“Ne ænig hleomæga feassceaftig ferð frefran meahte”: Old English Elegiac Elements in Breton Lays from Medieval England

Remmelzwaal, Dionne

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Student name: Dionne Remmelzwaal

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First reader: Dr. Murchison

Second reader: Dr. Porck

Leiden University, Department of Literary Studies

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Introduction

Few studies have been dedicated to exploring the survival of the Old English elegy in the later Middle Ages. The survival of the Old English elegy in Middle English literary works has been explored only in passing. For the most part, previous scholarship related to the elegy has been directed toward exploring the existence of the elegy in the Renaissance and in later literary periods. For instance, Scott Wayland discusses the range of elegiac literature in Renaissance poetry. Another scholar who approaches the survival of the elegy, Joseph O'Leary, attempts to delineate the use of elegiac elements in Yeats' works, thus focusing the survival of the elegiac genre in the nineteenth century. Nils Clausson looks towards the end of the eighteenth century, discussing the existence of the pastoral elegy in the Romantic literary movement.

There are a number of scholars who do research the survival of the Old English elegy in Middle English literature. Angela Carson examines the elements of elegy that exist within the Middle English poem *Pearl*. Brenda Deen Schildgen explores the link between the elegy and the descriptions of trees in the works of Statius, Boccaccio and Chaucer. These studies demonstrate the potential of exploring the role of elegy in Middle English literature, but further research remains to be done on the retention of the elegy within medieval English literature.

In this thesis, I will explore the extent to which elements of the Old English elegy survive in Middle English poetry. Specifically, I will explore which elements of the Old English elegy survive in Breton lais. To support this research, I will examine *The Wanderer, The Seafarer* and *The Ruin*. Using these elegiac poems, I will attempt to catalogue the important elements of the Old English elegiac tradition. These three poems – and especially *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* – have been chosen for analysis because they have had a significant impact on modern views of the elegy; they are very well-known elegies and have been researched heavily in prior scholarship.

After having identified these elegiac elements, I will explore the extent to which elegiac elements operate in Breton lays such as *Sir Orfeo* and Marie de France's *Lanval* and *Chaitivel*. *Sir Orfeo* and Marie de France's lays have been selected for consideration here because they are among the most famous of Breton lays, and they were particularly popular with their contemporary audiences. Given their popularity, these lays may help elucidate to what degree the elegy was prevalent among medieval readers. By exploring these topics, this research aims at providing more insight into the extent of the cultural transmission between the Old English period and the Middle English period.

To support this research, I will draw on a number of sources which may help to clarify the nature of the Old English elegy. In the first chapter, I will attempt to clarify the nature of the elegiac genre in general. I will attempt to form an understanding of what the genre consists of by discussing other forms within the elegiac tradition. By first laying down a more general foundation, I will then be able to focus on the Old English elegy in particular. Moreover, I will discuss what influences may have contributed to the development of the Old English elegy. In the second chapter, I will attempt to define some markers of the Old English elegy by examining *The Wanderer*, taking the poem as paradigmatic of the form. In the third chapter, I will continue to build on my discussion of the elegiac markers found in *The Wanderer* by bringing in *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin.* By way of comparison, I hope to show that the elegiac markers found in *The Wanderer* are also prevalent in other Old English elegiac poems.

I will examine *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin* in terms of their style and content on the basis of the elegiac markers found in *The Wanderer*. Aside from comparing their similarities, I will also discuss where the poems may differ. In the last chapter, I will discuss the survival of elements of the Old English elegy in the Middle English period. To do so, I will provide an overview of the literary transition from the Old English period to post-Conquest England. Moreover, I will discuss examples of elegiac elements found in other Middle English texts. Then, I will examine *Sir Orfeo, Lanval* and *Chaitivel*, and compare these Breton lays to the three old English elegies previously discussed. I will examine to what degree the elegiac elements exist in these Breton lays. Through this analysis, this study will contribute to ongoing research on the Old English elegies and Breton lays in Medieval England.

I. A Word on The Genre of Old English Elegy

Before any discussion about the extent of Old English elegiac survival in Breton lays can begin, it is important to explore the nature of an Old English elegy. First, it is valuable to discuss what 'elegiac poetry' signifies. In this chapter, there will be an attempt to define the Old English elegy through a brief discussion of the broader history of the elegiac genre prior to, and during, the Old English literary period. Furthermore, the chapter will focus on the development of the Old English elegy in an attempt to establish a preliminary framework of its characteristics.

Before the discussion at hand can begin, there is a difficulty that needs to be addressed. Namely, there is little agreement between scholars about the true definition of elegy, nor is there much agreement about what selection of characteristics an elegy is supposed to have (Weisman 2). This is especially true for Old English elegies. It seems to be difficult to define Old English elegy as a genre in itself. One reason for that is the abundance of Old English poems that feature similar elegiac elements, but differ quite substantially in other aspects such as length, subject matter or poetic structure (Opfer 1). There are many different ideas of what the genre is and which poems it should contain, all based on differing characteristics (Opfer 1). James Goodall writes that in the field of medieval literary scholarship, the label 'elegy' was traditionally applied to Old English poems out of convenience, thereby grouping together "poems that shared certain characteristics of tone and content" (Goodall 2). However, Goodall is not specific about what time period 'traditionally' entails.

While elegiac poems may have been grouped together based on similarities, this 'elegiac group' has not always consisted of the same poems. The list of poems defined as elegies has changed continuously, and it largely depends on the scholars who are researching the topic at a given time (Goodall 2). Different scholars have included or excluded different poems from the list, and a poem's inclusion or exclusion seemed to rely on what qualifications a certain scholar would attribute to an elegy (Goodall 2). Not every scholar is taught within the same academic framework and, naturally, opinions on which qualities an elegy should have will differ.

The theme of lamentation is a key aspect of the elegiac poem. However, it is important to address a difficulty with regards to lamentation. As previously stated, the categorization of elegies was based on the existence of a shared tone or shared content matter (Goodall 2). The notion of a shared tone is particularly interesting in this regard, because this tone is generally melancholic. Passages that depict lamentation emphasize this melancholic tone, because they serve as expressions of grief of various types. This combination, consisting of the melancholic tone and lamentation passages, seems to be a defining aspect of the elegy. This is where the difficulty appears. Although this combination may be a key aspect of the elegy, it does appear in other types of literature as well (Orchard 101; Goodall 12). According to Orchard, Anglo-Saxon literature itself, whether prose or verse, is "overwhelmingly retrospective in theme" and "tinged with longing and regret" (101). In fact, Orchard denotes that, in the body of Anglo-Saxon literature, there is an extensive spread of an "Anglo-Saxon elegiac sensibility" (101). This sensibility seems to count for Latin and vernacular texts, and it does not seem to be bound to a particular time period (Orchard 105). This contributes to the difficulties in defining the limits of the elegy as a genre.

Despite the obstacles that may arise when identifying poems as Old English elegies, there are poems which have been labelled as Old English elegies. Most of the Old English poems that are labelled as elegies are poems found in the Exeter Book (Goodall 2). However, there are many differences between these particular elegiac poems even in this single manuscript (Orchard 105). This, again, raises a sense of difficulty. If there are many texts that

share the same 'elegiac sentiment', but differ in many other areas, can they really be grouped together in the same category based on just one similarity (Orchard 101)? Given this complexity, the following discussion can only be an attempt at defining the Old English elegy; no one 'true' definition could ever be possible.

The difficulties that have been noted may raise a question. Why should one bother to define the Old English elegy at all? For this particular research, it seems of paramount importance to have some sort of defined framework that casts a light on what the Old English elegy is. Without one, it would be difficult to identify elements of the Old English elegy in another time period and another literary genre. To identify elements of the Old English elegy, it is relevant to examine different poems that have been labelled as Old English elegies and attempt to define features of these poems. The discussion could establish some idea about how widely such features were spread in the body of Anglo-Saxon literature (Opfer 12-13). Defining features of the elegy may, therefore, further our understanding of it.

As previously stated, the elegy lacks one definitive definition. Instead, the elegy has been defined by different scholars with varying opinions, which seem to meet on common ground only occasionally. To further the discussion, it might be wise to gather a few views on what the elegy means to gather something of a working idea of the elegy, and to guide the discussion in a more concrete direction. The term 'elegy' naturally appears in many dictionaries. In this case, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) forms an adequate source, because it offers a definition that is based on a catalogue of different literary sources that are concerned with elegy. When consulting the OED, the following senses are applied to the term 'elegy':

> A song or poem of lamentation, esp. for the dead; a memorial poem […] *Music.* A piece of instrumental music created as a lament or having a melancholic or mournful style […] A piece of writing, drama, art, etc., imbued with a sense of mourning or melancholy affection for something ("Elegy").

While helpful, the OED definition does not apply to an Old English elegy directly.

It is, therefore, helpful to look to scholars who have researched the Old English elegy. James Goodall argues for the following definition of an Old English elegy: "The elegy is a dramatic monologue ranging in length from fifty lines to just over a hundred. Characterized by lamentation in varying degrees of intensity […] a rich description of a vanished past which causes the speaker to reflect on the effects of the passage of time" (2).

On another note, Andy Orchard has a significant stock of research in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies. Orchard, similarly, calls the elegy a "poetic monologue" that laments hardships of various natures or a lost past with a "generally homiletic tone and structure [that] can be matched elsewhere in Old English prose […] (105). As a preliminary assumption, it seems that a salient characteristic of the Old English elegy is the mourning of lost time or a lost way of life. Moreover, the elegy is written in the style of a monologue. Fumo brings up the notion of a medieval mortality culture, expressed, for example, in mortality lyrics as well as laments (120). According to Fumo, a preoccupation with death prospered in the medieval period, especially after the Black Death (120). A possible popularity of the elegy at that particular time, thus, would not be unusual, because an elegy is a form of lament that is concerned with loss. However, the notion of the elegy as "a distinct, self-aware form of literary discourse" hardly existed in medieval England, especially not in comparison to the elegiac poetry created in Latin in France or Spain (Fumo 120). It seems that the use of the term 'elegy' is a modern occurrence (Fumo 120). The term 'elegy' may have existed at the time, but elegiac poems were more likely to be labelled as 'laments' than 'elegies' (Fumo 120). For convenience of use, this discussion will still use the term 'elegy'.

It is important to note that an Old English elegy differs from other elegiac variants, of which there are many. It is believed that the origin of the elegy rests in the classical world

(Weisman, 1). Like the Old English elegy, the classical elegy is a dynamic form of poetry, containing many variant forms and subjects. For the purpose of this discussion, it may be helpful to highlight two strains within the classical elegy. Namely, the ancient Greek elegy and the later Roman, or Latin, elegy.

The English word *elegy* is considered to be derived from the ancient Greek word *elegos* (Nagy 13). The meaning of *elegos* is associated with the "singing of a sad and mournful song" (Nagy 13). In fact, Nagy argues that the ancient Greek elegy denotes a kind of poetry that was sung, and was primarily mournful in tone (13). The Greek elegy portrays mourning of various kinds, such as isolation or someone's failures in life (Nagy 29; 36). However, most commonly, the ancient Greek elegy depicts a reaction to the passing of a loved one (Nagy 13; 36). It seems that this kind of elegy sprung forth from the ancient Greek tradition of lamentation songs (Nagy 21). The lament was traditionally performed by the person who experienced the greatest loss by this passing. They were often performed by a female character, who functioned as the lead singer of the lament (Nagy 21). In the lament tradition, the lead singer's performance was followed by a chorus of voices that continued the lament (Nagy 22). The addition of a chorus of voices signals that the mourning was felt by the community as a whole (Nagy 22).

It seems the key difference between a lament and an elegy is the number of people participating. While a lament can be performed by one or more participants, the elegy tends to be performed by only one performer (Nagy 26). Nagy calls a performance by one performer a 'monody' (26). A monody "is a medium of song intended for solo performance" that permeated the whole of ancient Greek literature (26). Furthermore, Nagy argues that the elegy exists as a part of the lament, or an incomplete lament, where the elegy serves as the beginning of the performance (29). Effectually, the elegy is the performance of the speaker and is then followed by the lament of a chorus of people, in which the individual mourning of the speaker becomes part of a communal sense of sorrow (Nagy 29). Moreover, the elegy tended to address a particular subject, which was usually a person (Opfer 1).

Another salient feature of the ancient Greek elegy is its poetic metre. Namely, the ancient Greek elegy commonly employs what is called an 'elegiac couplet', which combines "the elegiac hexameter and the elegiac pentameter" (Nagy 13). Nagy states that an elegy is "A poem constructed by way of elegiac couplets" (13). At its core, the elegiac couplet is made up out of dactyls, which translates to the use of a dactylic hexameter followed by a dactylic pentameter (Nagy 14; Opfer 1). Without becoming overtly technical, it seems that the hexameter creates asymmetry in its rhythm, while the pentameter is symmetrical (Nagy 16). Nagy argues that the pentameter, although only a part of the elegiac couplet, is the defining aspect of the couplet, because it creates a symmetry and forms the end of the couplet (16).

Pentameter is the defining feature of the elegiac couplet, and it is also an attractive feature. Pentameter is attractive because it can be used for more subjects than hexameter (Roberts 86). Hexameter is widely recognizable as a "traditional metre of epic and didactic" texts, which are generally serious in tone (Roberts 86). For weightier, academic texts, hexameter was most commonly employed. If a writer wanted to create a lighter tone to their work, they generally would not use hexameter as much. Through the addition of pentameter, the elegiac couplet could be applied more widely than it could have, using only hexameter. The elegiac couplet, however, was not used for epic or didactic texts, or it was only used as a preface for the work it preceded (Roberts 87). As a preface, the elegiac couplet could lend a more informal tone than the hexameter (Roberts 87). The elegiac couplet is considered more informal than a couplet consisting of hexameter only, and Roberts argues that it could hinder the construction of an argument in a text because it does not flow like the hexameter does (86-87). An informal tone is beneficial for an elegiac text, because an elegy is often more personal than an epic or a didactic text (Roberts 89).

In the late Roman period, roughly ranging from the fourth to sixth century AD, the elegy became even more dynamic (Roberts 85). It possessed a great capacity for adopting poetic conventions from other genres, and had a number of different functions and seemed to be more widely applicable than the ancient Greek elegy (Nagy 19; 14; 85). For example, the Roman or Latin elegy could take inspiration from fables, themes of martyrdom, and Christian moral poems (Roberts 85). It mostly retained the elegiac couplet, but the metre and form of the Roman elegy could vary due to the variation of subjects and forms it used (Roberts 85). In turn, there is "versatility of the elegiac metre" (Roberts 85).

The overall lamenting tone of the elegy never entirely disappeared. A variety of different subjects of lament were present in the Latin elegiac tradition. For instance, a Latin elegy might invoke a sense of nostalgia by reflecting on the loss of ancient strongholds that have been turned to ruin, or remembering Roman history (Roberts 88). For example, the Latin elegy could invoke the poetry of Ovid, and thus evoke a part of Roman history (Roberts 89; 97). Ovid's exile poetry, which was written in the elegiac metre, was very commonly invoked (Roberts 89). On the other hand, a Latin elegy could present its audience with strong moral advice, emphasizing a more pious way of life by reflecting on the hardships in the world, such as the invasions happening across the continent (Roberts 89). In this kind of elegy, there is often a strong emphasis on Christian doctrine and the comfort of the afterlife in contrast to a reflection on worldly sins and transient human life (Roberts 89). Another theme that appears in the Latin elegiac tradition is love and the hardships it can bring. One elegiac element within that theme is that of growing older and reflecting on one's youth and one's declining physical strength and looks (Roberts 91). Roberts argues that most depictions of love in Latin elegiac poetry are not erotic, but rather directed toward friends and family (97-98). Primarily, the point to take away seems that, even in the beginning, the elegy was highly influenced by other themes and subjects. Moreover, the elegiac metre seemed to be a fruitful means of expression for many occasions (Roberts 98).

The Old English elegy seems similarly versatile. The following discussion will focus on the influences that have had a lasting effect on the Old English elegy. To begin, it is important to observe the influence of the classical elegy. On face value, it might not seem as if the poems share many similarities. Primarily, this is due to the fact that, while the classical elegy is made up of the elegiac couplet, the Old English elegy makes use of alliteration as its poetic metre almost exclusively (Opfer 3). In fact, Anglo-Saxon poetry as a whole is very much dominated by the use of alliteration (Opfer 3). According to Orchard, alliteration, as well as assonance, are "stock-in-trade of Anglo-Saxon poetry in both Latin and Old English" (102).

However, there are a number of similarities between the classical elegy and the Old English elegy. Firstly, while Old English elegies do not generally depict the loss of a loved one, as a classical elegy is wont to do, they nevertheless function as a type of lamentation. Like the classical elegy, the Old English elegy depicts the speaker's sorrow about a type of loss. Secondly, the classical elegy tends to be a performance of a single lead character. Similarly, the Old English elegy is generally presented as a monologue of a single speaker. Lastly, the two types of elegy focus on similar subjects, such as reflecting the transience of life or constructions and exile poetry.

When examining the Old English elegiac poems, it becomes clear that the poetic genre shares similarities with two key elements. Firstly, the Old English elegy is primarily influenced by an oral, vernacular tradition. The use of alliteration is a telling sign. Namely, alliteration is a metre that is "designed to be heard" (Opfer 3). In addition, the content for many Old English elegies is primarily secular at its core, rooted in Germanic culture (Orchard 101-102). The Germanic influence is readily evident in the imagery displayed in the poems. The elegiac poems visibly display imagery from the Germanic heroic past (Goodall 6). For

example, many of the poems speak of warriors being given gifts by a feudal lord, which is a pillar of Germanic heroic society (Cherniss 100). Moreover, many Old English elegiac poems display the retainers' bond to the lord, as well as the importance of the lord's hall (Opfer 11-12).

Secondly, as already noted, the Latin poetic tradition may have had some, less overt, influences on the Old English elegy. However, given the scope of this research, it would be too ambitious to state that there is direct classical influence on the Old English elegies. While there may not be direct influence, the Old English elegy does share similarities with the classical elegy. As already noted, elegies tend to be sorrowful, and have an element of lamentation. A lamentation element occurs in multiple poetic and prose traditions in different languages, but it is especially prevalent in the classical elegiac tradition (Fumo 121).

The Old English elegy also shares more distinctive features with the classical lament. The classical lament begins with the performance of a single speaker. The Old English elegy is generally a monologue of a single speaker. In this regard, it is interesting to note Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 524). Although a direct link between the Old English elegy and the *Consolation* may not exist, the spirit of the Boethian *Consolation* is visible in some Old English elegies (Fumo 122). The *Consolation* depicts a "composition of Ovidian-style exile poetry in elegiacs" in the opening lines (Fumo 121). By following the example of Ovid's elegiac exile poetry, the *Consolation* draws on the Latinate elegiac tradition in these opening lines. The notion of consolation, the soothing of sorrows, is a key aspect in Boethius' thought (Fumo 121). In that light, Fumo argues that the elegy is not able to console, because it is a monologue (121). In the elegiac monologue, the speaker only has themselves to speak to, and they cannot console themselves while they are suffering. In turn, the elegy can only describe the pain one feels (Fumo 121). Boethius' *Consolation* promotes a "dialogue with God through prayer" to achieve consolation (Fumo 121). Moreover, feeling loss is a sign of one's "unsound possession", meaning someone who feels loss has unnecessary attachments to earthly things (Fumo 122).

In contrast, another view on loss has had influence on the medieval English elegy. Namely, the view that loss cannot be contained other than through the use of poetic expression (Fumo 122). Essentially, one needs to express their loss through poetry to heal. This view stands in sharp contrast with the ideas expressed in the *Consolation.* In the Boethian framework of thought, the visible expression of loss is considered somewhat unnecessary (Fumo 123). As stated previously, feeling loss a sign of having worldly attachments according to Boethius' *Consolation.*

In addition, the Christian religion was a great fount of influence. The entirety of Anglo-Saxon literature was vulnerable to Christian influence and, consequently, Latinate influence (Orchard 102). At the time during which elegies were being recorded into writing, the learned or literate environment was predominantly Christian, because religious institutions were often the only places that had and gave access to learning (Goodall 4). In varying degrees, these elegiac poems were made by Christian poets who had religious aims in mind while writing (Goodall 6). Consequently, thematic elements from the Christian religion found its way into the poems (Goodall 4). Consequently, the written Old English elegy, in turn, became a blend of secular narratives and Christian overtones.

As discussed in this chapter, it is difficult to define the elegy as a genre due to the great amount of versatility that exists within it as well the varying opinions of different scholars about what the genre consists of. This is especially true for the Old English elegy. Although there seems to be a general 'elegiac mood', the Old English elegy as a genre is difficult to define. This chapter discussed other variants of the elegy, namely the Greek and Roman elegy. The Greek elegy most commonly mourns the passing of a loved one, but it can incorporate other subjects, such as isolation or failure. The ancient Greek lament was an

inspiration for the Greek elegy. Like the beginning of the lament, the Greek elegy is a performance of a single performer. The Roman elegy was more versatile in the subjects it incorporated and adopted many conventions from other poetic genres. The Roman elegy, for example, could mourn the loss of constructs, implement moral advice or lament the hardships of love. The Old English elegy almost exclusively uses the alliterative meter and generally exists in the form of a monologue. The Old English elegy displays Germanic heroic imagery as well as Christian doctrine.

II. The Elegiac Markers of *The Wanderer*

At this point in the discussion, it is helpful to explore in a more practical manner what defines the elegiac genre. Specifically, it might be helpful to examine possible characteristics in a poem from the list of those defined elegies. As previously stated, there is not much agreement regarding the genre of the elegy, or which poems should be counted within it. However, the poem by the name of *The Wanderer* seems to be quite paradigmatic. It is among the most famous and most well-researched of the Old English elegies (Orchard 103). Moreover, it could be considered a defining poem of the genre, because the language and themes that have been used in it can be found in many of the other poems (Orchard 105). The Wanderer's classification as an elegy can also be attributed to the fact that, out of the number of elegiac poems in the Exeter Book, it appears first (Treharne 54). In a way, the fact that the characteristics in *The Wanderer* are found to be more universal, is a sign that these characteristics could also apply to the genre as a whole. Therefore, *The Wanderer* will be used to outline a tentative framework of elegiac characteristics in the remainder of this chapter. This framework will serve to aid the discussion in the following chapters. In the following chapter, a further discussion about elegiac markers will be developed, calling upon other elegiac poems.

The notion of exile has already been mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to the elegy. As it was a popular subject in classical elegies, so is it a salient feature of Anglo-Saxon literature as a whole (Opfer 9). Exile is also greatly apparent in the Old English elegy, and it is arguably one of the defining features of this elegy. In the previous chapter, it was discussed that an elegy can generally be recognized by a melancholic tone. This melancholic tone is emphasized by the theme of exile in the Old English elegy. Goodall speaks of "the grief which attends to those who much travel in exile" and "pain resulting from exile" (14; 11).

An aspect of exile poetry is the depiction of physical or psychological entrapment (Goodall 11). The entrapment can be described as a physical binding or the feeling of being trapped (Goodall 11). Moreover, it can be explicit or implicit. Entrapment is one cause for the lamentation in the poems, whether it is a literal or figurative kind of binding (Goodall 15). There exists a contrast in the connection between exile and entrapment. An exile is not bound physically; they can roam wherever they want, aside from the community they are exiled from (Goodall 15). Although they are not physically trapped or bound, the exile may be trapped mentally (Goodall 15). Essentially, the sense of psychological entrapment arises from being cast out from the society the speaker has always known (Goodall 15; Bjork 317). The exile laments not being able to go back to their community (Bjork 317). While they are not physically bound, the exile does feel trapped by their exile.

The speaker in *The Wanderer* experiences a similar sentiment. The speaker is not bound to a particular place, nor are they[1] restrained by physical bindings. However, the speaker does feel trapped. This feeling of being trapped is represented in an interesting way. There are several instances of entrapment imagery where the speaker discusses their mental binding by using images of physical binding (Bjork 317). Firstly, the speaker feels weighed

[1] Throughout this thesis, I will primarily use the (often plural) 'they' to refer to the speaker of a particular text, especially when referring to the speakers of the Old English elegies. It is a probable assumption that the speaker is male in these poems due to the subject matter. When there is a reference to a lord in the poem, it is likely that the speaker who refers to a lord is male, because it was mostly (if not exclusively) men who were retainers to a lord. However, I would like to refrain from assigning a gender to the speaker for the sake of inclusivity.

down by their loneliness. Their loneliness is heightened by the idea that the speaker must not share what they feel (Treharne 54; Bjork 317). The speaker states:

> Oft Ic sceolde ana uhtna gehwylce
> mine ceare cwiþan. Nis nu cwicra nan
> þe Ic him modsefan minne durre
> sweotule asecgan. Ic to soþe wat
> þæt biþ in eorle indryhten þeaw
> þæt he his ferðlocan fæste binde,
> healde his hordcofan, hycge swa he wille […]
> Swa Ic modsefan minne sceolde [Often, at every dawn, I alone must lament my sorrows. There is no one living to whom I might dare to reveal clearly my heart. I know too truly that it is a noble custom that a man should bind fast his breast, should hold fast his thoughts, think as he will […] Thus I have had to bind my heart with fetters] ("The Wanderer", ll. 8-14; 19).

The speaker is alone, but it seems the speaker cannot even speak the words of their lament into the world. Bjork argues that "tight-lipped stoicism" was a custom in Germanic or Anglo-Saxon culture (319). In that light, the speaker displays a remnant of their cultural customs in exile (Bjork 319). The speaker not being able to voice their despair intensifies their loneliness, because they are effectually alone with their thoughts. Secondly, the speaker describes other things as binding, such as natural phenomena. For example, the speaker speaks of "waþema gebind" [binding waves] ("The Wanderer", ll. 23-24). Moreover, the speaker says "ðonne sorg ond slæp somod ætgædreearmne anhogan oft gebindað" [when sorrow and sleep both together often bind the wretched solitary man] ("The Wanderer", ll. 39-40). The speaker is not physically bound, but it seems their psychological woe is great enough to evoke that feeling.

Secondly, the pain of exile is expressed in "a lament for the loss of an old order" (Goodall 11). In exile, the speaker is separated from the life they once had and the community they once belonged to. This separation causes the speaker grief, and is the focus of their lament (Goodal 2). For example, in *The Wanderer*, the speaker has been stripped of the comforts they previously enjoyed, such as the protection of having friends and a liege lord, and seems to live in some form of isolation (Treharne 54; Bjork 316). The speaker was once a member of their community and that community has been removed from them (Bjork 316). The protection of the lord and the gift-giving in the mead-hall is the center of heroic society and is commonly evoked to accentuate the loss of the speaker's comforts and security (Goodall 15). In exile, they have no security, only an infinite number of hardships in freedom (Goodall 15). Because of such hardships, exile was considered one of the worst fates that could befall a person (Bjork 316). In *The Wanderer*, the speaker continuously thinks of their past life:

> eðle bidæled,
> freomægum feor […]
> sohte seledreorig sinces bryttan,
> hwær Ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte
> þone þe in meoduhealle mine wisse,
> oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
> wenian mid wynnum. Wat se þe cunnað
> hu sliþen bið sorg to geferan
> þam þe him lyt hafað leofra geholena;
> warað hine wræclast, nales wunden gold,
> ferðloca freorig, nalæs foldan blæd.
> Gemon he selesecgas ond sincþege,

> hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine
> wenede to wiste […]
> þinceð him on mode ðæt he his mondryhten
> clyppe on cysse [deprived of my homeland, far from noble kinsmen […] sad at the loss of the hall, sought a giver of treasure, where I might find near or far, he who might show me affection in the meadhall, or would comfort me, friendless, entertain me with joys. He knows, he who is able to know, how cruel sorrow is as a companion to him who has few beloved confidants; the paths of exile occupy his mind, nor twisted gold at all, a frozen heart, not the riches of the earth at all. He remembers retainers and the receiving of treasure, how in his youth his gold-giving lord accustomed him to feasting […] in his mind that he embraces and kisses his lord] ("The Wanderer", ll. 20-21; 25-36; 41-42).

Throughout the poem, the speaker recalls memories from their previous life. Each memory fades quickly from the speaker's mind, only to be replaced by a new one. The exile's hardships are contrasted with memories from their past to intensify their despair; the comfort of the memory is contrasted with the "cruelty of the natural world" (Cherniss 112; Low 9). The speaker says:

> Sorg bið geniwad
> þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð
> […] swimmað oft on weg. [Sorrow is renewed when the memory of kinsmen pervades the mind […] they often swim away again.] (ll. 50-51; 53).

In the end, the speaker is still alone and cannot regain their past life through their memories. The warmth of the hall and their friends fades away and the cold of the ice and snow remains (Low 9). Their memories only serve to remind them of the hardships they now face, having to life alone without the protection of his lord and the community (Goodall 14; Low 9).

The speaker's recollections of their previous life emphasize their hardships and increase their lamentation. In the poems, such remembrance of memories also draws attention to the passage of time and the transitory nature of life (Goodall 2). As mentioned earlier, the theme of exile is of much influence for other features of the elegy. In this particular case, the exile theme is often used to accentuate life's transience. In the poems, the exile theme is combined with reflective passages, where earthly transience is lamented (Cherniss 112).

One of the most prominent ways in which an elegiac poem might reflect on life's transience is through the use of the *ubi sunt* topos. The *ubi sunt* topos is of Latinate origin. The expression can be translated as "where are they now?" (Orchard 103). The *ubi sunt* topos is a rather common literary theme in western literature, especially in texts written during the later years of the antiquity and the Middle Ages (Di Sciacca 105). According to Di Sciacca, the *ubi sunt* topos was very prevalent in Old English literature and it appears in both Latin and vernacular works (105). For instance, it occurs more than once in the so-called 'Bonifatian correspondence', which "highlights the hard ships and homesickness that affected the Anglo-Saxon mission to Germany" (Orchard 103).

In its essence, the *ubi sunt* motif is an extended metaphor (Orchard 103). However, in practice, the *ubi sunt* topos is generally considered elegiac in tone (Orchard 103). In particular, the motif seems to be highly connected to the elegiac tone of Old English literature (Di Sciacca 105). Modern scholars concerned with medieval literature commonly credit the *Synonyma* of Isidore of Seville (560-636), a Spanish scholar and Church Father, as an important source for the medieval *ubi sunt* topos (Di Sciacca 105). However, it is also wise to look towards the Eastern religious Fathers, who used the motif frequently in texts about human vanity and had much influence over its spread (Di Sciacca 108). One such Eastern

Father was Ephraem the Syrian (306-373), who, according to Di Sciacca, "is one of the major Christian sources of the *ubi sunt"* (107-108).

Consequently, such influences may imply that the *ubi sunt* motif ended up in the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition through Latin influence. Most medieval poets who wrote in Latin would have known the *ubi sunt* tradition (Quint 2). Moreover, most medieval "Christian lyric poets" would use the motif to "meditate on the fate of the great men of the past" (Quint 2). The Bible and classical literature offered a great fount of material for the motif, such as reflections of great leaders who have passed, once great cities that stand in ruins, the loss of youth or human vanity (Di Sciacca 107). Although, the *ubi sunt* motif in the Middle Ages also had secular applications. For example, the *ubi sunt* motif could ask questions about the future which cannot be answered, because the future is unknown (Quint 13). Thus, it could express an anxiety about the future and try to speculate what might happen (Quint 13). Moreover, the *ubi sunt* topos could be used to lament the loss of beauty, especially during descriptions of funeral rituals (Di Sciacca 107). The *ubi sunt* motif could regard people who had a high standing in society, such as a lord or a king (Di Sciacca 106). In addition, it could concern a number of possessions, such as wealth or constructions, or more abstract terms, such as pride or vanity (Di Sciacca 106; Quint 14). Quint states that the *ubi sunt* tradition is concerned with, amongst other things, the transience of life "together with the frailty and vanity of worldly things" (3). It could concern itself with the mortality of the human form (Quint 4). Moreover, the motif could "deal with the vanity of seeking or holding on to things which have no value, things which are passing" (Quint 13). In any case, the subject that the *ubi sunt* motif reflects upon is hardly ever ordinary or light (Quint 13).

Old English authors who used the *ubi sunt* motif tended to adapt the Latin source material freely to align the motif with the requirements of "poetic diction and alliterative measure" (Di Sciacca 107). In practice, the *ubi sunt* motif is made up of repeated questions which express various emotions, and "which attains a heightened emotional effect […] as the repeated rhetorical questions amplify the absence of their subject" (Di Sciacca 108). Because the motif is rhetorical, it does not demand an answer to the question it asks (Quint 11). The name of the motif betrays its structure in Latin works: the *ubi sunt* scheme combines the word *ubi,* the verb *sunt* or *sum*, and a noun (Di Sciacca 109). The *ubi sunt* topos is usually translated to *hwær is* or *hwær syndon* in Old English, and alternatively, to *hwær c*(*w*)*om*/*hwær c*(*w*)*oman* (Di Sciacca 109). The form *hwær is* is a more faithful translation of the Latin form than *hwær c*(*w*)*om* (Di Sciacca 109). In *The Wanderer*, the *ubi sunt* motif is clearly visible:

> Se þonne þisne wealsteal wise geþohte
> ond þis deorce lif deope geondþenceð,
> frod in ferðe, feor oft gemon
> wælsleahta worn, […]
> "Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?
> Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seldreamas?
> Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga! [Then he who wisely reflects upon this foundation and deeply meditates on this dark life, wise in mind, far off remembers a large number of slaughters […] "Where has the horse gone? Where has the man gone? Where have the treasure-givers gone? Where has the place of banquets gone? Where are the joys of the hall? Alas the gleaming cup! Alas the armoured warrior!] ("The Wanderer", ll. 87-91; 92-94)

In *The Wanderer,* the *ubi sunt* motif is recognizable through the appearance of *hwær cwom.* The passage reflects on past people and objects that had value in Germanic culture (Bjork 321). It intensifies their absence in the world of the speaker. The speaker seems to be lamenting the loss of an old way of life that is now gone or is slowly vanishing. Bjork argues that the use of the *ubi sunt* motif emphasizes the transitory nature of every aspect of Germanic

life, no matter if they are good or bad (321). Glory and wealth will fade, as will once proud constructs, because everything is transitory (Bjork 321).

In the elegiac poems, a tension may exist between the secular Germanic cultural background and Christian religious doctrine. This tension is especially present in the reflection of life's transience. In this reflection, the possession of worldly treasures and values are criticized. In some Old English elegies, as will be shown in more detail later, the amount of value placed on honour and treasure is criticized. These reflections employ Germanic heroic imagery to emphasize the transitory nature of heroic life (Goodall 6). In Germanic societies and Germanic heroic poetry, treasure gives moral and social value to the one who possesses it (Cherniss 81). Namely, it is a reflection of their achievements and consequently, their worth to society (Cherniss 81). The more treasure someone earns, the more honourable they are perceived to be, because one gains possession of treasure through honourable deeds, such as battle. The worth of the treasure determines the value of the warrior's honour, and the value of a warrior's achievements determine the worth of the treasure they will receive (Cherniss 95). A Germanic warrior's aim was to achieve a long-lasting reputation of honour, of which their amount of treasure was a visible measure (Cherniss 84). A warrior wanted the glory of their honour to surpass their death and be remembered for generations in the future (Cherniss 96). In turn, it could be stated that in Germanic societies the achievement of honour and treasure is given the utmost importance. Treasure was an important measure of one's standing in the community. However, in the elegiac poems, the heroic way of life is commonly presented as flawed and innately transitory in comparison to the perpetuity of Christian afterlife (Goodall 6). The heroic world "is deficient because it lacks the power to promote comfort" (Goodall 12). The permanence of the afterlife is implied as being superior and more fulfilling than one's human life, which is fleeting and filled with hardship (Goodall 12).

As previously noted, the exile theme is an important feature of the elegy. The tension that exists between Germanic culture and Christian doctrine in the elegy has also been underlined. The exile theme emphasizes this tension. In some elegies, the exile theme highlights the value that Germanic culture places on the possession of treasure and the pursuit of honour. In terms of treasure, an exile has none. Cherniss argues that an exile's lack of wealth is a visible sign of the dishonour that caused their exile (109). Cherniss states that the Christian doctrine is in contrast to the Germanic "veneration of riches" (100). Namely, living a life of little financial means was seen as a worthy religious pursuit, because those who had little riches but were true in their religion were esteemed for not concerning themselves with earthly wealth (Cherniss 100). Instead, they focused on their spiritual wealth. In the elegiac poems, it seems likely that exile had a secular meaning, because the speaker's pain from exile derives from being deprived of the important pillars of their community (Cherniss 119). In essence, such deprivation is not necessarily religious, but seems more likely to stem from Germanic warrior culture (Cherniss 119).

Primarily, the tension arises due to the different attitudes displayed towards exile. As discussed above, being exiled was viewed as a terrible fate in Germanic society, and it was usually not a choice one made. In exile, someone lost all their worth and their treasure. Exile was to be avoided, because it meant deprivation of everything that was worth possessing to a member of a Germanic society, such as one's worth and honour (Cherniss 217).

In contrast, Christian doctrine viewed exile more positively. Within a Christian point of view, exile meant a "voluntary rejection of the vanities of the world" to prepare oneself for their perpetual glory and wealth in their Christian home in Heaven, rather than holding fast to the one's wealth and honour in their earthly home in a Germanic community (Cherniss 119; 216-217). Effectually, the values and conduct of the Germanic heroic culture were considered insufficient for the salvation of one's soul, and could in fact be detrimental to the purity of

one's religious life (Cherniss 216). In the poems, the "validity of the concepts that govern Germanic heroism" is questioned through a religious lens (Cherniss 211). Germanic heroic values are contrasted with religious values. Primarily through the theme of exile, it attempts to show that heroic life is innately intransient, which would make it unwise to place value in the concepts of that heroic life, because they are fleeting (Goodall 12).

In *The Wanderer*, a tension exists between Christian sentiment and the cultural heritage of Germanic heroism. However, this tension does not permeate the entirety of the poem. The distinction between the worldly and the religious are vague (Di Sciacca 146). Namely, the first half of the poem seems exclusively secular in nature. The poem's reflection on the transience of life is discussed in exclusively secular terms. For example, the following passage does not show a religious tone:

> þonne Ic eorla lif eal geondþence,
> hu hi færlice flet ofgeafon,
> modge maguþegnas. Swa þes middangeard
> ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleþ […]
> Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið
> þonne eall þisse worulde wela weste stondeð […]
> winde biwaune weallas stondaþ,
> hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas [when I meditate on the lives of earls, how they quickly left the floor of the hall, brave young warriors. So this middle-earth each and every day declines and falls […] The wise warrior is able to perceive how ghostly it will be when all this world's wealth stands waste […] walls stand blown by wind, covered with frost, the buildings snow-swept] ("The Wanderer", ll. 60-63; 73-74; 76-77).

In this passage, the speaker reflects on the fact that young warriors will either die young on the battlefield or grow old and still die, because that is how the world functions. Life declines each day, as do the constructs that men create (Bjork 318). Time will eventually wear them down to the earth. The language used invokes Germanic heroic culture effectively. Yet, a slight shift occurs:

> Forþon ne mæg wearþan wis wer ær he age
> wintra dæl in woruldrice. Wita sceal geþyldig
> […] ne to feohgifre,
> ne næfre gielpes to georn, ær he geare cunne […]
> Woriað þa winsalo. Waldend licgað
> dreame bidrorene; duguþ eal gecrong
> wlonc bi wealle. Sume wig fornom […]
> sumne dreorighleor
> in eorðscræfe eorl gehydde.
> Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda Scyppend
> oþþæt burgwara breahtma lease.
> eald enta geweorc idlu stodon. [Therefore no man may become wise, before he has had his share of winters in the worldly kingdom. A wise man shall be patient: […] nor too greedy for riches, nor ever too desirous of boasting, before he clearly may have knowledge […] The wine-halls topple. The rulers lie deprived of joys; mature men all perished proud by the wall. Battle destroyed some […] a sad-faced warrior concealed in an earthcave. The Creator of men thus laid waste this earth until deprived of the joy of its inhabitants, the ancient work of giants stood empty.] ("The Wanderer", ll. 64-65; 68-69; 78-80; 83-87).

It is only when the poem speaks of a "worldly kingdom" (l. 65) and "the Creator of men" (l. 85) that the poem gives the reader a clue about its religious tone. This particular insert lifts the

poem from a secular point of view and creates a religious atmosphere. The decay of the world is credited to its creator, who allows for the world to decay until its inhabitants are gone (Bjork 318). This means that God has power over the decay of the world and that nothing on earth is more powerful than God, because everything on earth can be destroyed by God (Bjork 318). It is in the closing lines of the poem when the religious tone becomes dominant, and a critique of the heroic world becomes tangible:

> Eorlas fornoman asca þryþe,
> wæpen wælgifru, wyrd seo mære […]
> Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice;
> onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.
> Hir bið feoh læne […]
> Eal þis eorþan gesteal ideal weorþeð […]
> Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdep […]
> Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,
> frofre to Fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð [the might of ash-spears snatched away noble men, weapons greedy for carnage, notorious fate […] All is hardship in the earthly kingdom; the action of fate changes the world under the heavens. Here, wealth is transitory […] All this earth's foundation will become empty […] It is good for him who retains faith […] It will be well for him who seeks mercy, consolation from the Father in heaven, where for us all security stands] ("The Wanderer", ll. 99-100; 106-108; 110; 112; 114-115).

The speaker clearly implies that the decay of mankind and the hardships that life brings are only earthly concerns. Ultimately, the speaker will realize that all life is filled with hardships and that all life will end (Cherniss 113). Eventually, the speaker's view on life on earth develops into a spiritual consolation (Bjork 318).

The lamenting tone in the Old English elegy is emphasized by descriptions of weather. Matt Low states that, within Old English literature, the elegy "invests the most value in nostalgic representations of the natural world" (7). The elegiac poems particularly depict harsh weather conditions, such as enduring rains, heavy snowstorms and ice (Low 2). They may also depict rough natural surroundings, such as a thick forest, rocky caves or a stormy sea. Among many applications, the description of harsh weather can function as a lament for the loss of nature itself or, more commonly, as a "metaphor for something else lost" (Low 7). The description of harsh weather adds to the general atmosphere of hardship and discomfort that the speaker is experiencing in their exile (Treharne 54). It also emphasizes the severity of living in exile, and shows why many Germanic warriors were unwilling to inhabit such places (Low 3; 8). In *The Wanderer*, the speaker talks of having had to traverse the "hrimcealde sæ" [ice-cold sea] (l. 4) and "waþema gehind" [binding waves] (l. 24). Moreover, the speaker "hrusan heolstre biwrah" [(I) covered in the earth's hiding place] (l. 23), which is most likely a cave. Moreover, it seems like the speaker's environment is shrouded in winter weather (Low 8). The speaker states that "hreosan hrim ond snaw hagle gemenged" [falling frost and snow are mixed with hail] (l. 48). Essentially, the tough conditions strengthen the emphasis on the desolate despair of the speaker.

The Old English elegy seems to have a tendency to incorporate the imagery of birds. For example, the speaker states the following in *The Wanderer*:

> wineleas guma,
> gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas,
> baþian brimfuglas, brædan feþra […]
> Fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð
> cuðra cwidegiedda. Cearo bið geniwad
> þam þe sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe

> ofer waþema gebind werigne sefan [the friendless man, sees before him fallow waves, bathing seabirds, with spread feathers […] the spirits of seabirds do not bring many familiar utterances there. Sorrow is renewed for those who must send a weary heart frequently over the binding waves] ("The Wanderer", ll. 45-47; 54-57)

In such passages, the addition of birds seems to intensify the speaker's loneliness. While a bird is another living being, the bird cannot speak with the exile. A bird cannot communicate messages that the speaker might want to send to his loved ones; birds are simply there, silent and hovering. Moreover, the bird is free to fly away to wherever it wants, whereas the speaker is not as free. The bird is a reminder of the exile's restrictions and their loneliness.

Previously, the discussion has touched on the notion that the Old English elegies often appear in the style of a monologue. Most commonly, the poems feature a single speaker who reflects on the past and the hardships they face in exile through a dramatic monologue (Gunnarsdóttir Champion 328; Goodall 2). It is common to see the speaker identified by the use of *Ic*, meaning 'I' (Goodall 2). In *The Wanderer*, *Ic* is used to denote the speaker, and while the poem deviates into passages which do not involve the use of *Ic*, it seems clear that it is the speaker who narrates these passages. The single speaker of an Old English elegy can be a human figure, a non-human figure, such as an object, in which case they are given thoughts to convey to the reader. A famous example of a non-human speaker in the form of an object is the cross in *The Dream of the Rood*. However, the speaker is hardly ever described in detail (Gilles 2). For example, the speaker almost never discloses a name or an exact location, or what they look like. Generally, this lack of description can cause the poetry to feel rather impersonal (Gilles 2). In *The Wanderer*, the speaker does not disclose their name or their origins. It is clear that they are a human speaker. For example, their humanness is confirmed due to their mentions of "freomægum" [noble kinsmen] (l. 21) and having to stir the sea "mid hondum" [with his hands] (l. 4). The speaker talks about his friends and his lord, but they are also not identified.

In the elegy, the speaker commonly performs a monologue in which they describe their hardships. The story of the individual speaker may eventually develop into a general message for a larger audience (Gilles 2). The story of the single speaker may evolve into a reflection of the fates of those who live on earth and how a society will decline as time passes (Gilles v; Treharne 54). Aside from reflecting on the earth's decline over time, the universal message can also be hopeful and consoling (Bjork 315). A hopeful universal message is commonly religiously-motivated in the elegies, because it emphasizes the joy a person will find in Heaven once they die in comparison to the hardships found on earth (Bjork 315). This reflection may give advice to a general audience, instead of lingering on the actions of the individual (Gilles 2). Such advice can contain criticism of heroic values in favour of religious doctrine (Treharne 54). Essentially, the individual experience transcends into the universal experience (Bjork 315).

Exile is a common subject in the elegiac tradition, and it is similarly salient in the Old English elegy. The theme of exile emphasizes the melancholic tone that is characteristic of the elegy. The speaker laments the loss of their old life, which is emphasized by the memories that come to the speaker's mind. The Old English elegy may reflect on the transience of life, especially in combination with the exile theme. The *ubi sunt* motif is often used for such reflection. In *The Wanderer*, the *ubi sunt* motif reflects on people that have passed and objects that are no longer tangible to emphasize their absence in the world of the speaker.

The Old English elegy may combine secular and religious elements. A tension may exist between secular Germanic culture and Christian doctrine, especially in the reflection upon life's transience. In this reflection, value bestowed on earthly things is criticized. This tension also comes to fruition in the depiction of the exile theme. Germanic culture views exile as a terrible fate, while Christian exile is viewed more positively.

The Old English elegy may depict bad weather or rough natural surroundings in attempt to emphasize the lamenting mood of the poem. These features add to the sense of despair that the speaker is experiencing in exile. The depiction of birds also reflects this despair, because it emphasizes the speaker's loneliness in exile. Lastly, the Old English elegy commonly exists in a monologue form. In this monologue, the speaker's individual tragedy may develop into a general, universal message.

III. The Elegiac Markers of *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin*

In the previous chapter, some characteristics of the Old English elegy have been pointed out by examining *The Wanderer*. This poem has traditionally been considered a defining poem for the type of poetry in this research field. To further the discussion that was started in the first chapter, it might be helpful to look at other extant Old English elegies. In this chapter, the aim is to examine if and how the characteristics discussed in the first chapter appear in other Old English elegiac poems. As stated above, most poems that have been labelled as Old English elegies appear in a manuscript known as the Exeter Book. The importance of the Exeter Book manuscript lies with the multitude of different texts it contains. Most famously, the Exeter Book contains the Riddles and the elegies, such as *The Wanderer*. The existence of many different texts provides opportunities for much research. In light of this discussion, the difference between the elegiac poems in the Exeter Book are interesting. These poems share similarities, but are also quite different from each other. It is then interesting to see, in the case of the elegiac poems, to what degree they are similar.

This chapter will focus on *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin.* Firstly, the discussion will be directed toward the *Seafarer*. A compelling reason for including this elegiac poem is the fact that it has been compared to *The Wanderer* quite often. In the past, some have even called the two poems "companion pieces" (Di Sciacca 138). This comparison is prompted by the similar poetic style employed in the poems (Treharne 60). Moreover, they share similarities in terms of topics and moods (Di Sciacca 138). The following discussion will examine in what ways the characteristics discussed in *The Wanderer* exist and function in *The Seafarer*.

The first characteristic that the two poems share is the great loneliness felt by the exiled speaker. Like the speaker in *The Wanderer*, the speaker in *The Seafarer* lives in exile, and is removed from the life they had known before. They have no contact with the people they once knew and are removed from the comforts that life gave them. They are no longer protected by the authority of a lord and are to face the hardship of exile alone. The speaker's loneliness is touched upon throughout the poem, but the following passage highlights it especially:

> Þæt se mon ne wat
> þe him foldan fægrost limpeð:
> hu Ic, earmcearig, iscealdne sæ
> winter wunade wræccan lastum,
> winemægum bidroren,
> bihongen hrimgicelum; hægl scurum fleag.
> Þær Ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ,
> iscaldne wæg. Hwilum yfelte song
> dyde Ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor,
> ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera;
> mæw singende fore medodrince. […]
> Ne ænig hleomæga
> feassceaftig ferð frefran meahte.
> Forþon him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn,
> gebiden in burgum, bealosiþa hwon,
> wlonc ond wingal, hu Ic werig oft
> in brimlade bidan sceolde. [The man who lives most happily on land does not know this: how I, wretched and sad, dwelt a winter on the ice cold sea on the paths of exile, deprived of dear kinsmen, hung round with icicles; hail flew in storms. There I heard nothing but the roar of the sea, the ice-cold wave. Sometimes, the song of the swan I had as my entertainment, the cry of the gannet, and the curlew's sound

> instead of the laughter of men; the seagull singing in the place of mead-drinking […] No protective kinsman might comfort the desolate spirit. Thus he little believes, he who possesses life's joy, lives in the city, free from dangerous journeys, proud and merry with wine, how, weary, I had often to survive in the sea-path] ("The Seafarer", ll. 12-22; 25-30).

Two points arise from this passage about the speaker's loneliness. Firstly, their loneliness is accentuated by another elegiac characteristic discussed in *The Wanderer*. *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* employ similar descriptions of the weather conditions that the exiled speakers find themselves in (Low 10). For example, the "hrimcealde sæ" (l. 4) in *The Wanderer* is similar to the "iscealdne sæ" in *The Seafarer* (l. 15); both are translated as "ice cold sea" (Low 10). Moreover, both poems describe the weather as being ice cold and snowy, with fierce waves and harsh winds. Perhaps most notably, the image of snow and ice occurs in both poems, and both feature similar descriptions:

> hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,
> corna caldast [frost gripped the earth, hail fell on the ground, the coldest of grains] ("The Seafarer", ll. 32-33).
>
> winde biwaune weallas stondað,
> hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas [walls stand blown by wind, covered with frost, the buildings snow-swept] ("The Wanderer", ll. 76-77).

The bad weather serves to illustrate the harshness wherein the speaker finds themselves alone and without help (Orton 356). The harshness of the weather emphasizes the "lost joys" of the life the speaker once had (Low 10). Similar to the speaker in *The Wanderer*, the speaker in *The Seafarer* is described as being alone, save for the company of birds. However, they cannot make contact with these birds and the animals come and go. Consequently, the birds only serve to remind them of the absence of family and friends, which, in turn, increases their loneliness. Orton notes that the imagery of birds exists to provide a contrast between the "social pleasures" the speaker lacks in exile and the "inadequate substitutes for them […] afforded by his marine environment" (357-358). Instead of the sounds of friends talking and laughing in the meadhall, the speaker only hears the cries of seabirds (Orton 357-358). For instance, the speaker says:

> Hwilum ylfete song
> dyde Ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor,
> ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera;
> mæw singende fore medodrince.
> Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð
> isigfeþera; ful oft þæt earn bigeal,
> urigfeþera. Ne ænig hleomæga
> feassceaftig ferð frefran meahte. [Sometimes, the song of the swan I had as my entertainment, the cry of the gannet, and the curlew's sound instead of the laughter of men; the seagull singing in the place of mead-drinking. Storms beat the rocky cliffs there, where the tern calls out to them icy-feathered; very often that sea-eagle cries in response, wet-feathered. No protective kinsmen might comfort the desolate spirit] ("The Seafarer", ll. 19-26).

The speaker describes seeing multiple species of sea-birds and hearing them call out, but their calling only reminds the speaker of the sounds they heard in the mead-hall of his past. Instead of kinsmen, the speaker has the company of sea-birds. The sea-birds, and the memories they inspire, serve to amplify the speaker's sense of loneliness (Cherniss 107).

The second characteristic that *The Seafarer* shares with *The Wanderer* is a depiction of life's transience. Like *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, contains a reflection on the transience of

the world and the mortality of man. For example, the following passage touches on the fact that all people age and die:

> Eorþan indryhto ealdað ond searað,
> swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard:
> yldo him on fareð, onsyn blacað,
> gomelfeax gnornað; wat his iuwine,
> æþelinga bearn, eorþan forgiefene [The earth's nobility grows old and withers, as does each man now throughout the earth: old age overtakes him, his face grows pale, a grey-haired one laments; he knows that his friends of old, the children of princes, have been consigned to the earth] ("The Seafarer", ll. 89-93).

Such reflections are amplified by the poem's use of the *ubi sunt* topos. The following passage employs a variation of the *ubi sunt* topos:

> Dagas sind gewitene
> ealle onmedlan eorþan rices;
> næron nu cyningas ne caseras
> ne goldgiefan swylce iu wæron,
> þonne hi mæst mid him mærþa gefremedon
> on on dryhtlicestum dome lifdon.
> Gedroren is þeos duguð eal; dreamas sind gewitene.
> Wuniað þa wacran ond þas woruld healdaþ,
> brucað þurh bisgo. Blæd is gehnæged. [The days are gone of all the pomp of the kingdoms of earth; there are now no kings or emperors or gold-givers such as there formerly were, when they most performed glorious deeds among themselves, and lived in magnificent renown. the whole of this noble band has fallen; joys are departed. Inferior ones live and possess the world, they enjoy it by way of toil. Glory is brought low] ("The Seafarer", ll. 80-88).

As previously discussed, *The Wanderer* also uses the *ubi sunt* topos, where the speaker asks rhetorical questions about people, objects and buildings have gone. The *ubi sunt* topos in *The Seafarer* is less explicit, because it is not made up of the *hwær is* or *hwær c(w)om* construction. Nor does this passage immediately sound rhetorical (Di Sciacca 139). However, this passage has the same function as the *ubi sunt* motif in *The Wanderer.* The ubi sunt motif, through descriptions of people who once lived and history that once was, emphasizes the knowledge that time is fleeting and that everything on the earth is transient (Treharne 60; Di Sciacca 139-140). In *The Seafarer*, the *ubi sunt* topos depicts a secular world that has been in a state of decline for some time and its glorious history has long passed (Di Sciacca 140). Low argues that, with the *ubi sunt* motif, the speaker reveals their longing for a community while they live solitarily in a barren world (11). This instance of *ubi sunt* motif serves to promote nostalgia for a lost glory (Di Sciacca 140).

At first glance, there are two key ways in which *The Seafarer* differs from *The Wanderer:* the poem's employment of entrapment imagery, and its use of religious imagery. Firstly, whereas *The Wanderer* employs the imagery of binding heavily, *The Seafarer* hardly uses it. In *The Wanderer*, the speaker often refers to being bound or having to bind parts of himself, or describes natural phenomena as being binding. In turn, the exile that the speaker experiences is more like a prison. It is a hardship that traps the speaker mentally. However, in *The Seafarer,* there is hardly any reference to binding. In the first few lines, the speaker says: "Calde geþrungen wæron mine fet, forste gebunden caldum clommum" [Afflicted by cold were my feet, frost bound by cold fetters] (ll. 8-10). The use of the word 'fetters' implies some degree of binding. However, it is used more often and more clearly in *The Wanderer* than it is in *The Seafarer,* and, arguably, to a greater emotional effect. In *The Wanderer,* it is used like this:

Forðon domgeorne dreorigne oft
in hyra breostcofan bindað fæste.
Swa Ic modsefan minne sceolde,
Oft earmcearig, eðle bidæled,
Freomægum feor feterum sælan [Therefore those eager for glory must often bind fast a heavy heart. Thus I have had to bind my heart with fetters, often wretched and sad, deprived of my homeland, far from noble kinsmen] ("The Wanderer", ll. 17-21).

The difference is quite apparent. In *The Wanderer*, the use of *bindað fæste* [bind fast] and *feterum sælan* [bind with fetters] in this passage implies that the speaker is bound by the hardship of their exile, and displays that the speaker is suffering. In *The Seafarer*, the use of this imagery is limited to describing the coldness of the weather. In turn, the little entrapment imagery used in *The Seafarer* lacks an emotional depth. In *The Wanderer*, this imagery serves to portray the extent of the speaker's hardships. It signals to the reader that the speaker is suffering from their exile. In The Seafarer, the entrapment imagery is almost non-existent and thus, cannot deliver the same sort of emotional severity.

The previous chapter discussed the tension that exists in Old English elegies between the secular, Germanic culture and Christian religious values. Furthermore, it discussed that *The Wanderer*'s religious elements are usually implicit. These elements become more overt only in the ending lines of the poem. *The Seafarer* shows a similar religious sentiment. However, in this poem such a sentiment is present from the beginning and is more explicit, and there is a continuous reflection on what happens after death (Di Sciacca 146).

In the Old English elegy, the individual's journey generally develops into a universal message. In both *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, this progression is religiously motivated. The progression favours the comforts of the heavenly afterlife to the hardship on earth. In both *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, there is an innate secularity to the poetry. The world they depict belongs to Germanic culture, and the poems often use heroic imagery. However, the speaker's individual journey in their exile becomes "a universal debate on the mortality of mankind, the futility of earthly wealth, the morality of Christian living, and the need to be judged worthy of lof ('praise')" (Treharne 60; Bjork 319). Orton adds that, in *The Seafarer*, there is a progression from the speaker's mindset of lament over their hardships towards a spiritual consolation (361). The progression from individual to universal is paired with the speaker's spiritual development (Orton 361). The heroic values of Germanic culture are disparaged, with the aim of depicting the Christian religious life as the better choice (Cherniss 194; 217; Orton 368). It seems as if *The Seafarer* shows a more "conscious rejection of the concepts which control pre-Christian heroic poetry" (Cherniss 208).

The two poems depict a denunciation of earthly wealth in favour of spiritual wealth. As already noted, wealth has a positive connotation in Germanic culture and was something to be strived for, but Christian doctrine sought to strive for the heavenly wealth and viewed earthly possession and earthly honour somewhat as a waste of time. Furthermore, in Germanic culture, the absence of wealth was viewed negatively. Exile was a sign of one's dishonour due, in part, to the absence of wealth. Whereas, Christian doctrine viewed exile more positively, as a religious exile renounces their "earthly vanities" and embrace the "eternal values of Christianity" when they choice to live in exile (Cherniss 217). In a religious view, worldly treasure is a sign of vanity and should be avoided (Cherniss 217). Moreover, the harsh fate of exile could be seen a test of will for those who wished to experience "the mildness of God" in the afterlife (Goodall 10). In this religious point of view, exile is an experience where one can leave the pleasures of the world behind "gain the joys of God" (Cherniss 214).

At the surface level, the speaker's experience in *The Seafarer* is a secular rendering of exile (Cherniss 210). However, the speaker displays elements of a Christian exile. In the

beginning of the poem, it is not as overt. Previously in this chapter, it was discussed that the speaker of *The Seafarer* seems lonely and suffers in their exile. While the speaker does suffer, they do not visibly state the desire to return. They state:

> Forþan cnyssað nu
> heortan geþohtas þæt Ic hean streamas,
> sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige;
> monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
> ferð to feran, þæt Ic feor heonan
> elþeodrigra eard gesece […]
> ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
> sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenceð
> on flodwegas feor gewitan […]
> Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan, […]
> eorþan sceatas; cymeð eft to me
> gifre ond grædig [Therefore now the thoughts of my heart are troubled whether I should try out for myself the deep seas, the tossing of salty waves; the mind's desire at all times prompts the spirit to travel so that I, far from here, might seek the home of those living in a foreign land […] all of this urges those eager of spirit, the spirit to the journey, to him who is so inclined to venture far on the paths of the sea […] And yet now my spirit roams beyond the enclosure of the heart, […] over the world's expanse; it comes again to me eager and greedy] ("The Seafarer", ll. 33-38; 50-53; 58; 61-62).

The speaker wants to travel over the seas and they describe their spirit as restless. Orton argues that the speaker feels ostracized from life on land and, even if the possibility existed, they would not return to their community because they no longer belong (360). This passage does not evidently imply that the speaker feels ostracized from their community, but the speaker does seem eager to continue journeying. Being able to return to their community would seem like a natural longing for an exile, because that would end their hardships in exile. However, the speaker of *The Seafarer* longs for travel (Orton 360). Especially the line "Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan, […] eorþan sceatas" [And yet now my spirit roams beyond the enclosure of the heart, […] over the world's expanse] ("The Seafarer, ll. 58; 61) shows the speaker's longing. The speaker does not explicitly long to leave their exile.

As discussed previously in this chapter, *The Seafarer* uses the imagery of birds and weather to intensify the despair of the speaker and to emphasize the harsh conditions the speaker finds themselves in. The depictions of birds and weather also have another function in *The Seafarer* that aligns with the wanderlust of the speaker. While emphasizing the hardships of the speaker, the harsh weather and birds also emphasize the speaker's eagerness to travel again (Orton 364). The image of the cuckoo is the primary example. Orton argues that the call of the cuckoo urges the speaker to go back out onto the sea (365). The speaker says:

> "Forþon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan, […]
> eorþan sceatas […]
> Swylce geac monað geomran reorde,
> singeð sumeres weard, […]
> cymeð eft to me
> gifre ond grædig; gielleð anfloga,
> hweteð on wælweg [And yet now my spirit roams beyond the enclosure of the heart, […] over the world's expanse […] Likewise the cuckoo urges him with a melancholy voice, the watchman of summer sings, […] it comes again to me eager and greedy; the solitary flier yells, incites the spirit irresistibly on the whale's path] ("The Seafarer", ll. 53-55; 58; 61-63).

The speaker calls the cuckoo "the watchman of summer", which implies that, upon spotting the bird, summer is near. When summer is near, the speaker will set out to sea again, because it is the better climate for sailing than winter (Orton 364). The speaker states that their spirit travels over the sea and comes back greedy, and that the cuckoo likewise urges them to set out. The cuckoo rouses the wanderlust in the speaker even more.

The speaker resembles a Christian exile more concretely as the poem progresses. It is noticeable in the way the speaker emphasizes the superiority of God in contrast to an earthly way of life on a number of occasions. One such occasion can be seen in the following passage:

> Forþon nis þæs modwlonc mon ofer eorþan,
> ne his gifena þæs god, ne in geoguþe to þæs hwæt,
> ne in his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten to þæs hold,
> þæt he a his sæfore sorge næbbe
> to hwon hine Dryhten gedon wille [Therefore there is no man so proud-hearted on the earth, so generous of his gifts, so keen in youthfulness, in his deeds so brave, his lord so gracious to him, that he will never be anxious in his sea voyage about what the Lord will bring to him] ("The Seafarer", ll. 39-43).

This passage states that, however brave or rich someone may be, they will still always be humbled by what God will lay before them. The following passage has a similar tone:

> ne mæg þære sawle þe biþ synna ful
> gold to geoce for Godes egsan,
> þonne he hit ær hydeð þenden he her leofað […]
> Dol bið se þe him his Dryhten ne ondrædeð: cymeð him se deað unþinged.
> Eadig bið se þe eaþmod leofaþ: cymeð him seo ar of heofonum.
> Meotod him þæt mod gestaþelað forþon he in his meahte gelyfeð […]
> Wyrd biþ swiþre,
> Meotud meahtigra þonne ænges monnes gehygd [the gold that he hid before while he lived here cannot be a help to the soul which is full of sins when it comes into the presence of the terrible power of God […] Foolish is he that does not fear his Lord: death will come to him unexpectedly. Blessed is the man who lives humbly: the favour of heaven will come to him. God establishes that spirit in him because he believes in his power […] Fate is greater, the Lord more mighty than any man's conception] ("The Seafarer", ll. 100-102; 106-108; 115-116).

The Seafarer strongly emphasizes that the praise one receives in life pales in comparison to that of God, and that it is a waste of time to try and seek out earthly praise when the love and praise of God is much greater. In fact, the praise and glory they achieved in their life did nothing to stop them from dying nor does it help them once they are dead (Cherniss 215). Moreover, a warrior may win as much treasure and achieve as much glory as possible in their life, but these earthly notions will not help them in the afterlife (Cherniss 216). In the afterlife, a person is subjected to God only (Cherniss 216). A person who lives humbly and faithfully will enjoy the comfort of heaven while someone who lives to pursue worldly values will die without the promise of salvation (Orton 368). The exile has a lord in God, "the Lord in Heaven" who is considered to have more power than an earthly lord (Cherniss 211-212). As previously discussed, a similar sentiment resides in *The Wanderer*.

The poem emphasizes that the power of God exceeds the power of everything in the mortal world. The speaker notes that those who do not fear God are foolish. It seems that they are aware that everyone is at the mercy of God, whether on the sea in exile or in the comfort of the meadhall (Orton 367). Any man is weak compared to God, because they are mortal and subjected to the decay of transitory life (Orton 368; Low 11). This is further illustrated by the following passage:

Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge ne to hringþege, […]
ne to worulde hyh […]
Forþon me hatran sind
Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
þæt him eorðwelan ece stondeð.
Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce,
ær his tidege, to twon weorþeð:
adl oþþe yldo oþþe ecghete […]
bið eorla gehwam æftercweþendra
lof lifgendra lastworda betst
þæt he gewyrce ær he on weg scyle..
fremman on foldan […]
on his lof siþþan lifge mid englum.
awa to ealdre ecan lifes blæd,
dream mid dugeþum [Nor is his thought on the harp nor on the receiving of rings, […] nor the joy of worldly things […] Thus the joys of the Lord are warmer to me than this dead life, transitory on land. I do not believe that earthly happiness will endure eternally. Always, in all conditions, one of three things hangs in the balance before his final day: disease or old age or attack by the sword […] for every man, praise from those who speak of him afterwards, from the living, is the best memorial that he might earn before he must depart, achievements on earth […] and his glory will live then among the angels, always forever in the glory of eternal life, joy among the host] ("The Seafarer", ll. 44-45; 64-70; 72-75; 77-80)

It seems as if the speaker is waiting for the afterlife, because the hardship they endure in their life is grotesque compared to the promise of heaven. One could interpret this sentiment as the speaker being exiled on earth while the world he knows and wants to return to is heaven (Orton 368).

The Seafarer emphasizes that God's praise exceeds the praise that a lord could give or the praise that one could receive throughout following generations (Orton 368). Cherniss states that, according to the religious view of exile, the achievement of honour cannot be one's ultimate aim (216). Instead, a religious exile must abandon the pursuit of honour in favour of working towards heavenly salvation (Cherniss 216). Orton, similarly argues that the speaker's goal is salvation and to achieve eternal life with God (363) Cherniss adds that honour should not be more important than the value of salvation (216). For the religious exile, God's praise should receive the most value, because it is not transitory. Praise received on earth is fleeting and does not compare to that of God (Orton 368). In a way, the thought of the afterlife in heaven is a consolation to the speaker, a softening of the hardships they currently face (Treharne 60). It is a consolation because the speaker believes that their hardships will only last until they reach heaven (Orton 368). It is a consolation to know that their hardships are not permanent and that, after they die and reach heaven, they will never face hardships again. *The Seafarer* judges the values placed on earthly possession more than *The Wanderer.* In comparison to *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* shows a more overt Christian doctrine and a stronger longing for the afterlife compared to life on earth.

For the remainder of this chapter, the discussion will be focused on *The Ruin* poem. The poem is one of the damaged works in the Exeter Book. The manuscript was damaged by fire, leaving its last twelve pages ruined (Herben 37). Thus, a portion of what was once the full work of *The Ruin* is lost (Herben 37). The following discussion will show that *The Ruin* shares a number of similarities with *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*. However, these similarities are not the main reason for the poem's inclusion into the discussion. The point of

interest for this discussion mainly lies with the style of its narration. Unlike the previous two elegiac poems, *The Ruin* is not written as a monologue with a speaker who reflects on their exile. Instead, the poem consists of a reflective, meditative narration, which narrates the current state of the ruin and the appearance of the ruin when it was still a prosperous stronghold, as well as the fall of the city (Doubleday 376). The first chapter noted that, alongside the theme of exile, the image of ruined constructs was a common inspiration for sorrow in the classical elegy. A ruined construct reflected the loss of a part of Roman history and this loss was lamented in the elegy. *The Ruin* employs the same topic. It is reminiscent of a lamentation song, addressed to a lost city (Orchard 107). Since the poem does not have the same monologue style as the other poems considered thus far, it is valuable to explore its particular elegiac characteristics. Studying this poem is also valuable because little scholarly research has been done on this poem compared to other Old English elegies (Doubleday 369). The fact that the only extant version of the poem is damaged and partly lost means that much can be left up to speculation by the reader and the researcher. Thus, the following discussion of the poem will only be an attempt at parsing its meaning.

The exile theme is a foundational aspect of the elegiac mood in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. The lamentation of the elegy is represented by the speaker lamenting the hardships they face in exile. While the importance of exile is heavily underlined in the previous two poems, it does not appear in *The Ruin.* A question then arises. Can *The Ruin* even be identified as an elegy if it does not contain such an important elegiac characteristic? In light of this discussion, the answer would be that, although *The Ruin* does not depict exile, it does depict other elegiac characteristics that exist in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*.

Firstly, *The Ruin* contains a description of harsh weather that attacks the decaying construct. Namely, the speaker states: "hrimgeat berofen, hrim on lime" [the frosted gate is unbarred, hoar-frost on mortar] (l. 4). In the discussion about *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, alongside snowfall and stormy seas, there were also descriptions about frost clinging to objects. In *The Seafarer*, the speaker describes "hrim hrusan bond" [frost gripped the earth] (l. 32). In *The Wanderer*, the speaker states that the walls are "hrime bihrorene" [covered with frost] (l. 77). The presence of frost naturally implies that the weather is cold, and, as was the case with the previous poems, cold weather is usually a stimulant of sorrow in the elegy. The image of snow and ice clinging to the stone of the ruin emphasizes the decay of the stronghold that it once was (Low 12). In the previous poems, cold weather means discomfort for the exile who has to live in such conditions with little protection. In *The Ruin*, cold weather may intensify the absence of people living in the construct. The abandoned state of the ruin is a cause for sorrow in this poem.

Secondly, *The Ruin* contains a reflection on the transience of life similar to those in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* (Low 14). However, where *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* contain a religiously motivated tone that reflects on this transience, *The Ruin* seems entirely secular. However, because the poem is no longer complete due to the damage, it is not certain if such a religious tone might have been part of the poem at one point. In turn, this discussion will deal with the extant poem under the assumption that is a secular poem. Consequently, its reflection on the decay of human life is secular. Low argues that *The Ruin* reflects on the "inescapability of death and destruction" (14). The poem laments "a sense of the vanished glory, of lost greatness, of sorrow at earthly mutability" (Doubleday 370). This sense is, in a way, personified through the visage of a fallen stronghold. The speaker says:

Wrætlic is þes wealstan,	wyrde gebræcon.
Burgestede burston,	brosnað enta geweorc […]
ældo undereotone	[…]
…g orþonc ærsceaft…	[…]
	hygerof gebond

weall walanwirum wundrum togædre.
Beorht wæron burgcræced [wondrous is this stone wall, smashed by fate. The buildings have crumbled, the work of giants decays […] undermined by age […] ingenious ancient work […] ingeniously bound the wall-supports together with wires into rings. Bright were the stronghold's buildings] ("The Ruin", ll. 1-2; 6; 16; 19-21).

The speaker admires the work of those who have long passed, and seems to lament the decay that the structure has seen in the time since its construction. This passage may invoke the idea that those who built the stronghold were people of great skill, and that skill no longer exists. The speaker describes the people who once lived in the construct:

Eorðgrap hafað
waldendwyrhtan forweorone, geleorene,
heardgripe hrusan, oþ hund cnea
werþeoda gewitan. Oft þæs wag gebad,
ræghar ond readfah, rice æfter oþrum,
ofstonden under stormum, steap geap gedreas [The earth's grip holds the powerful makers, decayed, passed away, the hard grasp of the earth, until a hundred generations of the nation of men have passed away. Often this wall has survived, grey with lichen and stained with red, one kingdom after another, endured under storms, high and arched, it perished" ("The Ruin", ll. 6-11).

This passage implies that people will keep dying and being buried as long as time goes on (Doubleday 376). Even the glorious stronghold which is built to withstand attacks and house multiple generations of noble lineages will eventually fall to ruin. Now, the ruin is empty. The speaker says: "heresweg micel, meodoheall monig mondreama full - oþþæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe" [the great sound of warriors, many a meadhall full of the celebrations of men - until fate, the mighty one, changed that] ("The Ruin", ll. 22-24). Once, the stronghold was filled with the sights familiar to Germanic heroic culture, such as the feasting in the meadhall. Now, the ruin seems absent of life, or any life that may still exist in the ruin is not of the same joy as it once was.

In *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, the story of the individual speaker developed into a more general message that is religiously focused. In *The Ruin* poem, the speaker reflects on the stronghold's decay, but the ruin does not have an individual story like the exiled speakers of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. However, there does seem to be some kind of message present in the poem. The speaker expresses the following about the fall of the stronghold:

Crungon walo, wide; cwoman woldagas.
Swylt eall fornom secgrofra wera,
wurdon hyra wigsteal westen staþolas,
brosnade burgsteall. Betend crungon
hergas to hrusan. Forþon þas hofu dreorgiað,
ond þæs teaforgeapa tigelum sceadeð,
hrostbeages rof. Hryre wong gecrong
gebrocen to beorgum, þær iu beorn monig
glædmod on goldbeorht gleoma gefrætwed,
wlonc ond wingal, wighyrstum scan;
seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,
on ead, on æht, on eorcanstan,
on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices [Those slain in battle fell far and wide; the days of pestilence came. Death carried off all of the sword-brave men, their battle places became deserted sites, the site of the city crumbled. The repairers, the armies, fell to the earth. Therefore, these dwellings fall down, and this red-arch comes away

> from the tiles, the roof of the pillared vault. The place fell into ruin broken into mounds, where once many a warrior joyful-hearted and bright with gold, brightly adorned, proud and elated with wine, shone in his war-trappings; he looked upon treasure, on silver, on elaborately made jewels, on riches, on possessions, on precious stones, on that bright stronghold of the broad kingdom] ("The Ruin", ll. 25-37).

The soldiers of the stronghold passed away in battle and others died of disease, until the city was left without anyone to restore it to its former glory. The passage may imply that the stronghold's fall was caused by the sins of the inhabitants (Doubleday 378). Doubleday brings up the context of the phrase "wlonc ond wingal" [proud and elated with wine] (l.34), stating that variants of this phrase were often used to describe falling cities in Old English literature (378). He translates it as "pride and wine-lust" (Doubleday 378). It may imply that the warriors grew too prideful and became lax, vulnerable against attack. Moreover, the speaker describes warriors gazing upon the many treasures of the stronghold, while being adorned in beautiful armor. Essentially, the message may serve as a warning. Peter Orton also notes the use of "wlonc ond wingal" in *The Ruin*. Aligning with Doubleday, Orton states that the suffix "-gal" has a possible derogatory connotation in Old English and, when combined with this phrase, it creates the suggestion of "wanton or libidinous" behaviour (356). However, unlike Doubleday, Orton does not argue the existence of a moral dejection in "wlonc on wingal" in *The Ruin*, nor does he argue for the idea that the stronghold's fall was the result of the inhabitants behaving immorally (357). Instead, Orton states that "wlonc and wingal" is only "happily embedded in positive imagery of heroic splendor and power" (357).

However, the negative connotation of the phrase seems too strong to only serve as an expression embedded in this "positive imagery" (Orton 357). Especially, because "wlonc ond wingal" also exists in *The Seafarer*, where the phrase does seem to imply a moral dejection. In *The Seafarer*, the phrase exists in the following context: "se þe lifes wyn, gebiden in burgum, bealosiþa hwon, wlonc ond wingal" (ll. 27-29). In Treharne's translation of the poem, these lines are translated as "he who possesses life's joy, lives in the city, free from dangerous journeys, proud and merry with wine" ("The Seafarer", ll. 27-29). Interestingly, Orton views "wlonc ond wingal" in *The Seafarer* as possibly emphasizing the speaker's rejection of secular life (356). According to Orton, the phrase is derogatory towards secular life, and serves to emphasize the idea that the speaker's journey in exile is spiritual (356). The speaker has gone into a spiritual exile, because they see secular life as "temporal and worthless" compared to eternal life in Heaven (Orton 356). Hence, it is also more likely that the use of "wlonc ond wingal" in *The Ruin* implies a warning of immoral behaviour of some kind.

The previous chapter discussed the existence and function of elegiac elements in *The Wanderer*. This chapter discussed the existence and function of elegiac elements found in *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin*. *The Seafarer* is often compared to *The Wanderer* and is similarly popular among scholars. *The Ruin* has a different stylistic form to the other two poems.

In *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, the speaker feels loneliness in their exile. This loneliness is emphasized by depictions of harsh weather, especially by depictions of frost and cold seas. The imagery of birds also accentuates the speakers' loneliness. Both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* reflect on the transience of life. Both poems use the *ubi sunt* motif to represent life's transience. It is less explicit in *The Seafarer* than it is in *The Wanderer*, but the function is the same.

The Seafarer features a more overt religious sentiment than *The Wanderer*. However, both poems denounce earthly wealth and values, and favour religious wealth and salvation. The speaker of *The Seafarer* resembles a Christian exile in the sense that they view exile more positively than a Germanic exile would. They want to continue wandering. The Christian

exile may view life on earth as being exiled from God in Heaven. The speaker acknowledges that earthly praise and wealth is nothing compared to what awaits them in Heaven.

Unlike *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer, The Ruin* does not employ the exile theme. It does share the descriptions of harsh weather, especially the image of frost. In *The Ruin,* the harsh weather emphasizes the absence of people and the abandoned state of the stronghold, which accentuates the elegiac mood. *The Ruin* reflects on life's transience, but it seems entirely secular. It reflects on the glory days of the stronghold and its people, and their current absence as well as the decay of the construct.

IV. Elegiac Elements in *Sir Orfeo* and Marie de France's *Chaitivel* and *Lanval*

This chapter will attempt to examine the extent of the survival of elegiac elements in Breton lays from medieval England. To do so, it may be helpful to begin examining the broader context of the transition between Old English and Middle English after the Conquest. Moreover, this chapter will briefly examine the occurrence of elegiac material in other types of later medieval English literary types. Primarily, this part of the discussion will attempt to establish the extent of continuity between the Old English elegy and Middle English poetry. This will lay a foundation for the discussion of the selected Breton lays.

Comparing Breton lays to Old English may seem somewhat illogical. The lays may not seem to have much in common at face value. Breton lays do not seem to be concerned with the heavy sense of loss and longing that the Old English elegies contain. However, there are similarities in content, which are interesting to note. The selection of *Sir Orfeo* and Marie de France's *Chaitivel* and *Lanval* for this discussion was based on the popularity of the poems. In theory, such popularity means a widespread diffusion of these texts among the masses. Consequently, it could mean that whatever elegiac elements these texts have were known to a substantial portion of people. In such a case, the Old English elegy could be said to have survived at least in some way.

From the little Old English poetry that has survived, one can assume that the vernacular English was used as a literary language at least to a small degree before the Norman Conquest in 1066 (Faulkner 179). However, it is not certain to what extent English was used in favour of Latin for literary texts, because there is more extant Latin poetry in comparison to Old English. A century post Conquest, Latin was the dominant language (Faulkner 180). However, Old English manuscripts were still in circulation (Faulkner 181). Moreover, the copying of Old English works persisted. In the twelfth century, texts such as translations into vernacular English and homilies were copied, as well as legal and religious works (Faulkner 181; 184). These texts may show linguistic transitions from the original Old English to variants of Middle English that the copyists used (Faulkner 184). Most importantly, these texts were still Old English in their appearance (Faulkner 184). Faulkner states that texts dating from the early Middle English period show less influence of Old English literature than one may expect (182). If a text was written just after the Conquest, one might expect a text to reflect the Old English tradition, because not much time had passed. It would be odd for the language and the literary conventions to escape the collective memory just because of a change in leadership years before.

Fumo states that the Old English elegy was lost after the Conquest, not surviving in Middle English (120). However, at least one example of, although tentative continuity between the Old English elegy and Middle English literature may exist. This example arrives in the form of the London British Library's Royal 7 C. xii manuscript, which contains a copy of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* (Faulkner 184). These *Homilies* date from somewhere in the late ninth century, but the manuscript copy dates from the twelfth century (Faulkner 184; 191). In this manuscript, two-post Conquest hands have made alterations to Ælfric's Old English text (Faulkner 185). This discussion will focus on the latter of the two hands. This second hand is also known as "The Late Hand" and has been dated to the second half of the twelfth century (Faulkner 191). Faulkner argues that the Late Hand attempted to clarify Ælfric's text and to modernise its language (185).

For this discussion, one particular alteration made by the Late Hand is interesting. In the *Homilies*, Ælfric included the "First Sunday after Easter" and Jesus meeting with the apostles after his death (Faulkner 200). In this homily, Jesus inspires them "preach to reðum cynegum

7 wælræwum" (Faulkner 200). In the Royal 7 C. xii manuscript, the Late Hand altered Ælfric's use of "wælræwum to caseren", which in turn created the expression "cynegum 7 caseren" (Faulkner, 200). Interestingly, variants of this alteration already existed in other Old English homilies (Faulkner 200). More importantly, this phrase also exists in *The Seafarer* (Faulkner 200). Namely, the speaker in *The Seafarer* states: "nu cyningas ne caseras" [no kings or emperors] (l. 82) (Faulkner 200). To argue that the Late Hand was even remotely aware of *The Seafarer* elegy is but speculation, because such a statement cannot be verified due to lack of documentation. However, the coincidence is interesting. It could be a sign that the elegies were still known to people in the twelfth century. In any case, it is an example of a Middle English scribe copying an Old English text into a twelfth century manuscript, and trading in Ælfric's words for another known Old English phrase. In turn, this could very well mean that the Late Hand was aware of the phrase "cynegum 7 caseren" being used in other Old English texts and decided to adopt it. If the phrase was used in other texts, it could also have existed as a formulaic phrase.

It may be true that the Old English elegy, as a poetic type, did not survive the Conquest. However, because the Old English elegy is already a loose term of definition in itself, it might be better to consider how elements of the Old English elegy have survived in Middle English literature, rather than to look for examples of the bigger poetic type. However, that approach may be difficult, because, especially in longer narratives, conventions of different medieval literary traditions can be combined (Fumo 121). For example, an elegiac lament can be combined with fable, allegory or dream visions (Fumo 121). In turn, that may leave the lines between literary traditions somewhat blurred. Here the discussion of elegiac elements in previous chapters may prove useful for identifying elegiac elements in Middle English texts.

The following discussion will focus on Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* and Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. It may be odd to combine these works in the same discussion, because there is a significant period of time that separates them. *The Book of the Duchess* appeared around 1368 while *Morte Darthur* was published almost a century later in 1485. The two texts are examples of later Middle English literature. By focusing on these texts rather than earlier Middle English works, a great amount of literature will be left undiscussed. However, I chose to focus on works that were popular for the scope of this thesis. Both *The Book of the Duchess* and *Morte Darthur* were remarkably popular with their contemporary audience and are among the best works of extant Middle English literature. It is then interesting to examine in what degree Old English elegiac elements exist within such important works.

Geoffrey Chaucer's works are amongst the most famous works of Middle English. One might not immediately associate Chaucer's works with an elegiac mood. However, Fumo argues that Geoffrey Chaucer's works stimulated the "literary art of mourning" in English literature (130-131). MacMullan names Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* as a great elegy in the Middle English period, and argues that this elegy is an example of the French influence on Chaucer's work (59-60). It is generally agreed upon by scholars that *The Book of the Duchess* was written as an ode to, or a commemoration of, the late Blanche Lancaster, the wife of John of Gaunt (MacMullan 60). In that regard, this text is reminiscent of an elegy, because it mourns and commemorates the loss of someone who has passed. Previous chapters have underlined the lamenting nature of the elegy, in which numerous types of loss can be lamented. The death of a loved one is one type of loss that the elegy can express. From the beginning, the speaker sets a tone of sorrow:

> I have gret wonder, be this light,
> How that I lyve, for day ne nyght,
> I may nat slepe wel nygh noght;
> I have so many an ydel thought

> Purely for defaute of slep […]
> For sorwful ymagynacioun
> Ys alway hoolyin my mynde.
> And wel ye woot, agaynes kynde
> Hyt were to liven in thys wyse,
> For nature wolde nat suffyse
> To noon erthly creature
> Nat longe tyme to endure [I wonder greatly, by this day's light, how I still live, for day and night, the sleep I gain is well nigh naught, I have so many an idle thought, simply through default of sleep, […] For sorrowful imagination always wholly grips my mind. And well you know, against kind it is to live in this manner, for Nature will never suffer a single earthly creature any long time to endure (Kline, "The Book of the Duchess")] ("The Book of the Duchess", ll. 1-5; 14-20).

In *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, a similar state of mind was visible. In these poems, the speaker lamented the fact that their minds were not able to rest, and that their sorrow was ever-enduring. 'Sorrowful imagination' (l. 14) is what keeps the speaker of *The Book of the Duchess* in their state of lament. The line "For Nature will never suffer a single earthly creature any long time to endure" (ll. 18-20) is particularly interesting. It stands as a reflection on the transience of life – a reflection that is similar to those in the Old English elegies already discussed.

The poem focuses on the life and death of humans through the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, where Alcyone mourns for her dead husband until she too dies. The speaker finds a knight mourning the death of his wife in an elegiac lament (MacMullan 62):

> "I have of sorwe so gret won
> That joye gete I never non,
> Now that I see my lady bryght,
> Which I have loved with al my myght,
> Is fro me ded and ys agoon ['I have of sorrow so much won that joy I have never none, now that I know my lady bright, whom I have loved with all my might, is from me, dead, and is gone (Kline, "The Book of the Duchess"] (ll. 475-480).

This passage is the most elegiac in *The Book of the Duchess*, because there is an active lament performed by the speaker (the knight). In this lament, the knight is mourning the loss of his[2] loved one. The first chapter discussed the classical elegy, in which the death of loved ones was a common theme for lamentation. However, the death of loved ones is not as commonly found in Old English elegies. As discussed in previous chapters, exile was a more common theme in Old English elegies. Although this passage is elegiac in the sense that it is a lament of loss, it shares little similarities with the Old English elegies discussed in previous chapters.

Elegiac laments exist in later medieval romances. In these romances, the lament mourns someone who died during the adventures of the heroic knight (Fumo 123). For example, such elegiac expressions can be found in the Arthurian romances, Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* in particular (Fumo 123). In *Morte Darthur*, King Arthur and Ector perform laments that mourn the death of knights they loved. Arthur performs the following lament after he learns of the deaths of Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth:

[2] In this chapter, I will use the male pronouns to refer to a character when appropriate. I consider the gender more certain than in the elegies, because the characters in these longer poems are given proper names. For example, Arthur is a king and Ector is referred to as a Sir, which clearly underlines their gender. In the *Book of the Duchess,* the lament is performed by a knight, which was generally a male profession. In the Old English elegies discussed, the speaker is unidentified. Thus, I think it is more appropriate to use the male pronoun here.

> Allas that euer I bare croun vpon my hede / For now haue I loste the fairest felaushyp of noble knyghtes that euer helde crysten kynge to gyders / Allas my good knyghtes ben slayne aweye from me […] also the noble felaushyp of syr laucelot and his blood / for now I may neuer hold hem to gyders no more with my worship [Alas, that ever I bore crown upon my head! For now I lost the fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever held Christian king together. Alas, my good knights be slain and gone away from me […] also the noble fellowship of Sir Lancelot and his blood, for now I may nevermore hold them together with my worship] (Caxton, "Le Morte Darthur"; Malory 488).

In this lament, Arthur mourns their deaths while reminiscing their fellowship. He mourns the fact that these knights are now gone and he may never enjoy their company again. He claims that their fellowship held him together as a king. This implies that their deaths will unravel him. As discussed in previous chapters, this passage is elegiac in a general sense because it mourns loss. It is reminiscent of the classical elegy because it mourns the death of a loved one. The passage contains a small reflection on the transitory nature of life. Arthur acknowledges that his friends are gone forever and that his life will not be the same again. This reflection is reminiscent of the Old English elegies discussed in previous chapters, but it is not as overt and as extensive. In *The Wanderer, The Seafarer* and *The Ruin,* the speaker's mourning of the passage of time is an integral part of the elegiac lament. In this passage, it is not as relevant, because the focus rests on the grief Arthur feels for his friends' death.

In *Morte Darthur,* Sir Ector also performs a lament, mourning the death of his brother Lancelot. When Ector comes to mourn Lancelot, he says the following:

> & whan he waked it were harde ony tonge to telle the doleful complayntes that he made for his brother […] A Launcelot he sayd thou were hede of al crysten knyghtes / & now I dare say […] thou sir Launcelot there thou lyest that thou were neuer matched of erthely knyghtes hande / & thou were the curtest knight that euver bare shelde / & thou were the truest frende to thy louar that euer bestrade hors […] & thou was the meekest man & the Ientyllest that euer ete in halle emonge ladyes [And when he waked, it were hard any tongue to tell the doleful complaints that he made for his brother […] "Thou were head of all Christian knights. And now I dare say […] thou Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust knight that ever bore shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse […] and thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies] (MacMullan 61; Caxton, "Le Morte Darthur"; Malory 499).

Ector's elegiac lament is a farewell and a statement of the loss he feels, as well as a "nostalgic farewell to a lost form of chivalry" (Fumo 123). By claiming Lancelot was the best lover, the gentlest in the company of ladies and the most courteous knight, Ector implies that Lancelot's great show of chivalry is not a common occurrence anymore. Although Lancelot's chivalry is the norm, apparently, it is no longer being performed by many knights. Ector's lament, then, envokes a nostalgic sorrow that is reminiscent of the exiled speaker in *The Wanderer* in the sense that it mourns the loss of a way of life that no longer exists.

Besides romances, elegiac laments also appeared in lyrical elegies that were not embedded in a larger narrative, but were independent pieces (Fumo 124). Mainly, these elegies commemorated "the death of kings […] princesses […] and other noteworthy figures" (Fumo 124). In addition, they included "praise of the deceased's virtues and accomplishments, outcries against death […] reflections on the mutability of Fortune and the transience of life" (Fumo 125). The previous chapter discussed Boethius' *Consolation,* noting that a Boethian text sought to console the living instead of lamenting the dead (Fumo 125). In contrast, the mourning of loss was the focus of these independent lyrical elegies. Interestingly,

the dead could also perform elegiac aments in these elegies, in which the "decay of the flesh" and the *ubi sunt* motif were popularly employed techniques (Fumo, 126). Generally, the *ubi sunt* motif reflected on the loss of courtly life (Fumo 126). When the dead character laments, it functions as some kind of revival that is temporary; the poetry revives them for some time until their poetic need is finished (Fumo 128). The dead will, after telling their version of events (in a dream vision), not live on (Fumo 128).

The origins of the Breton lay are often traced to Celtic societies located in what are now Britain and France (Bullock-Davies 27). The form was quite popular among the higher classes (Bullock-Davies 18). However, this is where the clarity about the Breton lay apparently ends. The original essence of the Breton lay is hard to trace, because very few poets have made mention of the poetic type (Bullock-Davies 18). Moreover, there has not been a consensus on the status of the Breton lay within the Middle English literary corpus (Furnish 84). Specifically, there is no consensus on whether the Breton lay should be seen as a separate poetic form or as a part of the Middle English romance genre (Furnish 84). In Middle English, the term Breton lay is often used to denote the following poems: "Sir Orfeo, Sir Degaré, Lay le Freine, "The Franklin's Tale," Sir Launfal, The Earl of Toulouse, Emaré, and Sir Gowther" (Furnish 83). However, their universal similarities only really consist of their relatively short length of narrative and the importance of adventure (Furnish 84).

The lack of consensus on what the Breton lay has in Middle English literature is partially due to a lack of universal characteristics. Furnish argues that most characteristics which have been brought up traditionally are "incidental" (84). For example, Furnish argues that Breton lays "do not entirely exclude Arthurian material or embrace it regularly, do not share a common metrical system, do not uniformly develop courtly themes, and are not all contemporaneous" (84). As quoted in Furnish' article, Thomas Shippey argues that Breton lays are concerned with the dynamics of the family and some form of coming-of-age narratives (Furnish 85). Furnish also includes Harrington, who argues that Breton lays focus less on one's martial achievements, but rather on one's "domestic and social contexts" (85). Moreover, Furnish argues that Breton lays contain "regular, symmetrical repetition or sequence of concrete symbols", such as the harp that Orfeo clings to, which creates layers in the narrative (86). Bullock-Davies argues that Breton lays commemorated events that happened within a given society (27). Any event of any size and impact could be turned into a Breton lay (Bullock-Davies 27).

As previously mentioned, there is no consensus on whether the Breton lay is a separate form or a part of the medieval romance genre. However, it is obvious that are some differences between a Breton lay and a longer romance work. The Breton lay is generally shorter than a romance (Furnish 117-118). As a consequence of its shorter length, the narrative of a Breton lay is leaner than that of a romance, "lacking exposition" according to Furnish (117-118). There is also a difference in style between the two forms. The romance tends to use less poetic language and imagery than the Breton lay (Furnish 118). The less poetic style of the romance is, in part, because of the romance's length. A text of a longer length will generally need to focus more on the structure of the narrative rather than the style. As a longer text, the romance focuses more on narrative structure than the Breton lay (Furnish 118). The "manifestion of love" seems central to the Breton lay, as well as how love furthers the progression of a character (Furnish 114). Contrary to the romance, the Breton lay is less focused on martial prowess (Furnish 117).

For the remainder of this discussion, the extent of elegiac elements in the Breton lays will be examined. In the previous chapter, it became clear that the theme of exile permeates the Old English literary corpus quite heavily. After the Conquest, exile seemed to be a similarly popular subject, but its use became more diverse than it had been prior to the Conquest (Lawler 38). An important distinction in the depiction of exile between the Old English period

and the period that followed the Conquest is the duration of one's exile. For an Germanic warrior, exile generally has no end (Lawler 16). In contrast, in the romances of the later Middle Ages the hero who experiences exile usually has the opportunity to leave their exile (Lawler 16).

Lawler identifies another difference between the two periods with regards to their approach to the depiction of exile. While the Old English depiction tended to focus on the speaker's mentality towards their exile, the later medieval depiction was focused more on the action that the exile performed (Lawler 35-36). In later medieval literature, the longer narrative poems and romance narratives that depicted the exile theme needed "exile to be shown as narrative action, not a static position and state of mind" (Lawler 36). Furthermore, it seems that exile is generally depicted as a deliberate action (Lawler 40). Specifically, the exile chose that fate or they were forced into it by someone else (Lawler 40).

The previous chapters noted the existence of a tension between Germanic heroic culture and Christian doctrine in the Old English elegiac poems discussed. This tension existed especially in the poems' depiction of exile. In an Old English elegiac poem, this tension is visible in the lament of the speaker. A Germanic exile has a different view on their fate in exile than a Christian exile (Lawler 30). The goal of the Germanic warrior is to leave their exile and return to their community, despite usually not being able to return (Lawler 30; 143). A religious exile may strengthen their connection to God in exile and, eventually, be joined with God (Lawler 30). In the Old English elegy, the exiled speaker could perform a lament that combined secular and religious elements. In the later Middle Ages, the secular exile and the religious exile rarely meet in the same text (Lawler 17). Their different goals no longer seem to be able to pursued in the same text (Lawler 30).

The theme of exile was approached secularly after the Conquest, especially in longer poems and (chivalric) romances (Lawler 71; 73). A secular approach to exile may depict the hero's journey that allows them to experience the consequences of exile and what their place in their society is (Lawler 55). In later medieval romances, a character may experience being removed from their lover as exile, which, in turn, hinders them from creating a bond with God or their community because their attention is devoted to their lover (Lawler 77; 87). Exile intensifies the lover's suffering (Lawler 93). Another secular approach could also depict the lover being exiled so as to test their worth to the community (Lawler 78). This was especially true for secular romance narratives starring a heroic figure. In these romances, exile generally served as a test and the exile's reward was their newfound maturity and a place in their society, not their lover, who seemed to be an added bonus (Lawler 130). While the speaker of the Old English elegy does not or cannot return to their community, the exiled character generally does return in later medieval works. Upon their return to the community, the exile is then rewarded (Lawler 41).

Depictions of Christian exile existed alongside those of secular exile after the Conquest (Lawler 40). One approach to the depiction of Christian exile can function to put forth a warning to the audience and to deter them from sinning as well as stimulate to "exile themselves from the temptations of the world" (Lawler 46; 48-49). This depiction may also portray exile as the consequence of sin and, in turn, depicted the exile as being exiled from God (Lawler 46). Essentially, it means that to live on earth is to be exiled from God in Heaven (Lawler 50).

In the later Middle Ages, the exile theme inspires a reflection on the transience of life in a similar fashion as it could in the Old English elegies which were religiously motivated. Especially in later medieval devotional poems (Lawler 103). Love poetry could also show life's transitory nature by emphasizing the fleetingness of human emotion in favour of God's love (Lawler 103-104). A Christian lover should not pursue the love of an earthly being, but focus on God (Lawler 105).

In *Lanval,* it seems very likely that Lanval exists in a state of exile while living at the king's court (Lawler 121-122). He has status, but that does not seem to matter at Arthur's court: "Fiz a rei fu, de halt parage, mes luin ert de sun heritage. De la maisniee le rei fu. Tut sun aveir a despendu; kar li reis rien ne li dona"[3][He was the son of a king of high degree but he was far from his heritage. He was of the king's household but he had spent all his wealth, for the king gave him nothing" ("Lanval", ll. 27-31). Lanval is the son of a king, but, for all the good that does him, he might as well have been the son of a commoner. Moreover, Lanval has no treasure. It is stated that the king "asez I duna riches duns e as cuntes e as baruns, a cels de la table roünde […] fors a un sul ki l'ot servi. Ceo fu Lanval; ne l'en sonvint, ne nuls des soens bien ne li tint" [gave out many gifts: to counts and barons, members of the Round Table […] to all but one who had served him. That was Lanval; Arthur forgot him, and none of his men favored him either] ("Lanval", ll. 12-15; 18-20). As previously discussed, the honour of a Germanic warrior partly relied on the amount of treasure they owned, because their wealth of treasure reflected their honourable deeds. Furthermore, it was discussed previously that an exile lost their wealth and their status. In that light, Lanval seems akin to an exile.

However, Lanval is also an exile in other ways. Firstly, he is not from Arthur's court. He is the son of another king. He does not have the support of his king or his peers. In turn, Lanval appears in a state of melancholy:

> Lanval fu suls e esguarez, n'i aveit parent ne ami […] Ore est Lanval mult entrepris, mult est dolenz, mult est pensis […] huem estrangez, descunseilliez mult est dolenz en altre terre […] Mult est pensis pur sa mesaise, il ne veit chose ki li plaise [Lanval was alone and forlorn, he had no relative, no friend […] Now Lanval was in difficulty, depressed and very worried […] a strange man, without friends, is very sad in another land […] He worried about his difficulty, he could see nothing that pleased him] ("Lanval", ll. 398-399; 33-34; 36-37; 51-52).

Lanval is removed from his home and is practically exiled in Arthur's court. Lanval, in a way, resembles a Christian exile. The previous chapter likened *The Seafarer*'s speaker to a Christian exile. The speaker feels that the hardships they face in exile are equally as painful as being separated from God (Lawler 17). In *Lanval*, the devotion that Lanval shows the lady that he meets resembles the devotion that a Christian exile shows God. While living in the court, Lanval is exiled from his lady. He says to her: "Pur vus guerpirai tutes genz. Ja mes ne quier de vus partir. Ceo est la riens que plus desir" [for you, I shall abandon everyone. I want never to leave you. That is what I most desire] ("Lanval", ll. 128-130). He does not want to stay in his established community, but he wants to leave with the lady (Lawler 121-122). Moreover, the lady gives Lanval treasures that he does not receive from Arthur, his lord. The lay states:

> Ja cele rien ne vuldra mes que il nen ait a sun talent […] Ora est Lanval bien assenez cum plus despendra richement e plus avra or e argent [he would never again want anything, he would receive as he desired […] Now Lanval is well cared for. The more lavishly he spends, the more gold and silver he will have] ("Lanval", ll. 136-137; 140-142).

Arguably, the passage is reminiscent of the Christian exile wanting to renounce earthly treasure in favour of God's treasures. When Lanval returns to court, he enjoys the lady's gifts and does not need the attention of his peers:

> Lanval s'en vait de l'altre part, luin des altres. Mult li est tart que s'amie puisse tenir, baisier, acoler e sentir; l'atrui joie prise petit, se il nen a le suen delit [Lanval went off

[3] Due to the pandemic, I had much difficulty acquiring a source text for Marie's lays. The Old French represented here may therefore not be as accurate as I would have liked. As a result of using two different sources, there may exist incongruencies between the source text and the translation.

> to one side, far from the others; he was impatient to hold his love, to kiss and embrace and touch her; he thought little of others' joys if he could not have his pleasure] ("Lanval", ll. 253-258).

Lanval thus renounces the joys of Arthur's court and focuses on the joys of his lady.

However, when Lanval betrays his promise to the lady, she, in turn, exiles him and he loses his wealth once more (Lawler 121-122). Lanval has to return to court and that is where his sorrow settles in:

> Lanval ki asez a dolur e mal. A sun ostel fu revenuz; ja s'esteit bien aparceüz qu'il aveit perdue s'amie: descoverte ot la druërie. En une chambre fu tuz sous, pensis esteit e anguissous. S'amie apele mult sovent, mes ceo ne li valut niënt. Il se pleigneit e suspirot, d'ures en altres se pasmot; puis li crie cent feiz merci […] sun quer e sa buche maldit; c'est merveille qu'il ne s'ocit. Il ne set tant criër ne braire ne debatre ne sei detraire [Lanval who was feeling great sorrow and distress. He had come back to his dwelling, knowing very well that he'd lost his love, he had betrayed their affair. He was all alone in a room, disturbed and troubled; he called on his love, again and again, but it did him no good. He complained and sighed, from time to time he fainted; then he cried a hundred times for her […] he cursed his heart and his mouth; it's a wonder he didn't kill himself. No matter how much he cried and shouted, ranted and raged] ("Lanval", ll. 331-343; 345-348).

Lanval suffers from the distance between him and his lady. When she comes to rescue him from his trial, he says the following: "ceo est m'amie. Or m'en est guaires ki m'ocie, si ele n'a merci de mei: kar guariz sui, quant jeo le vei" [that is my love. Now I don't care if I am killed, if only she forgives me. For I am restored, now that I see her] ("Lanval", ll. 597-600). He does not care if he is killed, because death is nothing compared to the pain of being separated from her. As previously discussed, the Christian exile claims that the love of God is superior to any love they might experience on earth. Lanval displays a similar sentiment, albeit in a secular manner. Lanval does not worship God, but his lady. The love of his lady means more than anything he may experience or receive at Arthur's court. When the lady departs from court, Lanval goes with her:

> Sur le palefrei detries li de plein eslais Lanval sailli. Od li s'en vait en Avalun […] en un isle qui mul test beals; la fu raviz li dameiseals. Nuls n'en oï puis parler [Lanval leapt, in one bound, onto the palfrey, behind her. With her he went to Avalun […] to a very beautiful island; there the youth was carried off. No man heard of him again] ("Lanval", ll. 639-641; 644-645).

In this passage, Lanval resembles a Christian exile once more. A Christian exile would be happy to depart from their earthly life to join God in Heaven and enjoy God's eternal gifts. Similarly, Lanval is happy to follow his lady to a different land that is completely strange to him, as long as he can enjoy her gifts.

As can be seen, the most striking similarity between the Old English elegy and *Lanval* is the embedded use of the theme of exile, and the lament.

In *Chaitivel*, a lady from Nantes cannot find a lover in her own land. Instead, she falls in love with four separate knights from Brittany. They do not know of each other's romantic connections to the lady. They meet each other at a tournament, where they help each other fight. However, three knights are killed in the fray and one is gravely wounded. Soon after, a communal sense of lament arises:

> La noise leva e li criz, unques tels doels ne fu oïz. Cil de la cité i alerent, unques les alters ne duterent; pur la dolur des chevaliers i aveit itels dous milliers ki lur ventaille deslacierent, chevels e barbes esrachierent. Entre els esteit li doels comuns. Sur un

> escu fu mis chescuns; en la cite les unt portez a la dame kis ot amez.[4] [The noise began and the cries, such mourning was never heard. The people from the city came without a thought for the others. In sorrow for these knights, two thousand undid their visors, drew out their hair and beards; all felt a common grief. Each one was placed upon his shield and carried to the city to the lady that he had loved] ("Chaitivel", ll. 131-142).

This passage sets a tone akin to the elegiac mood. Yet, the following lament of the lady feels like an elegy:

> Des qu'ele sot cele aventure, pasmee chiet a terre dure. Quant ele vient de pasmeîsun, chescun regrete par sun nun. 'Lasse', fete le, 'que ferai? Ja mes haitiee ne serai! Cez quatre chevaliers amoue […] mult par aveit en els grant bien. Il m'amoënt sur tute rien. Pur lur bealté, pur lur pruësce, pur lur valur, pur lur largesce […] mes ne m'en puis covrir ne feindre. L'un vei nafré, li trei sunt mort: n'ai rien el mund ki me confort! […] 'jeo pensoue e voz cumpaignuns remembroue. Ja mes dame de mun parage tant nen iert bele, pruz ne sage, tels quatre ensemble n'amera ne en un jur si nes perdra, fors vus tut sul ki nafrez fustes, grant pour de mort en eüstes. Pur ceo que tant vus ai amez, vueil que mis doels seit remembrez [As soon as she knew the adventure, she fell, fainting, on the hard ground. When she recovered from her faint, she mourned for each by name. "Alas," she said, "what shall I do? I'll never be happy again. I loved these four knights […] there was great good in all of them; they loved me more than anything. For their beauty, their bravery, their merit, their generosity […] I cannot conceal or disguise my grief. I see one wounded, three are dead; nothing in the world can comfort me […] I was thinking, remembering your companions. Never did a lady of my position, however beautiful, noble, or wise, love four such men at once, only to lose them all in a day except for you, who were wounded; you were in great danger of dying. Because I have loved you so, I want my grief to be remembered] ("Chaitivel", ll. 143-149; 151-154; 158-160; 193-202).

In this passage, the lady laments the knights she loves by remembering every good quality they possessed. The lady laments the loss of these qualities, because she will not experience them again now that the knights are dead. The surviving knight also delivers something along the lines of a lament. However, his lament does not mourn his three fellow knights. Instead, he mourns another kind of pain:

> Li altre sunt pieç'a fine e trestut le siècle unt usé en la grant peine qu'il sufreient de l'amur qu'il vers vus aveient. Mes jo ki sui eschapez vis, tuz esguarez e tuz chaitis, ceo qu'el siècle puis plus amer vei sovent venir e aler, parler od mei matin e seir, si n'en puis nule joie aveir ne de baisier ne d'acoler ne d'altre bien fors de parler. Tels cent mals me faites sufrir, mielz me valdreit la mort tenir. Pur c'iert li lais de mei nomez: 'Le Chaitivel' iert apelez [The others have been dead some time; they spent their lives in great pain that they suffered because of their love for you; but I, who escaped alive, am confused and miserable – the one I could love most in the world I see coming and going frequently, speaking with me morning and evening, but I can have no joy from her, from kisses or embraces, nor any other good but talk. You make me suffer a hundred such ills, that it would be better for me to die. If the lai is to be named for me, let it be called the Unfortunate One] ("Chaitivel", ll. 211-226).

The knight mourns the fact that he is love with the lady, because he cannot feel joy from her love any longer. Not when her love has caused three other knights to fight for her until death.

From these passages, it becomes clear that *Chaitivel* contains few of the elegiac elements that appear in the Old English elegies. Namely, *Chaitivel* does not employ the exile

[4] As stated earlier, it was difficult to find adequate source texts for Marie's lays due to the ongoing pandemic. For Marie de France's original version of *Chaitivel*, I used L. Harf-Lancner's edition (1990). By using a different translation, there may be some incongruencies.

theme, nor does it reflect on the transience of life. There are no descriptions of harsh weather or descriptions of birds. Nor does *Chaitivel* mourn the loss of a time or a way of life that is passed. *Chaitivel* does have a general sense of mourning. While *Chaitivel* does not share many similarities with the Old English elegy, it does seem influenced by the classical elegy. It may be influenced by the classical elegy in the sense that the lady in the poem laments the loss of a loved one.

In *Sir Orfeo,* Queen Heurodis is snatched away to the kingdom of fairies. Upon this event, Orfeo immediately mourns the loss of his wife:

> "Oh, weel" quath he, "allas, allas!"
> Lever me were to lete my lif
> Than thus to lese the queene my wif." […]
> Tho was ther crying, weep and wo;
> The king into his chambre is go
> And oft swooned upon the stoon,
> And made swich dool and swich moon
> That nye his life was yspent –
> Ther was noon amendement. ["Oh, woe" he said, "Allas, allas! I would rather leave my life than thus to lose my wife, the queen" […] Then there was crying, weeping and woe; The king went into his chamber and often swooned upon the floor, and made such lamentation and such complaint that his life was nearly finished – there was no remedy] ("Sir Orfeo", ll. 176-178; 195-200).

After his moment of lamention, Orfeo becomes resolute in his decision to leave the kingdom. His lament strengthens his resolve (Fumo 129). He says:

> For now I have my queene ylore,
> The faireste lady that evere was bore,
> Nevere eft I nil no womman see;
> In wildernesse now wil ich tee
> And live ther for everemore,
> With wilde beestes in holtes hore. [For that I have lost my queen, the fairest lady that was ever born, never again will I see a woman; now I will go into the wilderness and live there forevermore, with wild beasts in gray woods] ("Sir Orfeo", ll. 209-214).

Orfeo cannot live in the kingdom any longer, because no one can compare to his wife and he does not want to look at another woman. To him, the better option is to disappear and be alone in the wild. In turn, Orfeo goes into voluntary exile. Orfeo takes with him only his harp and a cloak. Fumo argues that Orfeo disappears to be in the woods where his wife disappeared to and be with her in spirit, rather than to look for her there (129). Sir Orfeo's voluntary exile supports the difference between the depiction of exile in Old English and Middle English literature. As discussed previously, for the speaker in an Old English poem, exile is typically permanent. But while the speaker of an Old English poem was permanently exiled, the exile in Middle English was generally able to return from their exile. Orfeo chooses to leave his community; he was not exiled by his community. This means that he will be able to return when he chooses. Orfeo voluntarily spends ten years adrift in the forest:

> But evere he liveth in greet malaise […]
> He that hadde had castels and towres,
> Rivere foreest, frith with flowres,
> Now thought it ginne snowe and freese,
> This king moot make his bed in meese.
> He that hadde had knightes of pris,
> Before him kneeling and ladis,
> Now seeth he nothing that him liketh,

> But wilde wormes by him striketh […]
> Lord, who may telle of the sore
> This king suffered ten yeer and more? [But he lived ever in great pain […] He that had had castles and towers, forest rivers, meadows with flowers, now thought it would snow and freeze, this king must make his bed in moss. He that had had knights of renown, kneeling before him and ladies, now he sees nothing that pleases him, but wild snakes that glide by him […] Lord, who may tell of the pain this king suffered ten years and more?] ("Sir Orfeo", ll. 240; 245-252; 2643-264).

This passage is reminiscent of the *ubi sunt* motif. It describes the comforts that Orfeo no longer has (Fumo 129). In the Old English elegy, the *ubi sunt* motif was also used to emphasize loss of one's way of life. Moreover, this passage employs descriptions of Orfeo's surroundings, which are uninviting. Orfeo has traded flowery meadows in for snow and frost, and sleeps on moss instead of a bed. The imagery of snow and frost in this passage is particularly similar to descriptions found in Old English elegies. To recall, *The Seafarer, The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* all used frost and snow to describe the harshness of their surroundings in exile. Furthermore, the Old English elegies could employ the imagery of birds alongside the exile theme. Similarly, *Sir Orfeo* employs forest animals:

> His harp wheron was al his glee
> He hidde in an holwe tree
> And whan the weder was cleer and bright,
> He took his harp to him wel right,
> And harped at his owene wille:
> In al the woode the soun gan shille,
> That wilde beestes that ther beeth
> For joy abouten him they teeth;
> An alle the fowles that ther were
> Come and sete on each a brere
> To here his harping affine [His harp was all his glee he hid in a hollow tree, and when the weather was clear and bright, he took his harp to him, and harped at his own will: in all the woods, the sounds resounded, that wild beasts that were there drew around him for joy; and all the fowls that were there came and sat on a briar each to hear his harping to the end] ("Sir Orfeo", ll. 267-277).

In the Old English elegies, the birds served to remind the exiled speaker of their loneliness, because they were there with the speaker, but could not speak or offer the comfort that another human being could. In this passage, the forest animals gather around Orfeo to hear his harp-play. These animals, like the animals in the elegies explored above, cannot speak; they can only exist alongside Orfeo while he plays. Orfeo may find more consolation in his harp than the animals.

Soon after, Orfeo begins another lament. He sees his queen, Heurodis, in the forest, but she disappears before he can say a word to her. In her wake, Orfeo is in despair:

> "Allas," quath he, "now me is wo.
> Why nil deeth now me nought slo?
> Allas, wrecche, that I ne mighte
> Die now after this sighte.
> Allas, too longe last my life […]
> Allas, why nil myn herte breke? ["Allas," said he, "now woe is me. Why will death not slay me? Allas, wretched one, that I may not die now after this sight. Allas, my life lasts too long […] Allas, why will my heart not break] ("Sir Orfeo", ll. 331-335; 338).

When Orfeo returns to his kingdom, he is taken for a minstrel – not for the king. When his steward asks him where he found the harp, Orfeo says he found it ten years ago, next to the

body of a man torn by beasts. The steward immediately assumes that that man was Orfeo and launches into a lament:

> "now me is wo!
> That was my lord Sir Orfeo.
> Allas, wrecche, what shal I do
> That have swich a lord ylore?
> A, way, that evere ich was ybore
> That him was so harde grace y-yarked,
> And so vile deeth ymarked."
> Adown he fel aswoone to grounde [Now woe is me! That was my lord Sir Orfeo.
> Alas, wretched one, what shall I do now that I have lost such a lord? A, woe, that ever
> I was born that him was ordained by grace so hard, and by so vile appointed by death."
> He fell down to the ground, swooning] ("Sir Orfeo", ll. 546-553).

The steward's lament catalogues Orfeo's good qualities as a means of emphasizing the great loss that is his supposed death. Sir Orfeo contains elements that are generally considered elegiac, such as containing a mournful tone and describing the loss and grief of the speaker. Sir Orfeo also shares similarities with the Old English elegiac elements discussed in previous chapters.

In later medieval literature, elegiac elements could appear as a part of a larger narrative or as an independent work. Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* commemorates the loss that comes with the passing of a loved one. The work is elegiac because it mourns loss of love, but it is not necessarily reminiscent of an Old English elegy, because it shares few similarities with it. Malory's *Morte Darthur* also performs laments for deceased loved ones. Like *The Book of the Duchess*, *Morte Darthur* contains elegiac material, but it is not reminiscent of the Old English elegy in particular.

In the later Middle Ages, depictions of exile continued to flourish. In these depictions, exile is typically a temporary state, and this transitory aspect of exile stands in sharp contrast to depictions of exile in the early Middle Ages. In the later depictions, the exile can typically return to their community and, sometimes, they are rewarded upon their return.

Out of the three selected texts, *Sir Orfeo* contains the greatest number of Old English elegiac elements. While Marie's *Lanval* and *Chaitivel* contain some form of lament, and *Lanval* depicts the exile theme in some form (albeit embedded) these elements are not particularly pronounced.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have aimed to give an overview of the wider elegiac tradition by discussing the Greek elegy and the Roman elegy. I then discussed these traditions in relation to their influence on the Old English elegy.

Because the elegy is a versatile poetic form, defining it is difficult. I have attempted to give an overview of the nature of the elegy as a concept by, in part, drawing on the definitions that have emerged in previous scholarship. I have also delineated some elements of the Old English elegy. I have taken *The Wanderer* as a paradigmatic form for the Old English elegy and consequently, I have compared *The Wanderer* to *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin* to examine which elegiac elements existed within the poems.

In the elegiac tradition as a whole, exile is a common theme. But it does not appear prominently in all elegies; *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* employ the exile theme, while *The Ruin* does not. In *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, the speaker reflects on the hardships they face in exile and they lament the loss of the life they once had. The recalling of memories is one way in which the speaker laments their exile.

The reflection on the transience of life is another common theme within the elegiac poems, and this theme appears in combination with the exile theme. The poems commonly employ the *ubi sunt* motif to emphasize what has been lost and how life is naturally vulnerable to decay. All three elegiac poems reflect on life's transience. In *The Ruin*, this reflection is secular. In *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, this reflection is religiously motivated. In these two poems, life on earth is contrasted to the afterlife in Heaven, and the hardships of earthly life are contrasted to the comforts of Heaven.

This thesis has shown that several of the elegiac elements appear in later medieval works, namely *The Book of the Duchess* and *Morte Darthur*. But is it important to note that in these particular works, the key elegiac elements found in the Old English elegies do not occur. Particularly, both works do not employ the exile theme, no do they reflect on the transience of life in the same manner as the Old English elegiac poems. Thus, these works do contain elegiac elements, but they do not share many similarities with Old English elegiac poems. Instead, they are more reminiscent of classical elegies.

I have also examined the existence of Old English elegiac elements in the Breton lays of *Lanval*, *Chaitivel* and *Sir Orfeo.* The discussion showed that, out of the three lays discussed, *Sir Orfeo* contains more Old English elegiac elements compared to *Lanval* and *Chaitivel*. *Lanval* and *Chaitivel* contain elegiac laments, but these laments do not share similarities with the Old English elegies discussed. *Lanval* contains an embedded depiction of the exile theme, but it does not have the same importance as the exile theme does in the Old English elegiac poems. *Sir Orfeo* depicts exile in a way that is reminiscent to the elegiac poems discussed.

In light of the findings discovered in the previous chapters, a possible hypothesis may be that Old English elegiac elements have carried over into later traditions of English literature while there is little evidence of such influence in the French tradition.

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