarks how "it is true that some of the elegies tend to obscure their narratives to the extent that they could be taken for riddles as well, whereas a number of *Riddles* do not conform to the [established] generic conventions" (2009: 164). However, while most scholars agree on the transferability and intertextuality of specific themes, motifs, and formulae (exile, contrast of loss and consolation, deprivation of lord and kin), there is still a perceived sense of individualised subjectivity that transcends these stylistic and thematic parallels, and which begins with the identification of the speaker through the adoption of a first-person self-referential poetic voice, leading to assumptions about the form, content, and genre of the text.

This paper addresses the use of poetic voice in several *Riddles* of the Exeter Book and some of the poems conventionally labelled as 'elegies' to explore how the perceived sense of subjectivity that arises from readings of either set of texts is based on Romantic notions of poetic persona, dramatic situation, and self-referential discourse. As these elements come together in the form of genre categories, the intratextual and intertextual value of Old English poetics becomes blurred and fragmented. By way of contrast, this paper provides a reading of these poems based on their shared use of poetic voice and discourse to restore cohesion to the corpus and interrogate modern audience responses to Old English texts.

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England and the Continent in the Early Middle Ages: Æthelweard's *Chronicon* and the Role of Mathilda of Essen

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Abstract

In the second half of the 10th century, an important epistolary exchange involved Mathilda, abbess of the monastery of Essen since 971, and the Anglo-Saxon Æthelweard, ealdorman of the western shires with an important political role in Æthelred's England. Together with his son Æthelmer, he was also known as the patron of Ælfric of Eynsham.

Mathilda, niece of Edith of Wessex and Otto I, and so direct descendant of Alfred through his son Edward the Elder, spoke Old Saxon. This Ingveonic language shared many features with Old Frisian and Old English. Thus, we cannot rule out that she could have been able to read a text written in the language of Æthelweard. Nonetheless, he translated for her into Latin a section of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle up to the year 892, including material not found in surviving English versions. We suppose that for a member of the high nobility heading a religious house in the Old Saxon-speaking area, Latin would probably have been the only accepted literary language for such a purpose.

This paper aims to illustrate the sources of the relation between the two 'relatives', and especially the role played by Mathilda as a noblewoman of Ottonian Germany engaged in preserving and transmitting written records about her family history. *De facto*, even if there is no evidence to suggest that the Latin text reached Essen, the prologue to the *Chronicon Æthelweardi* addressed to his distant cousin in the form of a letter was intended to show that they communicated regularly and that both parties used the written word to remain in contact. Their epistolary exchange about their shared West-Saxon ancestry remains a significant example of the manifold interactions between England and Ottonian Germany in the 10th century.

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Neil Ripley Ker and Early English Manuscripts

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Abstract

When Neil Ripley Ker, author of a *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* (1957 [1991]), endured the *viva voce* for his BLitt dissertation on Old English manuscripts containing Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*, the seventeen detailed, scathing comments of his examiners—C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien—led him to believe that "the thesis is not worth much". This negative impression may have been enough to prevent him taking up a doctorate, but, in his moving away from editorial and philological analyses to studying the manuscripts themselves for the rest of his career, all scholars who have worked with British medieval texts since the 1940s have benefited immeasurably.

This paper evaluates Ker's contribution not so much in what he published, which is foundational to the field of Early English Studies broadly, but in what he did *not* publish—the dozens of essays and observations, charter descriptions, the meticulous evaluations of Latin and pre- and post-Conquest English manuscripts, and the correspondence he had with scholars internationally. Palaeographical issues that have concerned manuscript scholars for decades (the naming of script categories, the dating of particular features of handwriting) were raised by Ker as long ago as the 1930s. The need for clarity in cataloguing (the precursor to metadata tagging) and the role of the editor in establishing 'the text' were matters of importance to Ker, apparent in his dozens of notebooks and unpublished lectures on English literature up to *c.* 1250.

In this paper, I will discuss Ker's extensive archive, outlining my plans for a biography of Neil Ker as a progenitor of Manuscript Studies, and as, arguably, the single most significant influence in the creation of the modern field of Old English in its material contexts of production.

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Dark Minds, Darker Heavens: *gisuuerek/gesweorc* in Old Saxon and Old English

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Abstract

The biblical poems of MS Junius 11 illustrate the importance of translation, adaptation and vernacularisation to the development of the Old English alliterative verse tradition in Anglo-Saxon England. *Genesis B* recounts the Fall of the Rebel Angels and the Fall of Man and, as an interpolation within the longer *Genesis A*, constitutes a unique addition to the manuscript. *Genesis B* derives from an Old Saxon *Genesis* poem of which three fragments survive, one—Adam's postlapsarian remonstrance to Eve—corresponding to lines 790–817 of the Old English poem. Scholars including Benno Timmer, Peter Lucas, Paul Vickrey, and Alger Doane have analysed these passages to trace linguistic and stylistic changes made in the translation process. While their analyses reinforce the linguistic and nationalistic demarcation of separate Old English and Old Saxon alliterative verse traditions, I intend to bridge them through the word *gisuuerek/gesweorc* [darkness]. This word occurs in Old English poems such as *Genesis A*, *Judgement Day II*, and *Beowulf*, as well as in the Old Saxon gospel poem *Heliand*, where it appears frequently. Across these alliterative verse traditions, this word consistently signifies either a meteorological darkening of the sky or a spiritual darkening of the mind. I argue that in Adam's speech these meanings converge—the darkened sky obscures God's heavenly abode and Adam's mind darkens in disobedience, with each 'darkening' betokening his detachment from God. Highlighting a word common to Old Saxon and Old English in a text translated from the former into the latter, I emphasise the special relationship between these alliterative verse traditions. Examining *gisuuerek/gesweorc* at the intersection of psychology, divinity, and meteorology, this study offers fresh insights into the theological and literary connections between Old English and Old Saxon culture.

Old English Language and Linguistics

The Emergence and Establishment of the Innovative Preterite Singular *frān* in Old English

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Abstract

The Old English Class III strong verb (*ge-*, *be-*) *frignan* 'to ask' exhibits two distinct conjugational patterns: one with a stem-final *g* (*frignan – frægn – frugnon – frugnen*), which aligns with forms found in other Germanic languages, and another with long vowels (*frīnan – frān – frūnon – frūnen*). According to Hogg (2011: 284) and Hogg and Fulk (2011: 235), the latter variant arose due to three phonological and analogical changes: (i) the West Saxon sound change /ij/ > /i : /, (ii) the extension of this lengthening to the preterite plural and past participle (/u, o + g/ > /u : , o : /), and (iii) influence from Class I strong verbs, which led to the innovative formation of *frān* in the preterite singular.

Previous studies have treated *frignan* and *frīnan* as separate paradigms. However, poetic attestations indicate that the preterite singular form almost always retains *g*, even when the other forms exhibit vowel lengthening (e.g., *frīnan – frægn – frūnon – frūnen* in *Beowulf*). It is still unclear when and how these changes are completed.

This presentation examines the emergence and establishment of the innovative preterite form *frān*, arguing that its spread was a result of analogy induced by textual traditions. Notably, *frān* appears in verse only in *Journey Charm*, a 11th-century manuscript with strong Christian influences (cf. Strom 1948: 216ff.), and in prose primarily in the works of Ælfric and later religious texts. These patterns suggest that Ælfric's influence, along with the limited use of *frignan* in West Saxon (cf. Fulk et al. 2008: cliii), played a crucial role in the establishment of *frān* as a preterite singular form.

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Finding Textual Evidence of a Standard of Old English

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Abstract

Dialectal variety in the British Isles can be traced back to Old English times. However, research has also debated the existence of a standardized dialect in this language. This paper focuses on the affirmations made by authors such as Gneuss (1972), Hofstetter (1988) and Kastovsky (1992) on the possible existence of the Winchester Standard. To find evidence that could support or contradict this theory, a corpus of Old English lexicon representative of this standard has been compiled and its presence has been checked in different textual and lexicographical sources, e.g. the *VariOE* online morphological dictionary (Cichosz et al. 2021), the *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (YCOE) (Taylor et al. 2003) and the *Nerthus V5* interface of textual, lexicographical and secondary sources of Old English (Martín-Arista et al. 2024). The data obtained has been classified according to different parameters, including lexical category, textual genre, distribution of the standard lemmas and their inflectional forms in the YCOE corpus. The analysis of the data has allowed to observe the frequency of these terms in the texts that make up the YCOE, establishing a list of those that may have belonged to a standardised dialect, e.g. *sunu*, *bearn* and *mægen*. However, not enough evidence has been found for some of the terms. Further research in an enlarged group is suggested to check their presence in other Old English texts beyond the scope of this analysis. The results also show a possible relation between these standardized lemmas and texts of religious nature. On this basis, this study suggests the relevance of text genre for lexical selection from specific dialects in Old English.

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Lemmatisation of Anglo-Saxon Poetic Adjectives

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Abstract

The lemmatisation of Old English poetic texts presents challenges, particularly for adjectives, due to their morphological complexity and variation in attested spellings. Despite advances in digital lexicography, historical language corpora still lack a systematic approach to capturing linguistic variation and diachronic change in adjectives. This study addresses this gap by employing a relational database framework to assign unified headwords to adjectives in the *York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry* (YCOEP; Pintzuk and Plug, 2001). The database integrates key lexicographical sources, including *The Dictionary of Old English* (DOE; Healey et al., 2018) and Bosworth-Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1973), allowing for systematic comparison and lemma selection. The methodology follows four steps: compiling attested adjective spellings into a structured database, matching them with lexicographical sources, aligning assigned headwords with a curated lemma list, and validating results against authoritative references such as DOE, *VariOE*, and Bessinger's *A Short Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1960). Findings demonstrate the feasibility of a corpus-based approach to adjective lemmatisation in Old English poetry. The study contributes 15 new lemmas and provides a lemmatised inventory of poetic vocabulary exclusive to the YCOEP, offering a replicable model for studying linguistic variation and diachronic change in historical corpora.

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To What Extent Were the Demonstrative *se* and the Third-person Pronoun Interchangeable in Old English? An Analysis of Usage in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

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Abstract

It has traditionally been assumed that Modern English *they*, *their* and *them* have their origin in the Old Norse counterparts *þeir*, *þeirra* and *þeim*, which were possibly borrowed or imposed as a result of close Anglo-Norse contact in the Danelaw (e.g. Baugh and Cable 2002; Townend 2002). Another possibility that has long been put forward is that the plural forms of the Old English demonstrative *se* (i.e. *þa*, *þara* and *þam*) might have been the origin of *th*-forms (e.g. Förster 1941, 1942; Ogura 2001; Cole 2018). Better understanding of the interchangeability of *se* and the third-person personal pronoun is necessary not only for the latter view but for the former view, when taking into consideration its possible impact on the borrowing of Scandinavian pronouns. As Durkin (2014: 177) said: "There are several factors that probably eased the adoption of the Scandinavian third-person plural forms. Firstly, Old English sometimes used the demonstrative form *þa* in functions overlapping with the third-person plural pronoun […]".

However, little investigation has taken place concerning the details of the interchangeability of *se* and the third-person pronoun. With this situation in mind, I conducted research on the use of the third-person pronoun and the demonstrative pronoun *se* in the four manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, namely MS A (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS. 173), MS C (London, British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius B.i), MS D (London, British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius B.iv) and MS E (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud Misc. 636). This research suggests that (i) a certain degree of interchangeability can be observed between the two types of pronouns in question, but that (ii) the interchangeability is not evenly observed. This interchangeability might show a threshold of the incorporation of *th*-forms into the third-person pronoun paradigm.

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Let's Get Topical: Syntax and Discourse Function in Old English Glosses

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Abstract

This article investigates the relationship between locative inversion and information structure in Old English glosses, offering fresh perspectives on the syntactic and pragmatic aspects of glossing. Locative inversion—where a locative phrase precedes the verb and subject (cf. Levin and Rappaport 1995; Webelhuth 2011)—serves as a lens to explore the interaction between syntax and discourse in medieval texts. Although extensively studied in Old and Middle English (cf. Warner 2007; Dreschler 2015), its use and function in glossed texts have received limited attention.

Using a corpus-based methodology, the study analyses examples of locative inversion in Old English glosses drawn from manuscripts like the *Durham Collectar* and the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. It examines how these structures contribute to discourse coherence and the packaging of information, particularly in relation to the given-new distinction. The analysis combines qualitative interpretation with quantitative data retrieved from both printed editions (e.g. Stevenson's 1840 edition of the *Durham Collectar*) and digital resources such as the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (DOEC), with cross-referencing to digitised manuscripts like those in the *Durham Priory Library Recreated* project.

Additionally, the article considers the diachronic persistence of locative inversion in glossed texts, arguing that its use reflects deliberate stylistic choices by scribes. To better understand these functions, the study also examines the nature of preceding discourse and the types of topics introduced through locative inversion. This broader contextual analysis reveals how scribes strategically used syntactic structures to manage information flow and emphasise key elements.

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Concessit, Confirmavit, Confecit: Documentary Old English in the Twelfth Century

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Abstract

The Old English version of Sawyer 1046, a general grant of liberties in the name of King Edward the Confessor to the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, survives in two related cartulary copies of the late 13th century, each of which contains a significant number of other vernacular texts originally dating (or purporting to date) to the pre-Conquest period. Attention to the language of these copies allows us to identify scribal copying strategies deployed across these cartularies. Unexpected characteristics of this particular text include updated lexis and dialect features not found elsewhere in the repertoire of either scribe. What are we to make of this, and how might such features help us to trace the early history of this problematic charter? In this paper I link its genesis to the efforts of Abbot Samson in the 1180s and 1190s, as reported in Jocelin of Brakelond's *Chronicle*, to curtail the power of the merchants in the borough of Bury St Edmunds, and demonstrate how the text was adapted from existing charters.

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The Overall Acceptability Score and the Evaluation of Synthetic Old English Text

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Abstract

This paper deals with Old English in the new paradigm of large language models (LLMs) based on artificial intelligence. The point of departure of this research is the belief that the study of historical languages can benefit from the advances in Natural Language Processing with artificial intelligence if the written records are turned into processable datasets and annotated with standard tagsets (Piotrowski 2012). However, the scarcity of data poses additional difficulties because the three million words contained in the written records of Old English are not enough to train neural models (Martín-Arista et al. 2025). Against this background, the aims of this paper are to present the procedures and results of the generation of synthetic text (Boulanger 2025) of Old English and to gauge the acceptability of the new training text with expert evaluation metrics (Chen and Wang 2023; Liu and Li 2023; Zhang and Kuo 2023). A total of 75,000 words that imitate the style of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* have been generated with a reasoning LLM. The language model has been prompted to return grammatically correct, lexically plausible and semantically coherent Old English text. To guarantee the suitability of the topics and the decorum of the style, the language model has been asked to write six apocryphal chronicles based on the existing historical sources. The acceptability of the synthetic text is assessed by means of the Overall Acceptability Score, a comprehensive metric designed to evaluate Old English texts in terms of their linguistic authenticity and adherence to the topics and style found in the written records. The Overall Acceptability Score is calculated as a weighted average of four linguistic scores: lexical selection, inflection, syntactic configuration, and semantic coherence. The conclusions insist on the viability of the generation of synthetic text of Old English with LLMs and on the adequacy of metrics that include morphological, syntactic, lexical and semantic criteria of assessment.

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Cutting or Thrusting? Practical Weaponry in *Beowulf* and the Translators' Perspectives

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Abstract

This communication will explore and consider the different views and approaches some scholars have adopted when faced with the difficult task of translating weaponry-related lexemes in the epic poem *Beowulf*. The wide variety of lexemes included in the Old English semantic field of weaponry provides the language with great flexibility to create poetic compositions using a broad range of words, but it also creates a challenge of translating words whose cultural connotations cannot be explained only by the original text itself. The aim of this communication is to analyse different weapon-related passages of the epic poem *Beowulf* along with four translations of them written during the span of the last 150 years, and study how different times and backgrounds, where its translator lived and worked, have affected the translations themselves. In addition, experimental archaeology work done on the referenced weapons will be used to understand the passages and assess the accuracy of the translations from a practical point of view.

The database for my study comprises the translations of *Beowulf* carried out by Hall (1893), Tolkien (2014), Chickering (1977) and Heaney (2000). The fragments will be studied using comparative analysis between the four translations, studying the different lexemes and literary devices chosen by the translators, and then compared to the original text, paying special attention to the events and combat techniques being described in it, as well as the practical interpretation of such techniques and the implications they would have in a real combat.

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Imitating Tolkien's *Sellic Spell* with AI: An Assessment of Old English Text Generation with Large Language Models

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Abstract

Large Language Models (LLMs) have achieved great fluency in contemporary languages. While recent advances have shown remarkable progress in low-resource languages, the ability of LLMs to generate coherent and stylistically faithful Old English text is still debatable. In this context, this paper focuses on Old English text generation with Artificial Intelligence (AI). The methodology for this study includes: (1) Old English text generation with AI using a series of prompts, (2) the creation of a parallel corpus aligned at fragment level, and (3) a subsequent qualitative linguistic analysis of the generated text. Text generation mainly draws on *Sellic Spell* (2014), which represents Tolkien's only complete work written in Old English. *Sellic Spell* is used as the source for generation and as a benchmark for evaluating the AI's output. In the first step, the AI model is prompted to generate text with *Sellic Spell* as reference. Here, no translation method is used; rather, the AI is asked to produce parallel text from scratch, fragment by fragment. Then, these fragments are aligned with the original text to form a parallel corpus. The linguistic analysis examines the quality of the generated text, focusing on lexical choice, inflectional morphology, and syntactic structure. Preliminary results suggest that AI is capable of producing Old English text which is grammatically and semantically accurate, while some differences in lexical register and idiomatic usage remain.

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The Influence of Latin on Old English Recursive Adjectival Modification: A Quantitative Corpus Analysis

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Abstract

Old English borrowed many syntactical and lexical properties from the more prestigious, learned and ecclesiastical Latin (Taylor and Ringe 2014). Bruce Mitchell (1985: 172) was the first to suggest Latin influence on the development of adjectival recursion in Old English, stating that the construction resulted from "a desire for emphasis, rhythmic and stylistic variation, [and] metre". Olga Fischer (2001) similarly recognises this possibility. However, little serious consideration has been given to the viability of this proposal, nor has any quantitative study to determine the influence of Latin on this Old English construction been attempted. This paper will analyse the instances of recursive adjectival constructions in the *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English* (YCOE), a 1.5 million word syntactically-annotated corpus of 100 texts, to determine the rate at which this construction appears in Latin-translated versus non-Latin-translated texts. The following recursive structures were searched for using the CorpusSearch tool: prenominal modification (ADJ-ADJ-N), postnominal modification (N-ADJ-ADJ), and combined pre- and postnominal modification (ADJ-N-ADJ). The analysis determined that approximately twice as many ADJ-ADJ-NOUN constructions occurred in Latin-translated texts (0.0738% of parsed nodes) in comparison to non-translated texts (0.0446% of parsed nodes). In addition, significant number of instances of combined pre- and postnominal pseudo-measure phrases (e.g. *godne [noun] fulne*) were located within medical texts, whose contents have strong Latin influence (Kesling 2020)—roughly three times as many in comparison with non-translated texts. This quantitative evidence strongly suggests that Latin syntactical constructions have leached into Old English. This paper will outline these findings, reflect more broadly on the linking of Latin medical and textual traditions with Old English syntax, and consider the possibility of using adjectival recursive modification occurrences as a diagnostic for determining the provenance of the texts of the YCOE whose translation status is unknown.

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Old English Centre-embedded Relative Clauses and the Change OV → VO: Extending the Database

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Abstract

In the wake of Pérez-Lorido (2022), this paper addresses the question of the extent to which clauses containing an embedded object relative clause—like (1) below—were linguistically viable in Old English, and the role the avoidance of centre-embedded structures of this type played in the change OV → VO:

(1) swa þæt hie [eal [þæt toweard wæs]], beforan witgodan & mannum cyþdon.
so that they all that coming was before prohets and men let know
'so that they let know before prophets and men all that was coming'
(coblick,LS_12_[NatJnBapt[BlHom_14]]:161.9.2044)

The paper is couched within the framework of length minimization theories in language processing such as Hawkins (1994, 2007) and Gibson (2000), and aims at providing new evidence from an extended corpus of 16 texts taken from the *Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (Taylor et al. 2003) (toting up nearly 700,000 words), to validate the findings in Pérez-Lorido (2022), explicitly tackling the following points:

1) Overall incidence of centre-embedded object relative clauses in the corpus vs. extraposition of the object relative.
2) Impact of the perceptual factors that bear on the choice between relative clause embedding and relative clause extraposition, i.e. an analysis of their competing Constituent Recognition Domains, which ultimately depends on two parameters: (i) relative clause length and (ii) extraposition distance.
3) A discussion of the relevance of 'external factors' on the impact of centre-embedding vs. extraposition in the corpus, focusing on (i) Latinate / non-Latinate origin of the text (ii) text type/genre.
4) The possibility for multiple centre-embedding (Karlsson 2007) in the corpus.

The results of the research strikingly confirm the data in Pérez-Lorido (2022), with the figures for the analysis of the different variables in the extended corpus matching almost exactly, the figures in the earlier study, and confirming its major hypotheses. These are: (1) avoidance of

centre-embedding can hardly have been the trigger of the change OV → VO in English as its impact in the new corpus is considerable (19.6% against the sum of centre-embedded and extraposed clauses (19.9% in Pérez-Lorido (2022)); (2) the origin of the text (whether a Latin translation or an OE original) seems to be relevant in the choice between extraposition and embedding (with embedding preferred in Latin translations and extraposition in original OE texts), as is the stylistic and generic characteristics of the texts; (3) the interaction of the size of the relative clause and the extraposition distance are crucial parameters in determining the choice between embedding and extraposition of an object relative clause in Old English: sentences with a long extraposition distance and a short relative clause size often favour embedding and viceversa. (4) The maximum number of levels of depth for centre-embedding is one, with no examples of multiple centre-embedding having been found in the corpus, a conclusion also arrived at in Pérez-Lorido (2022).

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Fariseas lufigaþ forþmestu setulas: Loanwords and Analogical Changes in the Nominal Morphology of Farman's Gloss to the Rushworth Gospels

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Abstract

The Rushworth or Macregol Gospels (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auctarium D.2.19) is an Irish MS produced about 800 AD, with an Old English interlinear gloss added in the late 10th century by two scribes: Farman and Owun. Farman glossed all of Matthew, Mark 1.1 – 2.15 up to *hleonadun*, and John 18.1–3 in a Mercian dialect (Rushworth[1]); Owun glossed the remainder in Northumbrian (Rushworth[2]).

This paper offers a study of the nominal morphology of Farman's gloss to the Rushworth Gospels in comparison with Aldred's gloss to the Lindisfarne Gospels (London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero D.iv), and focuses on two inter-paradigmatic analogical changes: 1) the extension of nominative/accusative plural *-as* from the masculine *a*-stems to neuter *a*-stems and other declensions, and 2) the spread of genitive plural *-ena* from *n*-stems to *a*-stems. The first aim of this paper is to establish the scale on which these analogical changes are attested in Rushworth[1]. Since loanwords tend to be integrated into productive paradigms, the second aim is to study Farman's practice when rendering Latin religious terms found in the gospels, more specifically the degree of morphological adaptation of the Latin source word.

The data have been retrieved using the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, which is based on Skeat's edition, but all the tokens have been checked against Tamoto's and Kotake's editions and the digitised manuscripts of both glosses in order to detect possible errors or inaccuracies, especially regarding the expansion of abbreviations. The results are compared with those obtained in the study of the Lindisfarne Gospels in order to assess the degree of similarity between the two glosses regarding these processes.

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The Inflection of Latin Proper Names in Old English Saints' Lives

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Abstract

Latin loanwords are a major concern in the study of the vocabulary of Old English. Most works on the topic focus on the type of words that entered the language and when (Kastovsky 1992: 301-317, 2006: 220-226), and on their morphology (Baker 1998; Gneuss 1996: VI). This paper discusses a specific type of Latin loanword, i.e. personal names. These words present a lot of variation regarding their morphology, since they may take Old English inflections, Latin ones or a mixture of the two (Campbell 1959: 219). Following the methodology in Ruiz-Narbona (2023a, 2023b, 2024a and 2024b), this study analyses the inflectional morphology of Latin proper names taken from different Old English lives of saints, namely *Andreas* (LS 1.1), *Mary of Egypt* (LS 23), *Peter and Paul* (LS 32) and *The Seven Sleepers* (LS 34). The objective is to find out whether Latin proper names present a well-established inflectional pattern, one that is mostly Latin or Old English, or a mixture of the two, as well as the factors behind the choice of inflections. Additionally, these results are compared to previously analysed texts to try to determine to what extent a general paradigm for Latin names can be found across different Old English texts. Preliminary results show that paradigms are not as systematic as in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* (Ruiz-Narbona 2024b), even if a general cross-textual pattern can be outlined. Internal variation within a text, though possible, is, however, limited. Grammatical case seems to be the most relevant factor in determining the choice of inflection. Whereas nominatives normally display Latin inflections, Old English *-es* tends to dominate in the genitive. In the dative case, Old English *-e* is widespread, however, there is a tendency for first declension names to have Latin endings, e.g. *Andreae.* As for the accusative, two main patterns can be accounted for depending on the text, namely, names that are marked following Latin patterns, e.g. *Maximianum,* or unmarked nominative-like ones, e.g. *Zosimus.*

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Disambiguating Poetic Syntax in *Beowulf*

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Abstract

The editors of the standard edition of *Beowulf* did not attempt a complete revision of Klaeber's text but expressed serious doubts about his punctuation (Fulk et al. 2008: 321). Klaeber often omits commas that provide important syntactic information, supposedly to avoid "awkward cases of overpunctuation" (Klaeber 1950: clxiv). His text mimics the flowing periodic sentences of Classical authors at a significant cost in clarity. Mitchell (1985: 91) identifies similar problems in punctuation of prose by Andrew (1940). In this paper I focus on the poet's use of adjectives in substantival and adverbial functions (Fulk et al. 2008: cxlix). It is often hard to tell whether an adjective is functioning as a noun or as an adverb and Klaeber's punctuation makes matters worse. Instances with null subjects can be especially difficult to interpret. Here I offer criteria to distinguish between nominal and adverbial use of adjectives and also to distinguish these zero-converted instances from adjectives that are distanced from their governed nouns in artificial poetic constructions, which I call hyperbatons. Hyperbatons are well attested in the cognate Germanic meters and seem to have provided a traditional starting point for experiments with syntactic scrambling in Old Norse *drōttkvætt* (Gade 1995: 213-16).

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Assessing Large Language Models in Old English Translation: A Qualitative Evaluation

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Abstract

Major advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have given rise to Large Language Models (LLMs) which are capable of performing a variety of linguistic tasks. However, most research has focused on widely spoken languages, leaving less commonly studied languages such as Old English still underexplored. This paper addresses the following research questions: (1) are LLMs able to perform translation tasks in Old English?; and (2) how accurate is the LLMs performance in Old English from a linguistic point of view? This study offers a qualitative evaluation of the Old English text generated through back translation. The LLMs tested include GPT-4 and LLaMA2, while the Old English sources comprise selected fragments from Ælfric's *Life of Saints* (Baker 2012: 183-185), the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Baker 2012: 186-187) and Orosius' *Historia Adversus Paganos* (Baker 2012: 202-209). The methodology involves the creation of a golden corpus of human-rendered translations for the fragments at stake, which will gear the comparison with the AI-generated translations. The analysis reveals that LLaMA2's output exhibits significant lexical and morphological inaccuracies, whereas GPT-4's offers translations that are more closely aligned with the golden corpus, although syntax reflects an inferior quality. The main conclusion is that, while back translation into Old English is feasible using LLMs, the output produced by the LLMs presents inconsistencies, with the linguistic quality of the generated text varying depending on the source text and the model employed.

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A Pilot Study on the Spatial Vocabulary in Old English

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Abstract

Despite growing interest in the study of space across various disciplines over the past few decades, linguistic research on spatial vocabulary in older stages of English remains limited. Most research has concentrated on Modern English (e.g. Shusterman and Li 2016; among others) or 'Language and Space' as a cognitive concept in general (e.g. Talmy 1983; Levinson 2003; Levinson and Wilkins 2006), while medieval studies have approached spatial concepts primarily from historical or literary perspectives (e.g. Valtonen 2008; Kemp and D'Olier 2016) rather than linguistic ones. Yet, examining the Old English spatial lexicon can offer a valuable glimpse into how the Anglo-Saxons conceptualized and perceived space (Jackendoff 1985: 210) centuries before the advent of cartography.

This pilot study, part of a broader project examining the linguistic encoding of spatial concepts from Old to Early Modern English, aims to identify and analyze Old English lexemes related to spatial concepts (e.g. *onbutan* 'around, about', *setlgang* 'west') to explore how these reflect early medieval understandings of the physical world. In order to do so, this pilot study employs a twofold approach. First, using the *Historical Thesaurus of English* (HTE) for initial lexical identification and then the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (DOEC) for contextual analysis, examining collocations and usage environments to refine the understanding of their spatial semantics. The resulting data will allow for further exploration of how spatial vocabulary was used to establish orientation, define territories and influence perceptions of 'inside' versus 'outside' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Pollio et al. 2005: 148), raising broader questions about belonging, exclusion and power. Preliminary findings suggest that the Old English spatial vocabulary often encodes both geographical and conceptual boundaries and limitations, providing insights into how early medieval society may have understood and organized space.

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Middle English Literature and Culture

'Much Known of Other: Thomas Wyatt's Knotty Conventionality'

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Abstract

Without fully committing to its character as either 'medieval' or 'renaissance', C. S. Lewis called the 1530s the 'Drab Age' of English literature: "a period in which, for good or ill, poetry has little richness either of sound or images. The good work is neat and temperate, the bad flat and dry. There is more bad than good" (Lewis 1954). This paper is posited on the notion, demonstrated *prima facie* by his modern popularity, that Thomas Wyatt's poetry must be a possible exception to Lewis's dispiriting and qualified assessment of the period; and that nevertheless Wyatt must be considered to be a thoroughly medieval poet, the inheritor and shaper of a vast Middle English lyric tradition.

Indeed, Wyatt's best-known poems (and several of the others) exert a period-surpassing power to surprise and to move, recasting conventional sentiments and inherited models with a knotty friction that prevents smooth and untroubled response. Yet this is done without overt recourse to anything new; even his most famous refrains have their crowd of post-Chaucerian predecessors, documented in lengthy 15th-century poetic anthologies full of conventional and cliched sentiment. In parallel with this inheritance, Wyatt's celebrated role as inventor of the English sonnet sees him at Petrarch's knee, belatedly fashioning an English formal tradition from the Italian influence that Chaucer had so adeptly absorbed into Middle English writing more than a century earlier. This paper will tease out how it is that Wyatt's 'drab' conventionality, his absolute participation in an existing, fulsome (and indisputably dull) tradition of English love poetry, and his close, even slavish response to Petrarch, nevertheless produces verse that 'in the head sticks day and night'.

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Memory and Mind in the Work of Geoffrey Chaucer

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Abstract

The argument in the paper seeks to provide a contribution towards an in-depth assessment of Geoffrey Chaucer's understanding of the function of memory in the overall conceptualization of the operations of the mind. The analysis is meant to provide a wider diachronic cultural context to two key passages in Chaucer's work which invoke a threefold model of the highest faculties of the human mind: *The Second Nun's Tale* (ll.338-339, referencing the triad of "*memorie, engyn, and intellect*"), as well as the more extensive discussion of memory as one of the "goodes of nature of the soule" in *The Parson's Tale* (ll. 453-454).

Building on previous research (see Bibliography), the discussion seeks to position Chaucer's treatment of this aspect against the context of the medieval evolution of the perception of memory in human mental operation, beginning with the legacy of Aristotle's discussion of the issue in the second chapter of *De Memoria et Reminiscientia* (343- 349), through St. Augustine's seminal model incorporating *intellegentia, voluntas* and *memoria* from the 10th chapter of *De Trinitate*, Boethius' hierarchical structure of the sensus, imaginatio, ratio and intelligentia from the 5th Book of *Consolatio Philosophiae*.

Finally, the argument will attempt to position Chaucer's perspective in the emic context of the interplay of the Aristotelian and Platonic philosophical traditions during the High and late Middle Ages. Here the argument concentrates on the hylomorphic model developed by Aquinas, whereby the two basic potencies of the intellectual soul: *Intellectus* and *Voluntas*, are augmented by the habitus of *memoria intellectiva*, while collecting memories of the past as *phantasmata* is the function of *vis memorativa*—one of the four internal senses operating within the middle layer of the human soul—the *amina sensitiva*.

The purpose of the argument is to discuss Chaucer's model against the interplay between the Aristotelian hylomorphic tradition and the Platonic/Augustinian tenor of most of contemporaneous Middle English mystic tradition, evident i.e. in Walter Hilton's scheme of "mynde, reson, and wille" from the 31st chapter of the second Book of *The Scale of Perfection*.

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Morgan and Argante: A Study in Literary Correspondences

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Abstract

In the Arthurian section of his *Brut* poem, a Middle English adaptation of Wace's *Roman de Brut* (c. 1155) and, consequently, of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (c. 1123-1136), La3amon (c. 1185-1205) significantly expands on the magical and preternatural elements. One of the most notable additions is the portrayal of Arthur's connection with otherworldly beings, particularly the elves or fairies, led by their queen, Argante. Described as a supernatural figure with powerful healing abilities, Argante appears at Arthur's death, leading him into the realm of Avalon. Her enigmatic presence has led some scholars to associate her with Morgan le Fay, a central figure in later Arthurian literature. This hypothesis, first proposed in the early 20th century, has not been consistently taken into account in modern scholarship on the character.

This paper aims to re-examine the relationship between Argante and Morgan le Fay through a three-pronged analysis. First, it will trace textual links between La3amon's Argante and Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgen in his *Vita Merlini*, investigating any narrative parallels among the two depictions. Second, it would conduct an etymological study of early sources mentioning the character's name, exploring whether Argant/Morgan share linguistic roots. Finally, it will situate the role of elves and fairies in *Brut* within the broader cultural and folkloric context of medieval England, focusing on their gendered representations and possible connections to nymphs.

By reassessing the textual, linguistic, and cultural dimensions of Argante, this study aims to shed new light on the evolution of supernatural female figures in early Arthurian legend and their enduring significance in medieval literary traditions.

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The Face of the 'Gawain' Poet

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Abstract

Thanks to medieval artists, the faces of Dante or Petrarch or Chaucer are familiar enough. The 'Gawain' Poet has in contrast been thought faceless, thereby blurring his identity. But analysis of the illustrations to *Pearl* in the Cotton Nero manuscript may change that, informing us on the author's age and status. Comparison of them with 15th-century representations of the Stanley family should also indicate whether the Dreamer and the Poet and the Cheshire magnate Sir John Stanley (d. 1414) were or were not one and the same.

A New Reading of Lady Bertilak in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

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Abstract

Lady Bertilak is a key character in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, as she is deeply entangled with all aspects of the plot. Naturally, her role and character in the story have been studied from many angles, the main focus being the analysis of how her actions affect both Gawain's development and the overall reading of the poem. Yet, there is a lack of studies that regard Lady Bertilak as more than just a narrative device to further the plot. A thorough analysis of Lady Bertilak would reveal a level of complexity she has not been allowed previously. Thus, it is essential to assess Lady Bertilak as a nuanced character that has her own vision of the events. Understanding how her emotions develop throughout her participation in Gawain's test, as well as re-evaluating the importance of the girdle as her only mean of protection, is crucial in order to analyse her feelings in a new light.

In this paper I intend to propose a new understanding of Lady Bertilak as a complex character through different clues found in the poem. There are three main aspects that will be analysed for this purpose. First, the evolution in her speech during her temptation of Gawain, from anacoluthon to double entendre and matching Gawain's own (see, for instance Clark 1966 and De Roo 1993). Second, the actual role of the girdle, as a protection given to her by Morgana in case Gawain fell for her charm (see, for example Tolkien 1953 and Cooke 1998). Finally, the intention of the poet behind their writing, which is usually to invite readers to reflect more deeply about the work (see, for instance, Hanna 1983). The aim of this paper is to contribute to a richer understanding of female characters in medieval English literature.

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Tolkien's Academic Life: Early Years

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Abstract

It is Michaelmas term of 1926 and J. R. R. Tolkien's second year as the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford. This named Chair seems to denote that Tolkien's teaching duties involved Old English only, but that is just true in part. Tolkien was also responsible for lecturing on Gothic, Norse and even Middle English. This may come as a surprise for it contradicts the notion embedded in the collective mindset that Tolkien was and had been mostly engaged with *Beowulf*. Yet our author, as we shall discover, had a wider variety of duties as well as interests, as can be seen at a glance if one browses through his reconstructed library (Cilli 2019 [2023]: especially 1–347).

Teaching led Tolkien often to research, regardless of its intensity, investigations that frequently remain hidden amid his unpublished lecture notes. Because he made many findings that never made it to the press during his lifetime, and many remain unpublished to this day. Tolkien's academic production can be likened to an iceberg: his publications (regular or posthumous) crown under the surface a massive mass of research that testifies to his ample and varied expertise. Throughout Paper chapter we present an overview of his early academic career (1911-1925) in the light of his training, teaching and published writings, while establishing, for the first time, a more complete understanding of Tolkien's expertise and knowledge with the support of his unpublished works at the Weston Library (Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford).

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For a Classification of the Portents in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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Abstract

The decapitation scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is one of the most striking moments of the poem; it has traditionally been seen as a supernatural event, one that defies natural order, yet a closer look at the reactions of Arthur, Gawain, and the court suggests that it may be understood as an example of medieval illusionism rather than demonic magic. The term *clergye*, used by Bertilak to describe the ability of Morgan Le Fay in orchestrating the episode, suggests that the magic at play here is not demonic, but a sophisticated form of illusion—akin to the tricks performed by medieval jugglers or scholars studying natural phenomena. This perspective shifts the focus from supernatural forces to the manipulation of perception, an art that was considered both a science and a source of wonder in medieval society.

This interpretation is further supported by medieval texts like the *Secretum Philosophorum*, which outlines methods for deceiving the senses. Such tricks were not seen as violations of natural laws, but rather as feats of intellectual and perceptual skill. By framing the decapitation scene as an illusion, the poem connects with the intellectual culture of the time, offering a more nuanced view of magic. In this way, Gawain's confrontation with the Green Knight can be viewed as a moment not of supernatural terror, but of a challenge to perception itself, a game of illusion that the knight must navigate with both physical courage and intellectual discernment.

This paper seeks to explore how the decapitation scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* can be understood as an example of medieval illusionism, drawing connections between the poem's depiction of magic and contemporary perceptions of reality.

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'Fettled in on forme': Reading *Patience* as a 'Poetic Imitation'

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Abstract

Most studies of *Patience* have involved some analysis of the relationship which the poem has to the Vulgate Book of Jonah, terms including homily, paraphrase, sermon, translation; in the words of one of the most recent commentators, "much criticism on *Patience* begins from the premise that the work is at base vernacular paraphrase". This paper seeks to explore the term 'poetic imitation' as being the most appropriate to describe the relationship between 'source' and 'version', with particular attention given to the system of rhetorical internal parallelism which characterises each text. 'Imitation' has a complex history in literary criticism; Aristotle's 'Mimesis' has a much broader reference than the 'imitation' presented here, which is specifically used to denote a certain kind of translation. The term *imitatio* became fundamental to the theory of translation during Augustan Roman times, as Rita Copeland has masterfully shown in her examination of Roman translation, and imitation, of Greek literature: "The ideal of imitation … is that of organic recreation from an earlier text, in the sense of formal or substantive adaptation. Translation, on the other hand, is recognised as necessarily replicative". The concept of 'organic recreation from an earlier text' is essential when considering the relationship which *Patience* creates with its Vulgate source. The term used in this present study—'poetical imitation'—involves the poetical fusion of source and version; a method of translation which, developing from the Roman model, became perfected in the 18th century. This study offers a critical analysis of the Medieval poem *Patience* and its relation to the Vulgate Bible's version of The Book of Jonah, exploring the poet's response to the structural and rhetorical system of the Latin source, and relating his significant transformation of that source to the poem's 'homiletic' theme. The critical method is that of close textual reading.

Chaucer, The Revenant, and the 'Effable Ineffable: A Balladic Reading of *The Book of the Duchess*'

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Abstract

Ballad scholarship in English has been developing steadily since the 18th century, and has periodically prompted heated debate. One of the central questions has been how seriously to take Percy's presentation of ballads in his 'dedicatory epistle' to his *Reliques* as "not as labours of art, but as effusions of nature"—and whether there can be any justification in distinguishing balladry from 'literature'. More recent ballad criticism, for example in the work of Douglas Gray, has indicated that for as long as ballads have existed, they have enjoyed a closer relationship with the poems which we now term 'canonical works' than was accepted in earlier critical periods. This paper will explore possible 'balladic' aspects of the composition of Chaucer's first major poem, *The Book of the Duchess*, by identifying stylistic qualities of the poem which have a close relationship with those of both the popular ballad and folk song. To quote David Fowler, "the ballad is a special narrative form within the larger context of folksong, of which it has become a part"; and although it is not possible to give any approximate date to the beginnings of 'balladry' itself, the manuscript copy of the ballad 'Judas' does indicate that it was a developing genre by the year 1300. The 'revenant lover' *topos*, central to Chaucer's poem, has a long history, present in Virgil's *Aeneid* as well as in Chaucer's source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; however, it is also a recurring 'balladic' theme, as demonstrated in this paper, which also explores one of the greatest strengths of the ballad style: the way in which the ballad can convey in very simple language an inexpressible, or 'ineffable' anguish—which Chaucer's poem also succeeds in doing so powerfully.

Wudu, *burg*, and *fryth*: Landscape Depiction in Medieval English Alliterative Poetry

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Abstract

Landscape depiction is not only a prominent feature within the alliterative tradition, both in Old English and Middle English, but also highly heterogeneous, which is remarkable considering the relatively homogeneous formal style of the poetry. *Beowulf*, usually regarded as the most canonical of all Old English poems—and so it is the most intensely studied as well (see Fulk 2008)—, is rich in landscape description (e.g. ll. 1357–76 and 1408–19). Archetypical Beowulfian descriptions, however, are not isolated instances in medieval English alliterative poetry. In fact, many scholars have showcased the significant correlation between poetic imagery (i.e. not only in *Beowulf*) and the natural world (Pearsall and Salter 1973; Neville 1999; Michelet 2006; Hiatt 2020), evincing key connexions between spatial order (or disorder), sensory experience and poetry, yet works have not so far received sufficient attention in this respect. I will then take Hrothgar's description of the entrance to Grendel's Mere in *Beowulf* as the starting point to analyse selected passages from Old English texts—such as *The Wife's Lament*, *The Wanderer*, *Andreas* or *Guthlac A*—and from works of the so-called Alliterative Revival in Middle English (see Turville-Petre 1977), including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*.

By comparing semantic constituents and syntactic structures, this paper aims at scrutinising discrete methods of landscape depiction in a variety of poems with an eye to providing an insight to poetic diction and motifs, both to increase our understanding of Old English literary history in relation to the different traditions underlying descriptions in medieval English alliterative poetry (e.g. Christian Latin tradition, pre-Christian Germanic culture, epic and romance) and to enhance our appreciation of the poets' artistry.

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Locatio passionis: An Ecofeminist Approach to the Middle English Iuliene

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Abstract

The story of St Juliana of Nicomedia's martyrdom, which took place in the early 4th century, received much attention within the Christian tradition. The young woman, an example of unwavering Christian faith, resisted the enforcement of paganism decreed by Emperor Maximianus during the Roman rule in Asia Minor, the capital city of Nicomedia becoming one of the most important Christian centres in the region. The popularity of this pious legend is attested by the numerous versions available of Juliana's *passio*, which spread across different centuries, cultures and languages, and reached the Middle Ages. Predictably, the process of transmission of this hagiographical material involved changes and adaptations in the narrative with the purpose of adjusting it to the specific context of reception.

This paper offers a comparative study of two such medieval accounts of Juliana's martyrdom: the Middle English *Þe liflade ant te passiun of Seinte Iuliene*, recorded in the MS. Bodley 34 (first half 13th century), and the Latin *Passio S. Iulianae* from MS Paris, BNF, lat. 10861, (9th century), copied in England and closely linked to the lost Latin source from which this Middle English text descends. The main objective is to carry out an ecofeminist analysis of the texts' (re)construction of Juliana's sanctity as a case of female dissidence, symbolically expressed through her interactions with the urban setting of Nicomedia, this representing institutional authority. To this end, this study will examine the terminology used in the medieval renderings of the story to locate Juliana's martyrdom within the gendered power dynamics of late antiquity as embodied by the scenarios of the classical *urbs*, which are reimagined by the medieval authors to make them resonate with their contemporary audiences.

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An Environmental Materialist Reading of Middle English Rota 'Sumer is Icumen In'

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Abstract

This paper analyses the famous 13th-century polyphonic Rota piece 'Sumer Is Icumen in', under the lens of the new environmental materialist studies, which puts the focus on the physicality of spaces and bodies, in order to reconnect nature with human activity. In addition, it seeks to "feel-think" (Fals) daily dues and cultural initiatives from the perspective of the "geography of perception" (Tuan); which produces, in a rhizomatic way (Deleuze and Guattari), an interconnection of thought with history, through time and space, and, above all, with the corporality of actant beings in eloquent and agentic places. Finally, the dividing lines between material objects (using the theory of "ecotones"), as well as the presence of natural ecobodies—in terms of sympoietic generation of activities (haraway) and symbiotic mutuality (Albrecht)—will be scrutinized to achieve new dimensions of the literary study and make visible the subalternity of the other non-human species. In this sense, the Rota musical genre (or four voices with canonical multiplicity) is particularly interesting for the polyphony it implies. The famous 'Sumer Is Icumen in', (considered the oldest English canon extant) combines an actant nature with the mannerist narrative of the time, with its exuberant atmosphere of life and sound, which will be studied from an environmental postpastoralist perspective. Special consideration will be paid to the collection of tangible and immaterial showcases, with their respective rhizomatic layers of agent and empathic interrelations, and their mode of collective representation. In the same way, the overlapping of sentient beings in a specific earth milieu, with its cyclical and essential nourishment, will be tackled. The results will offer a review of the landscape shown in the song, resituating the environment and the characters, decolonizing animal stereotypes, and creating new alliances and meanings devoid of anthropocentrism.

Medieval English and Celtic Influences in C. S. Lewis's Voyage of the Dawn Treader

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Abstract

The proposed paper will address the presence of Celtic influences in the work of C. S. Lewis. Lewis, a medievalist better known to the general public as the author of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, famously incorporated not only elements borrowed from medieval literature, but also commentary on the modern and medieval in his work. As Professor of English Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge, the influences of the medieval tradition generally, and medieval English literature in particular on his work, have been well studied (e.g. Ward 2008; Baxter 2022). The proposed paper aims to complement these readings with an exploration of the relationship of Lewis's creative work with the medieval Irish and Welsh traditions, and the interplay between elements deriving from these, with his professional focus on medieval English literature. The paper will address in particular two elements of these traditions which had a broader European impact both in the Middle Ages and beyond: the legend of Saint Brendan's Voyage and the Arthurian legend, and Lewis's use of these in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (Lewis 1952 [2014]). This paper builds on previous research relating to Lewis's use of Brendan's voyage as a model (Lawyer 2002; Swank 2019), and on my forthcoming book (Petrovskaia 2025), to show the influence of Lewis's professional engagement with medieval English literature on his adaptation of Irish and Welsh material.

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The Figure of Saint Bartholomew in Middle English Religious Literature

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Abstract

One of the most fascinating figures of saints of the Christian tradition is that of the Apostle Bartholomew. All we know about this Saint's preaching activity and martyrdom derives from apocryphal texts, the best known of which in medieval West was the *Passio Sancti Bartholomaei*, which served as a major source for later writings. In England Bartholomew played a crucial role, being the spiritual guide of the British Saint Guthlac; it is therefore compelling to look at his portrayal in medieval English religious literature. The picture of Middle English writings concerning Saint Bartholomew is extremely complex and varied, as it comprises texts in both verse and prose, dating back to a timespan that goes from the 13th to the 15th century, and pertaining to two distinct but interconnected genres: legendaries and sermons, whose main aim was the moral edification of their readers. Texts focusing on this Saint are thus to be found in hagiographical narratives such as the *South English Legendary*, the *Scottish Legendary*, the *Northern Homily Collection*, and the *Gilte Legende*; as well as sermon collections like Mirk's *Festial*, the *Speculum Sacerdotale*, and the sermons preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 96. This paper intends to analyse how the figure of Saint Bartholomew is represented in these writings, each of which is somehow related to Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*—'the decisive source for vernacular legends' (Görlach 1998)—and yet is unique. The aim is to highlight the distinctive features of each text, thereby unveiling the relationships among them. The results will allow to reconsider the role of the *Legenda Aurea* itself in their compilation and to better delineate the *mouvance* that characterizes these literary pieces.

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From Canon Law into Folklore, Belial in the English Mystery Plays

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Abstract

Throughout the long centuries of their existence, mystery plays established strong links between Biblical texts and themes on the one hand, and vernacular culture on the other. Their topics, having a biblical basis, ranged from the liturgical sphere to the environment of folklore, bringing the characters and themes they offered to a broad and popular audience. They continued to evolve during the late Middle Ages, even though in England they began to disappear during the English Reformation and the establishment of the Church of England. However, the topics and characters in those plays remained in the collective imagination, shaping it and developing a tradition that even authors as strongly cultured as John Milton continued in their own way, transforming them for their own purposes.

This paper seeks to approach the role of the demon Belial (Bellyall) in the representation of the Harrowing of Hell, especially in the York and Towneley cycles, and discusses how the spheres of influence attributed to this demon (those of rhetoric and moral corruption) are depicted in these plays. The role of Belial in the Harrowing of Hell's fight over the souls of the righteous is similar to that which he acquires in other medieval works, such as Langland's *Piers Plowman* or Jacobus da Theramo's *Liber Belial* (14c), a text that shaped the frame of discussion for canon law. This paper aims to explore the possible relation between these works and the mysteries, and their influence in creating the precedent of a character that would develop for hundreds of years in literature (Belial as the lawyer/counsellor of the devil), thus generating what I think can be called a literary tradition of its own.

'And she laughed…': The Disbelieving Woman, Eucharistic Exempla, and Vernacular Preaching in Late Medieval England

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Abstract

This paper investigates a remarkable but overlooked exemplum—the disbelieving woman who doubts the Real Presence and desecrates the Host—as it appears exclusively in a cluster of late 14th- and 15th-century Middle English sermons (O'Mara and Paul 2007). Preserved in manuscripts such as Bodleian Library e Musaeo 180, Graves 54, Gloucester Cathedral Library 22, British Library Harley 2247, Claudius A.ii and Shrewsbury School III, the story is, as far as current evidence shows, unattested elsewhere in the vernacular homiletic tradition. Its limited diffusion contrasts sharply with the extensive circulation of its Latin analogues, suggesting a deliberate and meaningful reworking by individual preachers.

Through close comparison with Latin exempla found in the *Legenda Aurea*, *Speculum Laicorum*, *Dialogus Miraculorum* and collections attributed to Jacques de Vitry and Etienne de Bourbon, this paper explores how these narratives were transformed in the vernacular. Thematic, narrative and rhetorical modifications—such as the introduction of miraculous elements (bleeding Hosts, blooming trees, Christ-Child apparitions), shifts in narrative authority ("I rede in a Cronycle…"), and so on—reveal preachers actively tailoring material to fit changing doctrinal priorities and gendered anxieties (Vezzosi 2025; Bailey 2003; Kienzle 2000). For instance, the shift from male to exclusively female protagonists—unlike the more varied gender distribution in the Latin sources—suggests a deliberate alignment of disbelief with femininity, echoing broader ecclesiastical trends that increasingly associated women with witchcraft and sacramental profanation (Kieckhefer 1976; Bodin 1581; Eymericus 1578).

By analyzing both the content and rhetorical strategies of these Middle English sermons, both within and beyond Mirk's Festial, the paper aims to reconstruct the preacher's reworking, showing how vernacular preaching acted as a key medium for translating elite theological discourse—particularly on heresy, magic and sacramental theology—into accessible and affective moral instruction for lay audiences (Delcorno 2017; Fletcher 2009; Ward 1982).

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Middle English Language and Linguistics

The Decoration of *Prick of Conscience*: *Litterae Notabiliores*, Rubrication, Rhyming Brackets

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Abstract

One of the most striking features of mediaeval manuscripts is their illumination, which enhances their visual appeal while having a functional value (Parkes 1993; Beadle and Hanna 2020). Building on the approaches of Kerby-Fulton et al. (2012) and Parkes (1993), this study aims to combine both perspectives to describe the scribal practices in the use of decorative elements and their rhetorical or structural functions in five manuscripts copies of *Prick of Conscience* (MS D.5, English MS 90, MS e Mus. 76, CCA-DCc/LitMs/D/13 and MS Dd.12.69). Additionally, it seeks to identify the external factors influencing these variations. This description will solely focus on the folios of the Prologue.

The features examined include (i) ink colours, (ii) size and shape, (iii) additional decorative elements, (iv) planning strategies (space, guiding marks), and (v) probable functions (Petti 1977; Parkes 1993; Kerby-Fulton et al. 2012). Ultimately, the data analysis will help us establish the order of production of each artefact and to determine to what extent there is variation in scribal practices across different manuscripts.

The results reveal the presence of five main types of illumination documented in most of these five manuscripts: decorated initials, versals, rubrication of Latin verse, rhyming brackets and penwork. Despite shared features, the level of care in illumination varies significantly, from manuscripts with rich decoration (English MS 90 or MS e Mus. 76) to minimal decoration (MS D.5). Influential factors include the available space on the folio (Ahvensalmi 2013), the location of manuscript production, and/or the budget of the prospective purchaser (Bell 1936).

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A Semantic and Stylistic Approach of Norse-derived Terms in *Havelok the Dane*

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Abstract

Research into the integration of Norse loanwords into English is far from complete. Comprehensive studies by Richard Dance (2003), Janne Skaffari (2009) and Sara Pons-Sanz (2024, 2025) have greatly advanced our understanding of the integration of these Norse-derived terms in Middle English works, and yet much remains to be examined.

Such advanced and accessible tools as the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), and especially for this purpose the *Historical Thesaurus of English* (HTE) have made it possible to conduct a detailed analysis of the semantic relationships between Norse-derived terms and their native (near-)synonyms. With the help of the HTE, I begin with a general classification of the lexico-semantic domains that include words of Norse origin found in the 13th-century Middle English poem *Havelok the Dane*, which only survives in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc 108. Following this overall classification, I examine in detail one specific semantic category, SOCIETY, focusing on a selection of Scandinavian borrowings within sub-groups such as OCCUPATION, WORK and ARMED HOSTILITY. With this lexico-semantic study of *Havelok*, which has not been previously addressed, I aim to take a closer look at the semantic and stylistic connections between the Norse-derived terms and their native (near-)synonyms in the poem, exploring the factors that might have influenced the author's lexical choices.

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The Semantic Field of 'Medical Agents' in Middle English

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Abstract

This paper is part of the project *Waxing and Waning Words: Lexical Variation and Change in Middle English* (WAW-ME). Part of this project will result in the creation of online databases that will give diachronic, diaphasic and diatopic information on the Middle English lexicon. Here, I will focus on the semantic field of medicine in Middle English, and more particularly the subcategory of 'Agents' as entitled in the databases. This subcategory deals with lexical items used to designate healers, broadly defined (items such as *leech*, *healer*, *doctor*, *chirurgeon*, *apothecary* and *midwife*), as well as patients, who take part in the medical procedures (items such as *seke*, *sickman*, *lazar*, *malade* and *patient*). This paper aims at providing an overview of the evolution of this field between the 12th and the 15th centuries. The lexical data collected for this overview come mainly from the *Historical Thesaurus of English*, *The Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The analysis of the data collected makes it possible to describe the evolution of the lexicon of 'medical agents' through time, but also the geographical distribution of the terms as well as the different genres and registers in which they appear. This will lead to a description of the manner in which these words were used in specialised and non-specialised contexts.

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New Readings of The Thewis of Gud Women

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Abstract

The 15th-century Middle Scots text *The Thewis of Gud Women* has received virtually no critical attention since the 1948 edition by Tauno F. Mustanoja. Surviving in two extant manuscripts with significant variants, Mustanoja included the Scots text with two other English missives of motherly advice. All three texts participate in the tradition of advice texts for young women; what is unique in *The Thewis* is its reminders that virtue is contingent on community and materiality. Its narrator, a fictional mother, addresses a young woman, but also the community at large by moments, reminding men how fragile a woman's virtue can be and how bad company and poverty can lead to a moral downfall.

The Thewis revisits many of the commonplaces of earlier 14th-century texts: one must dress appropriately, attend to one's home and husband, perform one's religious duties, keep good company and avoid those who would lead one towards debauchery. The genesis of *The Thewis* remains unclear and possible sources elude the scholar for the most part. This paper seeks to replace the text into conversation with the continental tradition of conduct literature to demonstrate what it shares with more canonical texts as well as its uniqueness.

Possible Causes of the Growth and Loss of *-meal* Adverbs in Middle English

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Abstract

The suffix *-meal* originates from the dative plural of the Old English noun *mǣl* 'measure' and forms denominal adverbs with the sense 'X by X' such as *dǣlmǣlum* 'piecemeal' and *dropmǣlum* 'drop by drop' (Kastovsky 1992: 397). After the loss of the ending *-um*, this "common" (Brinton 2012: 159 n.29) suffix survived into Middle English and went on to create new adverbs from nouns of native and French origin (e.g. *littlemeal* 'little by little' and *gobbetmeal* 'bit by bit', respectively). However, it ceased to be productive by the end of the 16th century, and all *-meal* adverbs are 'obsolete' today except *piecemeal* (*OED* s.v. *-meal*, Meaning & use). Perhaps unsurprisingly, they are not discussed at all in Marchand's (1969) exhaustive study of present-day English word-formation.

Middle English is the crucial period for the history of *-meal* adverbs given that i) new members emerged partly to compensate for the loss of the majority of Old English *-mǣlum* adverbs; ii) 'piecemeal', the sole *-meal* adverb currently in use, was born in the early 14th century; iii) the formula 'X by X', which ultimately replaced *-meal* adverbs, is first attested in the late 14th century; iv) most new *-meal* adverbs in the 16th century were hapax legomena or short-lived.

This paper aims to shed more light on *-meal* adverbs in Middle English by trying to identify the causes of their growth and eventual loss. After an overview based on the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), I will analyse examples in the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* and offer case studies of the *Wycliffite Bible* and *Piers Plowman*, which record the earliest use of several new *-meal* adverbs. I will show that *-meal* adverbs continued to be associated with the practice of glossing or translating Latin and often remained no better than nonce word plays.

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Anglo-Italian Contact via Commercial Interaction at English Ports. A Lexical Investigation in Late Medieval Period (14th-15th Century)

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Abstract

Anglo-Italian contact and the presence of Italian merchants in English ports left traces both in Italian and Middle English lexicon. This paper investigates the presence of anglicisms in Italian, with special attention to the etymological problems posed by their analysis. Mercantile writings, rather than the literary canon, can provide us with a new source of pre-1500 loanwords. Middle English loanwords in medieval Italian texts—as currently documented in major historical dictionaries, at least—are very thin on the ground. Nonetheless, they are interesting in terms of the theoretical and methodological issues they raise, as well as the linguistic and historical-cultural implications. Based on a corpus of letters sent from England to Genova, we identified a group of lexemes related to the business world. We are going to investigate the issues related to their etymology and the history of words through the examination of medieval mercantile documentation and of the main lexicographic sources of both the languages of medieval England (Anglo-Norman, Middle English and medieval Latin) and Italian. It is worth recalling that written communication in English mercantile environments is characterised, throughout the period of interest, by the use of Anglo-Norman. This complicates the identification of a univocal transmission route from the languages of medieval England to Italian, especially considering the limited documentary evidence of the investigated lexemes. For some of these words, for example, correspondences can be found in Anglo-Norman texts but not in Middle English writings. Furthermore, the observation of the formal and semantic aspects of such lexemes confirms that it is necessary to consider the transmission across Anglo-Norman and/or Middle English as a complex etymological route. Finally, we will look into the relationship with extra-linguistic reality, observing the loss of vitality of the lexemes with the decline of Anglo-Italian trade in the late Middle Ages.

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Adjectives Ending in *-en* in the *Wycliffite Bible* (c. 1382-1395) and in Tyndale's Translation of the *New Testament* (1526)

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Abstract

This paper compares and analyses the corpus of adjectives ending in the *-en* suffix (meaning 'pertaining to, of the nature of') in the *New Testament* books of the Wycliffite Bible and in William Tyndale's translation of the *New Testament*. The language of these Bible translations has been extensively analysed from the theological point of view, from the aspect of Biblical translation studies, and also with respect to the morphological and syntactic development of the English language. This paper will thus present a new aspect of these texts, exploring possible changes in the use of adjectives such as *brazen* (in the sense 'made of copper, bronze, or brass'), *golden*, *silvern*, etc. between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 16th century. The research will focus on parallel translations of verses containing at least one adjective with the suffix *-en* in at least one of the translations; a parallel corpus has been built from these verses. Attributive, predicative and substantival (i.e. when an adjective functions as a noun) uses will all be explored.

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Markers of Countability in Middle English

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Abstract

While countability as a grammatical category has been described as "basic in English" (Quirk et al. 1985: 247), its development in English has never been systematically described. At the same time, given the dramatic typological shift from Old English (OE) to Present-day English (PDE), diachronic changes of the category seem highly likely—noting this, Denison states "full evidence is not yet available" (1998: 96).

This paper is part of a broader project aimed at tracing the historical development of countability in English. Building on our previous investigation of OE, we examine the emergence of the major PDE markers of countability in Middle English (ME) and contribute to a more systematic account of the category during this period. Our focus is specifically on nominal number, the distribution of incipient articles, and the use of quantifiers. We analyse these features both in comparison to other periods (OE and PDE) and in relation to diachronic change and dialectal variation within ME.

Our methodology is based on a set of high-frequency nouns that have survived from OE to PDE. These nouns are carefully selected to represent a range of variables, including semantic categories (e.g., concrete, abstract, substance), countability status in PDE dictionaries and OE inflectional classes. Using PPCME2 for ME and BNC for PDE,[1] we examine three key factors: 1) the pluralization of the selected nouns indicated by their morphology or SV agreement; 2) the distribution of the (incipient) article *a* in their NPs; and 3) the distribution of quantifiers in their NPs.

Analysing these key factors, the paper illustrates the establishment of the category in its modern form.

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Low-frequency Variation in Late Medieval English Documents as a Source of Early Language History

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Abstract

The proposed paper presents a new project ongoing at the University of Stavanger: 'Linguistic Traces: low-frequency forms as evidence of language and population history' (LiTra). The aim is to study geographical patterns of minority variants ('micro-patterns') in late medieval English in order to uncover earlier patterns of language contact and settlement. The project builds upon *A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (MELD) which contains localized and dated documents from the period 1399-1525.

In the absence of written records, language appears ephemeral: changes through time seemingly erase all traces of earlier speech. Such erasures are not, however, complete, as language change always leaves behind a tail of residual forms. Very little research has dealt with the low-frequency variation that forms part of all natural language, even though it is known that residual forms are often resistant to change and may show stable geographical patterns. The LiTra project explores the potential of such patterns to provide linguistic 'fingerprints' allowing the reconstruction of much earlier linguistic configurations.

We will study the spread and interactions of linguistic groups in early England through micro-patterns in an expanded version of the MELD corpus. A key methodological challenge is to produce an annotated corpus that allows for the detailed analysis of linguistically variable texts. Such an approach has not been attempted before, and is made possible by the combination of philological research and the development of corpus annotation methods based on deep learning technology. The proposed paper outlines the thinking behind the project and discusses the methodological challenges involved in its first phase, that of corpus annotation. It then goes on to address the question of low-frequency variation in late Middle English: what kind of patterns may we expect to find, and how do they relate to the overall development of written English during this period?

Committing Crimes in Late Middle English

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Abstract

In this paper, I will present an overview of the semantic field of CRIME and CRIMINAL OFFENCES in Middle English. The lexical items were collected from the *Historical Thesaurus of English* (category 03.05.09.02.01: Society > Law > Rule of law > Lawlessness > Specific offences) as well as the *Middle English Dictionary* (subject label Law).

I will analyse these data in terms of language of origin (English, French, Latin, Old Norse) and word formation processes and relationships between words within the semantic field (e.g. derivation, conversion, compounding). Additionally, the items in the dataset were searched in *A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (MELD) in order to investigate their frequencies, spelling variations, their occurrence in bi- and multinomial expressions, as well as potential differences in usage across various document types. If time permits, the results obtained from MELD will be compared against a general, non-legal reference corpus. This will further allow me to draw conclusions on whether individual words, phrases, and/or bi- and multinomial expressions were part of the general or technical (legal) vocabulary of late Middle English.

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