"*ÞÆT ON STAÞELUM HEALDAN*": EXPLORING THE FIRM FOUNDATION OF *THE SEAFARER*'S WORLDVIEW IN CONVERSATION WITH AUGUSTINE, BOETHIUS, AND ALFRED THE GREAT

by

BRENDA N. BROCATO

(Under the Direction of Jonathan Evans)

ABSTRACT

The Old English poem *The Seafarer* is widely recognized for its homiletic nature, bringing the language of theology into what would otherwise be easily classified as an elegy. These theological underpinnings do not come from nowhere but are instead part of a tradition beginning with early Christian theologians Augustine and Boethius and entering early medieval England through the translations attributed to Alfred the Great of the *Soliloquies* and *Consolation of Philosophy*. Taken in conversation with each other, *The Seafarer* and both the Latin originals and the Old English translations of the *Soliloquies* and *Consolation of Philosophy* paint a picture of a worldview designed to give practical hope to those living in an unstable and uncertain world, a worldview which is also evidence for a single-voice reading of *The Seafarer*.

INDEX WORDS: *The Seafarer*, Old English poetry, Elegiac poems, *Soliloquies*, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine, Boethius, Alfred the Great, Worldview

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Robert W. Abel, who believed in my ability to succeed and who taught us to make order from chaos.

Ex tenebra, fiat lux; ex morte, vita.

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On a more personal note, I am blessed to be surrounded by incomparable family and friends. My parents, Mark and Diane, and my brother Isaac have all been at my side (or on the other end of the phone) night and day, encouraging, admonishing, advising, and cheering me on.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Stieran mon sceal strongum mode, ond þæt on staþelum healdan "A man must steer a strong spirit and keep it on a firm foundation"[1] (*The Seafarer* 109). So exhorts a seafarer, the titular character of the Old English poem found in the Exeter Book,[2] as he bids his readers to order their minds rightly and, by extension, to order their lives. This line, part of the culmination of a lengthy homiletic section of *The Seafarer*, may seem a surprising end for a poem that begins firmly in the tradition of elegy or lament. This abrupt change in direction at the end of a traditional elegy has led some to argue that this poem is actually a compilation of poems rather than one original work. However, such arguments fail to consider that the combination of elegy and sermon makes sense when the poem is taken as a whole and considered as the creative emanation of a sincere religious belief. The seafarer does not bandy empty words, but he trades in earnest ideas, carefully expressed. Further, resonances may be found between the ideas expressed in the poem and ideas espoused in both Latin and Old English works of theology and philosophy.

Two particular works should be noted not only for the similarities between their themes and *The Seafarer*'s, but also because they had significant influence on each other. These are the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius and the *Soliloquia* of Augustine or, more specifically, the translations of these two texts into Old English by Alfred the Great.[3] These Old English

[1] All translations mine
[2] A compilation of Old English poetry from the tenth or eleventh century (Klinck 13)
[3] Hereafter, the Latin titles of these two works will be used only refer to the original Latin sources while the English titles "*Consolation of Philosophy*" and "*Soliloquies*" will refer specifically to the Alfredian translations.

treatises are notable both for the similarities they share with their Latin counterparts (introducing the older ideas into a new vernacular) but also for their distinctiveness from the Latin originals. Indeed, there is enough textual variance that the Old English translations are often referred to as versions of the Latin originals instead of strict translations. Like the character of the seafarer, Alfred seems intent on spurring his readers into acting upon the ideas he puts forth in his translated works, influencing readers to both think and live rightly. When put into conversation with each other, Alfred's translations of the *Consolation of Philosophy* and the *Soliloquies* and the Exeter Book's *The Seafarer* present a vibrant worldview, one which is intellectually satisfying and practically livable, reaching both the philosophical and the artistic realms, and this worldview has the potential to be transformatively unifying in a world which is marked by suffering and uncertainty. It is on account of this particular manner of seeing and interpreting the world that *The Seafarer* makes sense as a singular, unified poem.

To clarify this interpretive approach, we must consider the concept of a worldview. First used by Immanuel Kant, the term "worldview" comes from the German "*Weltanschauung*," and "it has become a key term in Western intellectual discourse since the beginning of the nineteenth century, generally denoting a global outlook on life and the world" (Vanhoozer 854). "Worldview" is often construed as the lens or glasses through which an individual (or a group of individuals) sees the world, but perhaps a more precise definition is "the framework through which or by which one makes sense of the data of life" (Geisler 785). Since its inception, the term has come to be widely used by Christian theologians and scholars to refer to the ways of being which ought to follow from a right interpretation of the Bible, but it is by no means an exclusively Christian concept.[4] More than a singular idea or a loose philosophy, a worldview is a

[4] For a comprehensive overview of the term's history, development, and use (including its use in fields outside of philosophy or theology), see Naugle.

unified and (at least relatively) systematic way of understanding the world and one's position in it. Generally, worldviews are considered to have a set of categories or questions which must all be taken into account or answered in some way, though the exact list will vary. N. T. Wright, for example, provides four questions which a worldview will answer: "'Who are we?' 'Where are we?' 'What is wrong?' and 'What is the solution?'" (Vanhoozer 855). Similarly, Norman L. Geisler lists the categories covered by every worldview as the "view of God, origins, evil, human nature, values, and destiny" (785). Coming from the field of anthropology, Michael Kearney lists as worldview universals "the self and other, relationship, classification, causality, space and time" (Naugle 243).[5] In spite of the diversity among these lists, what is clear is that a worldview ought to be comprehensive, addressing essentially every aspect of life. Likewise, a worldview will have something to say about how to live in relation to the world. Answering the questions to define a worldview is not simply a philosophical exercise, but it is a method of recognizing how one is oriented in relation to oneself and the world, a recognition which will have practical ramifications, even if these are subconscious.

Along with their Latin counterparts, the *Consolation* and the *Soliloquies* will be analyzed with an eye to extrapolating the principles that make up the worldviews behind the texts. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, this analysis will use N. T. Wright's four worldview questions but with an understanding that the ideas gathered to answer those questions would be the same ideas that could be used to classify the worldview according to a different set of categories. Placing the worldviews of the four theological texts in conversation with each other reveals significant similarities among all four but also highlights certain elements which stem from a unique perspective which informs the Old English translations. *The Seafarer*, too, will be examined with the four questions to determine its underlying worldview, which will then be compared with the

[5] See also Kearney 37-40, 65-107.

early medieval English[6] worldview intimated from Alfred's *Consolations* and *Soliloquies*. Ultimately, these works communicate the same manner of seeing and interpreting the world, and there is a specificity to this ideology which suggests intentionality. Drawing significant influence from the Latin theologians, the early medieval English authors created for themselves an ideological center in their shared way of looking at the world. Thus, the worldview found in *The Seafarer* is not incidental, but it is a philosophy which has been cultivated by the culture in which the poem was written. This worldview, then, provides grounds for accepting *The Seafarer* as we have received it, that is, as one single text.

A final piece of context must be considered in order to hold this poem and the theological works in conversation with one another—their chronology. The Alfredian *Consolation* and *Soliloquies*, of course, date from the reign of King Alfred, [7] between 871 and 899, most likely sometime in the latter part (Smyth 528), but *The Seafarer* proves much more difficult to pin down. Two notable attempts from I. L. Gordon and Anne L. Klinck refer to the scribal hand and the conventions of dialect present in the poem as tools to determine its date, but the nearest to a conclusion either of them comes is to say that it was most likely written before 940 or 950 (Gordon 29, Klinck 20). Given the uncertainty regarding when it was composed, it is not possible to say for a fact that *The Seafarer* was influenced by Alfred's translations. Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons for reading these texts in conjunction with each other.

Perhaps most significantly, in translating the *De Consolatione*, Alfred was likely responsible for first introducing Boethian ideas to England. As Allen J. Frantzen puts it, "no firm evidence points to knowledge of the work in England before Alfred translated it" (44). Susan

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[6] On account of the recent controversy and debate surrounding the term "Anglo-Saxon," I have chosen to avoid it in this project. For lack of a more efficient, widely-accepted term, I use the phrase "early medieval English people" to refer to the group traditionally known to scholars as the Anglo-Saxons.

[7] While there is some controversy over the actual authorship of these works (which will be discussed further in the next chapter), their presumed dates remain fairly consistent.

Irvine and Malcom R. Godden have doubts about the authorship but concur on the importance of this translation to the presence of Boethian thought in early medieval England (ix). While manuscript evidence indicates that other versions of the *De Consolatione* (some in Latin and some in English) would eventually become more popular throughout England (Bolton 38, 51-60), substantial indication remains that Alfred's *Consolation* had notable influence. Nicole G. Discenza points out its use by several Old English homilists, especially Ælfric, and by a later translator of the *De Consolatione*, in addition to the fact that our surviving manuscript copies date from up to two centuries apart from each other ("Old" 223-225). She concludes that "readers considered the Old English text worthwhile for centuries after it was written" (226). The Alfredian *Consolation* is uniquely distinguished in the history of Boethian influence on England. As quite possibly the first appearance of Boethius in Britain, and one that continued to be passed down, it makes sense that this specific text ought to be held alongside other early English works which bear marks of Boethian inspiration.

Indeed, the *Consolations* have already been discussed in relation to another Old English elegy from the Exeter Book, *Deor* (Klinck 18-19). And several more Old English elegies have been put into conversation with Boethian texts for their thematic connections, even when it has not been possible to present a definite argument for a particular poet's having had Boethius in mind during composition (Renoir 70-71). The analysis of *The Seafarer* presented below will yield clear evidence that it, too, warrants a Boethian reading, and it is hardly unreasonable to choose for such a purpose that English translation of Boethius which was likely the first.

With this connection established, Alfred's *Soliloquies* may be added into the mix by noting the correspondences between that work and his *Consolation*. Thomas A. Carnicelli fills several pages of his introduction to the *Soliloquies* with parallel passages in which the

Consolation and *Soliloquies* use unmistakably similar phrasing, especially in places where the Latin sources differ (29-37). Frantzen goes so far as to suggest, based on these correspondences, that the two translations were intended to be taken as "a complementary pair" perhaps found by Alfred in a collection of Latin dialogues (85). It only makes sense, then, to include the *Soliloquies* as a second thematic interlocutor with *The Seafarer*. Whether or not it is ever proven that the poet of *The Seafarer* had the Alfredian texts in mind, there is certainly precedent for putting such similar works into conversation with one another for the purpose of exploring their shared themes.

Sometime between the years 1050 and 1072, the bishop Leofric presented several manuscripts to Exeter Cathedral, and it is generally agreed that the Exeter Book was among them (Niles 49). It is likewise plausible that a copy of Alfred's translation of Boethius was included in this gift (Bolton 38). Whether or not the *Seafarer* poet had read Alfred, perhaps we may imagine a young priest or scholar encountering these texts together and coming away impressed with their way of seeing and interpreting the world, having found a firm foundation on which to fix his mind and from which to order his life.

CHAPTER 2

CHURCH FATHERS AND ALFRED THE GREAT

The right ordering of one's life and mind has of course been the provenance of philosophers and theologians since Plato and before. The writings of Boethius and Augustine exemplify this well. In his *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Boethius focuses on how to orient oneself toward suffering and how the ordered state of the universe ought to provide a stable base from which to exist. Augustine's *Soliloquia* deals with a search for God and the knowledge of one's own soul, including discussions on the proper relationship between the soul and the world. Alfred the Great joins the conversation with translations of both of these works with the added element of his perspective as an early medieval English king and the influence of the scholars with whom he partnered. Given the Christian religion that these authors share, general similarities between the Boethius and the Augustine should be expected. But Alfred the Great takes things a step further, juxtaposing these works with each other in a manner which highlights their overlaps in thought. Through this juxtaposition, Alfred is able to present a worldview for his people, derived from authoritative sources, but with particular application to his immediate context.

During Alfred's reign, a number of written works were produced both sponsored by and at the hand of the king, from law codes to scripture to theological treatises. Many of these were translations of Latin texts into Old English for the purpose of making important writings available for a significantly larger number of people to understand. Succinctly, the purpose of this project was that "everyone would have access to the translations and profit from the wisdom

contained in them" (Abels 227). More specifically, Nicole G. Discenza points out several layers to Alfred's translation project. First, he made useful texts available for his people's edification, including those of his people who could not read or understand Latin (*King's* 2). Second, he began the process of establishing English as an official language, and further as a language of learning, thus "adding to the cultural capital of his people" (4). Finally, closely intertwined with the first two goals, Alfred secured his own authority as a translator through his adept use not only of language but also of the ideas and imagery prevalent in both classical and Christian sources (7). In the words of Discenza again, "By reading the text, readers accept Alfred's authority in the field, making a place for him among the learned Latinists who dominate it" (7).

If Alfred's purpose is to establish his authority and build cultural capital for the English people, the question of how much his translations are his own work must be addressed. It is certainly well known that Alfred did not translate these works entirely alone but with the aid and influence of scholars whom he invited to his court. But what is unclear is exactly which words may be Alfred's own, if any. One scholar imagines Alfred and his scholars sitting in deep discussion over each line of text until they together come up with a translation which satisfies Alfred and which he authorizes to be written down (Abels 233). Other scholars go so far as to doubt whether Alfred had any real hand in the translation process at all (Irvine xi). However significant the degree to which Alfred himself translated these works, it certainly was not an individual effort when his team of scholars are considered and indeed when whoever translated the works would almost certainly have been dictating to scribes. Nevertheless, the most common consensus is that Alfred had a significant amount of influence over the translations of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and Augustine's *Soliloquies*, along with Pope Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* and fifty Psalms (Abels 232; Discenza *King's* 1). It should be noted that there is a

significant historical record which attributes this list of works to the king himself (Ganze 22). Likewise, there is enough stylistic and thematic overlap among the *Soliloquies*, *Consolation*, and *Cura Pastoralis* to assume the presence of a uniform guiding hand throughout their translation (Ganze 26). Thus, I will concur with Allen J. Frantzen that "the literary works attributed to him are best regarded as a collective achievement supervised by Alfred and guided by his spirit" (Frantzen 1). Where I refer to the *Consolation* and *Soliloquies* as Alfred's, it should be understood that I am using Alfred's name as a stand in for all who were involved in the process of text creation but considered from a perspective in which King Alfred was indeed heavily involved.

Whoever translated them, the Old English *Consolation* and *Soliloquies* share a significant number of similarities, even more than their Latin antecedents. Taken together they present intriguing possibilities for defining a distinctive early medieval English worldview. But before these works are put into conversation with each other, they should first be held up individually next to their Latin counterparts.

Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*

The *De Consolatione Philosophiae* was written by the late Roman official and philosopher Boethius around the year 525 (Irvine viii).[8] While holding a high position in the court of the Gothic king Theodoric, Boethius was accused of treason and was sentenced to live in exile before being executed (Watts xxi). The *De Consolatione* is a dialogue between Boethius and Lady Philosophy as Boethius sits in exile for a crime from which he claims to be entirely innocent. Gordon Leff describes the main concern of the work as "finding true happiness in contemplation, despite the tribulations of this world" (49). Boethius, faced with deep misfortune,

[8] Although Augustine's is the earlier work, I have chosen to examine the Boethius first on account of the greater influence that it held on medieval thought as a whole.

must remember that which he knows to be true and base his outlook on those things rather than giving in to despair.

As Book I opens, Boethius laments his fate when he is suddenly approached by a woman whom he initially does not recognize but who reveals herself to be *nutricem meam, cuius ab adulescentia laribus obversatus fueram, Philosophia* "my nurse, in whose home I had moved about from youth, Philosophy" (1.III.3-5). Philosophy's aims to provide Boethius with a better framework for dealing with his present suffering than the framework of tears and self-pity (provided by the Muses) with which he starts out, saying of the Muses that, *Hae sunt enim quae…[hominum] mentes adsuefaciunt morbo, non liberant* "These are indeed those who…accustom the minds of men to sickness, not set them free" (1.I.30-33). Improper passions have brought harm to Boethius, but Philosophy is ready to free him. Here Boethius will make note of his own innocence, asking Philosophy if she came *ut tu quoque mecum rea falsis criminationibus agiteris* "so that with me you also might be harried, a defendant with false charges?" (1.III.7-8). But of course, she has other goals.

Lady Philosophy instructs Boethius not to find it surprising when those who seek wisdom and oppose evil suffer on the stormy seas of life (1.III.34-37), but she gives him the opportunity to lay out his complaints so that she may help him find the remedy. Boethius's primary complaint is that it is monstrous or unnatural that wicked men should be able to prevail against the good while God is watching (1.IV.96-97). He sings a song referencing the cycles of nature which all have a proper place and order and in this song asks why God does not similarly exert control over the affairs of men (1.V.26-27). Hearing his complaints, Philosophy replies that Boethius has in fact exiled himself from his true home, that home which is ruled by one lord, *cuius agi frenis atque obtemperare iustitiae summa libertas est. An ignoras illam tuae civitatis*

antiquissimam legem, qua sanctum est ei ius exsulare non esse quisquis in ea sedem fundare maluerit? "…to be led by whose reins and to submit to whose justice is the greatest liberty. Or do you not know that most ancient law of your city, by which it is established that whoever wishes to lay the foundation of his home in her is by right not to be exiled" (1.V.12-16).

Philosophy hears Boethius's complaint and promises that she will first give him a gentle medicine before moving on to that which is stronger and can finally cure him. Lady Philosophy begins to catechize Boethius, and through her questions, she learns that Boethius does believe that the world and creation are ordered by God but that there is something deficient in his understanding which is keeping him in his state of grief and despair (1.VI.14-16). From the facts that Boethius cannot seem to recall the end and direction of the whole of nature and that he has an incomplete definition of what a man is, Philosophy is finally ready to diagnose Boethius's problem: *quid ipse sis nosse desisti* "you have ceased to know what you yourself are" (1.VI.37-38). She will finish the first book with an overview of the beliefs that she wants to correct in Boethius that she may lead him to understand his nature rightly as it stems from the order of the world which is governed with an end to that which is both good and meaningful. She tells Boethius that she still has hope that he will regain his health on account of his true belief about the governing of the world *quod eam non casuum temeritati sed devinae rationi subditam credis* "because you do not consign it to the accident of chance but subject to divine reason" (1.VI.50-51).

In Book II, Lady Philosophy first gets Boethius to concede that his lot in life is not wholly unhappy and that Fortune has not completely deserted him, but from there she will continue on to demonstrate how true happiness can never be found in the inconstancy of Fortune. This book also features the famous metaphor of Fortune's wheel which constantly reverses the

fortunes of all men as it turns. Moving on to the third book, the dialogue systematically dismantles a number of ideas about what might bring happiness, concluding that it cannot be rooted in wealth, power, fame, or pleasure alone. Rather, Philosophy says, *perfectum bonum veram esse beatitudinem constituimus: veram igitur beatitudinem in summo deo sitam esse necesse est* "we have established that perfect good is true happiness; therefore it is necessary that true happiness is situated in the most high God" (3.IX.34-36). From this grounding point, the two will dialogue further about the proper way to seek happiness, and Philosophy will help Boethius rebuild the belief which had earlier been slipping from him that the world is ordered and harmoniously governed by God.

With Book IV, the *De Consolatione* will present a theodicy, prompted by Boethius's asking Philosophy why the good suffer while the wicked prosper. The answer in this book is that the wicked are denying their own nature by failing to pursue goodness, and because of this, they are in fact powerless. Those who do evil are punished by their very evil acts, for they will never be able to attain happiness (which is the true good). Congruently, God works with intertwining Fate and Providence to order all things appropriately (including the rewards and suffering of men) in accordance with divine omnipotence.

In Book V, Boethius asks Philosophy whether free will can be said to exist at all, if everything is governed by Fate and Providence. The interlocutors conclude that while true chance does not exist on account of the ordered nature of the universe, this does not preclude free will because the ordered nature of the universe is founded upon a being who has a greater ability to know things than man does. Of humans Philosophy says, *in hodierna quoque vita non amplius vivitis quam in illo mobile transitorioque momento* "likewise in today's life, you do not live more than in that changeable and transitory moment" (5.VI.16-17). whereas God exists, and therefore

his knowledge exists, in an eternal present (5.VI.58-64). Lady Philosophy will sum up her arguments from Book V, but with a view to the whole discussion, by saying, *Manet etiam spectator desuper cunctorum praescius deus visionisque eius praesens semper aeternitas cum nostrorum actuum futura qualitate concurrit, bonis praemia malis supplicia dispensans* "God still remains the watcher from above, foreknowing all things, and the always present eternity of his sight concurs with the quality of our future actions, weighing out rewards for good, punishments for evil" (5.VI.161-165). Because of God's position as watcher, Philosophy concludes the whole work with an exhortation to Boethius to hope, to pray, and to do good (5.VI.165-171).

Alfred's *Consolation of Philosophy*

Alfred's *Consolation of Philosophy* is ostensibly the same text, but such a characterization implies more of a one-to-one correlation between the two works than is actually present. This is not to say that Alfred was not translating Boethius, but there are some significant alterations of both theme and structure. The Alfredian *Consolations* begin with a brief preface introducing Alfred as the translator of the work. Following this preface is a table of contents dividing the work into forty-two chapters, a rather different structure from the five books of the Latin. In this list, the main theme from each chapter is summarized, and the content follows the same general outline as its predecessor. But these headings also provide the first example of one of the most obvious changes to the text. While Alfred does use the name Boethius, he will refer to the Boethius character more often than not as *Mod* or "Mind," and he similarly alters Philosophy, giving first the name *Wisdom* and later alternating with *Gesceadwisnes* or "Reason" (and occasionally using the two names together for the single character). These name changes

serve to put the *Consolation* in conversation with Alfred's version of the *Soliloquies*, a connection which will be explored in further detail below.

After the contents, Alfred will begin the body of the text with a brief introduction to the character of Boethius and his situation, including assertions that Boethius did indeed try to overthrow Theodoric and is therefore imprisoned justly, not falsely as he is in the Latin (I, 7).[9] Nevertheless, *Mod* still categorizes himself among the innocent in his complaints. Like the Latin Boethius, he sings about the order of creation and God's ruling over it but continues on to ask why God allows Fortune to act outside of the proper order of things, saying of her: *heo þreat þa unscildigan and nauht ne ðreaþ þam scildigum* "she afflicts the innocent and does not at all afflict the guilty" (VI, 10). In reply, rather than addressing the concern outright, *Wisdom* and *Gesceadwisnes* say, *ic ongeat þæt þu wære ut afaren of þines fæder eðele, þæt is for minum larum* "I perceived that you were gone away out of your father's homeland, that is, from my teachings" (V, 11). Thus, the set up to the dialogue clearly reflects the original source. The Boethius character cannot see the governing hand of God which he expects to see in the ordering of human lives, and he is told that the reason for this is his failure to remember that place which is his true home.

As *Wisdom* begins to answer *Mod*'s complaints, he does present the illustration of a wheel; however, it is presented in a very different context from its Latin counterpart. *Wisdom* first says that it is impossible to change the fickleness of human fortune, which indeed reflects the illustration in the original text, but as he compares this impossibility to the impossibility of turning back a revolving wheel, the wheel is given another purpose entirely. *Wisdom* tells *Mod, þa niðemystan ic gebringe æt þæm hehstan, and þa hehstan æt ðæm niðemæstan; ðæt is þæt ic gebringe eadmodnesse on heofonum, and ða hefonlican god æt þæm eaðmodum* "the lowest I

[9] Cited according to chapter and page number

bring to the highest, and the highest to the lowest; that is, I bring humility to the heavens, and heavenly goods to the humble (VII, 18). His wheel is not an instrument of Fortune, following her whims to bring success or misfortune to whomever she wills. This wheel is a heavenly tool which delivers blessings to the deserving, whether by bringing them to a place of ultimate reward or by bringing good things to them here on earth. And those who assist *Wisdom* in turning the wheel are his servants *wisdomas and cræftas and soðe welan* "wisdom and virtues and true riches" (VII, 18), not fickleness or futility.

The *Consolations* will return to the subject matter of the Latin as *Wisdom* first reminds *Mod* that he does indeed have things in this life for which he may be truly happy, though such human enjoyments will then be classified as narrow and worthless on account of their inconstancy (XI, 23). Rather, *Wisdom* insists, reason is worth more in life than happiness because it cannot be lost (XI, 25). Another brief departure from the Latin will occur here as *Mod* is reminded of those who do relinquish worldly happiness better than any others, that is, the martyrs who seek eternal happiness to the extent of willingly accepting death (XI, 26).

Once it has been established that they are not the source of happiness, *Wisdom* does not move on from worldly things as quickly as Lady Philosophy does. Rather, *Wisdom* encourages *Mod* to use them with moderation, explaining that the things which *Mod* needs are *þæt mete and dryncand claðas and tol to swelcum cræfte swelce þu cunne þæt þe is gecynde and þæt þe is riht to habbenne* "the meat and drink and clothes and tools for such craft as you know which is natural to you and which is right for you to possess" (XIV, 30). *Wisdom* will go on to clarify that these natural things are still not a part of human identity and should be held in accordance with the knowledge that their source is God, but the amount of time spent discussing the right use of worldly things at all is an addition to the Old English text.

Another expansion which ought to be mentioned comes at the end of Chapter XXXIII, corresponding with Book III, meter 9 in the Latin. Like the original, Alfred has *Wisdom* sing a song of praise here; however it is significantly longer than its Latin counterpart. In fact, this is the longest of all of the additions in the Old English text, a fact which supports the common conclusion that Alfred's *Consolation* is much more interested in theology as compared to the philosophy of the *De Consolatione* (Irvine xii). While there are many further additions and changes made in the Old English version (such as a digression on the proper virtues for a king, an allusion to the legendary goldsmith Weland, and a conversation about friendship), those detailed here have the greatest effect on the overarching themes of the text. After all of these changes, the Old English will follow the Latin more closely again to end with a declaration of God's position as an all-seeing judge and with an exhortation to pray and live virtuously.

Full and detailed analyses of the *De Consolatione* and the *Consolations* have been published which explore the relationship between these two texts in great depth.[10] It is not my goal here to replicate any of those but instead to bring into focus some of the overarching thematic differences which characterize Alfred's edits. Of course, Alfred (and his team of scholars) worked with annotated texts and commentaries, so the changes found in the Old English *Consolation* are not necessarily all original to him. However, given that no single manuscript has been found which could account for all of Alfred's changes (Frantzen 47), it is reasonable to conclude that he made conscious editorial decisions about exactly what would end up in his final copy for the purpose of communicating specific ideas. For example, a number of scholars have emphasized Alfred's making the *Consolation* a more specifically theological text than Boethius's. One particularly eloquent statement of this comes from F. Anne Payne who writes that the Old English *Consolation* "is a Christian Existentialist preoccupied with the

[10] See, for example, Payne, Sedgefield xxv-xxxv.

readjustment of every utterance of a Stoical Idealist" (143). But in addition to altering the philosophy into theology, Alfred has also created a work that is meant to be applied in a different manner. In the Latin, Boethius is presenting a method for freeing the soul, and he is moving towards an answer for the problem of evil (Watts xxv-xxvii). One scholar even argues that the whole text is a self-reflective exercise which allows Boethius to process his struggle and rediscover happiness (Donato). This is a text which is meant to be applied internally, dealing with the proper way to orient one's own thoughts and feelings regardless of the external circumstances. On the other hand, starting with the early edit that makes Boethius's suffering a just and reasonable response to his actions, the Old English text is more interested in presenting how one ought to be oriented externally. This is further confirmed by the heavy emphasis on a good and moderate use of worldly goods and power along with several sections which deal with the cultivation of specific individual virtues. As Discenza points out, Boethius encourages readers to not seek after worldly goods as "they are a distraction from the true good that one must seek, and so they are left behind on the journey" (*King's* 96). But in Alfred's *Consolation*, "temporal goods are not to be ignored but properly used" (96).

Augustine's *Soliloquia*

To proceed to the next pair of texts, the *Soliloquia* is a very early (and admittedly somewhat underdeveloped) work of the North African theologian Augustine. He wrote it shortly after his conversion to Christianity and before his baptism in 387, and it has never been one of his most widely read works. It is plausible that Alfred chose to translate it in spite of this because it "provided [him] with a framework for his own meditation," that is, because he wanted to build upon its ideas (Abels 239).

The *Soliloquia* is set up as a dialogue in two books between Augustine and Reason because, as Augustine tells Reason, *Deum et animam scire cupio* "I desire to know God and the soul" (1.II.7). As Book I begins, Reason and Augustine spend a good portion of time discussing the nature of knowledge and in what way and to what extent Augustine hopes to know God. They will then establish that faith, hope, and charity are necessary for the soul to see God and that this is what will bring about virtue, which may also be thought of as perfected reason. Next, it is determined that the Wisdom which Augustine seeks must be desired exclusively. Not only can one who seeks Wisdom desire nothing else, but indeed, *penitus esse ista sensibilia fugienda* "those things which can be perceived by the senses must be inwardly fled" (1.XIV.24). That is to say, a true seeker of Wisdom ought not to spend time pursuing other things, especially physical distractions. Book II will go on to stick to a more unified topic as Reason attempts to convince Augustine that the soul is immortal and the two have a very lengthy discussion about the nature of Truth. In a similar fashion to the ending of the *De Consolatione*, both books of the *Soliloquia* end with an exhortation from Reason to Augustine to live in accordance with Truth that he may thus receive life and blessings hereafter.

Alfred's *Soliloquies*

The Alfredian *Soliloquies* opens with the same set up. It is a dialogue between Reason and Alfred's Augustine[11] who expresses the same initial motivation: *god ic wolde ongytan, and mine agene saule ic wolde witan* "I would understand God, and I would know my own soul" (56, 18-19[12]). In fact, the whole of Book I in the Old English is a relatively straightforward translation of the Latin, with additions and edits mostly coming in the form of an expanded prayer and some new illustrative metaphors. However, the rest of the *Soliloquies* looks very different from the

[11] Referred to thus in order to distinguish him from both Augustine the author and the Augustine character of the Latin dialogue
[12] Cited by page and then line number

Augustinian text. First, it must be noted that the *Soliloquies* has an added preface which seems entirely original, and this will be examined more closely below. Likewise, Book II is much changed from the Latin. Though its dialogue covers the same theme, the immortality of the soul, it is condensed and also features heavy influence from other works (Abels 240). The biggest change in the *Soliloquies*, though, is the addition of a third book, one which, within the text, is said to be derived from another work of Augustine's (the *De Videndo Deo*) but in fact seems to have multiple sources (Carnicelli 28-29). This third book begins with more dialogue about the nature of knowledge and immortality, but it then shifts to a discussion of reward after death for those who seek wisdom and do what is right. Specifically, Alfred draws on the Biblical parable of the rich man (Dives) and Lazarus as evidence that good will be rewarded and evil will be punished and furthermore that in such future states, each man will be conscious of the reason for his respective reward or punishment (95, 4-96, 15).

Let us now consider the Alfredian preface to the *Soliloquies*. Alfred uses the picture of gathering materials and building a house as an extended metaphor for the manner in which an individual should gather wisdom and shape his life in accordance with it. Further, he indicates that by following the advice of this preface, one may live more comfortably both in this *lænan stoclife* (leased dwelling) and later in the *ecan hame* (eternal home) (47, 13-14). Valerie Heuchan interprets the specifics of this building metaphor thus: "the woods are the writings of the Church Fathers…and the material carefully gathered from the woods by Alfred is the writings of these Fathers which Alfred has chosen to study and translate" (3). Based on this premise then, Alfred advises his audience to study and perhaps translate these works as well, and he asserts that such texts will not only make life more pleasant but they will also teach their readers how to move from this temporary life into eternal life. In her analysis of Alfred's preface, Heuchan relates the

Soliloquies preface to passages from others of Alfred's translated works which have similar, practical metaphors. For instance, in his epilogue to his translation of the *Cura Pastoralis,* Alfred writes about "fixing the leaky pitcher lest the drink of life be spilled" (4-5). With this prefatory metaphor, Alfred takes the highly philosophical *Soliloquies* and sets up his readers to encounter the text with an eye to application.

Heuchan also theorizes about a possible source for the Alfredian building metaphor, pointing out significant similarities between it and a passage in 1 Corinthians 3 in the Vulgate. Specifically, 1 Corinthians 3:9 refers to its Christian audience "not only as co-workers with God, but also as God's field and his building," and as that chapter continues, the author develops an extended building metaphor of his own (Heuchan 5). In addition, Heuchan points out that Alfred actually quotes from 1 Corinthians 3:9 in the main text of his *Soliloquies* (5). If she is correct that this is the source of Alfred's metaphor (and the evidence certainly seems to lean in her favor), then there is even more reason to suppose that Alfred wants his ideas to be lived out. As Alfred and the majority of his contemporaries would have considered the Bible to be a guide to living rightly, bringing inspiration from the Bible into his own work would indicate that Alfred hoped his *Soliloquies* could also help guide its readers towards right living. With this preface in mind, a comparison of the *Soliloquia* and the *Soliloquies* will reveal a similar theme to the above comparison of the Boethius and its translation, namely, that, while both works have a practical element, Alfred's is oriented more externally than Augustine's.

Unfortunately, there is little known about the manuscript tradition of the *Soliloquia* and thus about any specific texts which would have been available to Alfred and his scholars. It is known that the *Soliloquies* is heavily influenced by various works from Boethius, Gregory, and Jerome (Carnicelli 28-29). But without further evidence, it cannot be known whether Alfred's

translation takes liberties with an exact copy of the Latin or whether Alfred translates exactly a copy of the text which has already undergone significant alterations (Frantzen 69). Yet, it is still reasonable to argue that the version of the *Soliloquies* which we have from Alfred represents a conscious attempt to communicate carefully chosen ideas. The themes line up so closely with those present in his *Consolation* (and, to a slightly lesser extent, in his other works) that anyone would be hard pressed to argue for accident here, especially because we know that Alfred would in fact alter and edit texts if he could make them better suit his educational purposes. Indeed, not only do the themes align between Alfred's *Consolation* and *Soliloquies*, but their texts do, too. As noted above, in writing his *Consolation,* Alfred shifts the identities of the dialoguing characters Boethius and Lady Philosophy to *Mod* and *Wisdom*. This creates a parallel with Alfred's Augustine and Reason in the *Soliloquies* (Frantzen 49), and the two works are thereby drawn closer together into direct conversation with each other. The detailed textual similarities between the two Old English works have been thoroughly treated elsewhere and are beyond the scope of this project,[13] but it should at least be noted that there are a significant number of passages between the two Old English works which are extremely similar, including in several places where they match each other but not the Latin source texts (Carnicelli 29). Debate has gone back and forth about which of the two translations came first or if they were being worked on concurrently, but, however they may have influenced each other's development and in whichever order they may have been written, it is clear that these works are intentionally built upon similar themes.

The Texts' Worldviews

With the texts having been presented, let us return to the four questions established in the introduction for analyzing their worldviews: 'Who are we?' 'Where are we?' 'What is wrong?'

[13] See, for example, Carnicelli 29-37, Frantzen 82-85.

and ‘What is the solution?’ The Latin *De Consolatione* and *Soliloquia* have similar answers to each of these questions, if not quite identical. Their worldviews are worth considering to guide an understanding of Alfred’s derivative texts and to make clear which ideas Alfred uniquely emphasizes in the Old English.

It could be argued that the answer to ‘Who are we?’ is a central theme of the *De Consolatione* as Philosophy characterizes Boethius’s problem, *quid ipse sis nosse desisti* “you have ceased to know what you yourself are” (1.VI.37-38). Early on in the text, Boethius will incorrectly answer this question with his lament that God does not order human affairs in the same way that he orders the rest of the world (1.V.26-27), but Philosophy contradicts this claim. She asserts instead that, as everything is *devinae rationi subditam* “subject to divine reason,” mankind must be as well (1.VI.50-51). Of course, humans are also seen in this text to be changeable and transitory (5.VI.16-17). In the *Soliloquia*, a similar theme emerges as Augustine begins the dialogue desiring to know God and the soul (1.II.7). Boethius may not realize (where Augustine does) that he has forgotten his true self, but ultimately, both of them are seeking to know who they are. Augustine further answers the question in his second book as he considers the immortality of the soul, concluding after much debate with Reason that humans do, indeed, have immortal souls (2.XIX.33). And where Boethius notes the transitory nature of man, Augustine notes his capacity to be deceived (2.III.3).

The second question, ‘Where are we?’, likewise has similar answers in the two Latin sources, and both of them answer this question on two levels. The obvious answer in the *De Consolatione* is that man exists in a physical world which is ordered and governed by God. In Augustine’s opening prayer in the *Soliloquia*, he also references God’s creation of the world and the order inherent therein (1.I.2, 4). But neither author leaves the answer there. Boethius has

Philosophy add that he is a citizen of another country, separate from this world (1.V.12-16). Augustine does not include an explicit statement of his being a member of some other world, but he does (again in his opening prayer) reference God's kingdom as a state separate from the world (1.I.3). So, in the *Soliloquia*, whatever may be the exact answer to 'Where are we?', it must include room for both this world and some other.

To answer 'What is wrong?', both authors use the voice of their interlocutors.

The worldview contained in the Old English *Consolation* and *Soliloquies* is very similar to the one espoused by these two theologians, though some key differences stand out. As has been discussed, the Old English versions emphasize the practical application of the philosophy contained within in a rather different manner than the Latin originals. Without necessarily contradicting any of the ideas set forth by the earlier writers, Alfred's seems to be more interested than they are in ordering his life to fit well in the present world instead of only ordering his life to prepare him for the world to come (Ganze 27). Something else that comes out in the Old English translations is a specific view of human origin and mankind's place in the world. More than once he describes the world and human life as *læne*. This word is a common poetic adjective meaning "transitory" or "ephemeral," but there is another element at play here, too. Grammatically, *læne* is actually a participle derived from the verb meaning "to loan." And this moves into the area of morality for, as a loan, life must have been given or bestowed by someone to whom the beneficiary of the loan (i.e. any person who is living) is now accountable. Likewise, as a loan, life is meant to be used in a certain way, and when it is eventually returned, there ought to be some good to show for it. Of course, the other key point about Alfred's view of morality in the *Consolation* and *Soliloquia* is his emphasis on outward over inward application. Focusing slightly less on the pursuit of higher goods, the worldview presented here encourages

the right use of tools, money, and even power. Alfred's versions of these works give us a refined version of the worldview the works originally presented, elucidating how this worldview was received and practically embraced in early medieval Britain. It should also be noted that there is a distinct possibility that Alfred's translation first introduced the *De Consolatione* to Britain (Frantzen 44),[14] affording him the opportunity to shape the culture's understanding and reception of the work.

By choosing to emphasize these philosophies, Alfred may not be entirely original, but he certainly is interested in getting across a unique point that would not necessarily have been an obvious worldview in his cultural context. Alfred's works demonstrate very little of the tradition of the heroic code which is often said to dominate early medieval English culture. Given the sociopolitical unrest that characterizes early medieval Britain (even including the early and later parts of Alfred's own reign, in spite of his reputation for bringing peace to the island), it may initially seem as though either a more warlike or a more defensive worldview would be encouraged. But Alfred does something unexpected here in promoting this worldview of perseverance and a sort of practical detachment. A notable effect of supporting a worldview not based in heroism or martial valor is that it minimizes questions of human loyalty. Even if the *Soliloquies* leave room for human loyalty as a good thing, it must remain secondary. By introducing these works to his Anglo-Saxon audience, Alfred is filling what he sees as the role of a good king, leading and guiding his people in thought and virtue in addition to war and policy.

[14] See also Irvine ix; though Irvine and Godden do not at all share Frantzen's confidence that Alfred was involved with the work, they do concur that the work which attributes itself to Alfred was the first time the *De Consolatione* appears in England.

CHAPTER 3

THE HOMILETIC ELEGY

The Seafarer is one of the most ubiquitous Old English poems, appearing frequently in anthologies and on the syllabi of introductory English literature courses, but it is not without controversy. Scholarship on this poem has been marked by extensive debates on such questions as whether it ought to be read literally or allegorically; whether one, two, or more voices are meant to be speaking; and whether it should be considered as a single poem at all or as a composite of multiple fragmentary works, stitched together by an unknown scribe. The common thread among these competing viewpoints and among the massive quantities of other writing about this poem is that it is a good poem worth studying which will stand up to continued scrutiny.

There are two main questions which have characterized the majority of scholarship on *The Seafarer*. One is whether the poem ought to be read as the voice of a single speaker or if it is a dialogue. The second recurring question is whether a literal or an allegorical interpretation of the text is more fitting. Regarding the question of voice, this was most famously addressed in a series of back-and-forth articles between John C. Pope and Stanley B. Greenfield. These articles will be addressed in more detail below, for now, it should be noted that the two scholars eventually agreed that the poem most likely comes in the voice of a single speaker. What has yet to be resolved, however, is precisely how to account for and synthesize the key moments in the text which gave rise to the two-speaker theory in the first place. As Roy F. Leslie puts it, *The Seafarer* is generally agreed to be a single poem, but “there are widely divergent views on how

the poet achieves this unity" (Leslie 96). On the question of whether the poem ought to be read as literal or allegorical, Dorothy Whitelock's pilgrimage theory (a literal reading) remains the most influential interpretation. I will reference Whitelock frequently throughout my analysis, but hers is by no means the final voice on the subject. Pope's objections are worth consideration, and several more recent scholars have picked up on Whitelock's threads as well, in both agreement and disagreement ("Dramatic," Sobecki, Warren). More on this conversation below.

A further piece of context for *The Seafarer* is its generic categorization as an Old English elegy. As an elegy, it features certain conventions which contribute to its interpretation, but to categorize this poem as such is not without an amount of controversy. The term "elegy" typically refers to a group of Old English poems (as few as seven or as many as ten), found primarily in the Exeter Book manuscript. Martin Green will point out some of their most distinctive commonalities as their "concern with the transitory" (here especially echoing Greenfield) and their "evocative portrayals of loneliness and isolation" (12-13). Later, Anne L. Klinck presents a more detailed list of shared themes which characterize the genre: "exile, loss of loved ones, scenes of desolation, the transience of worldly joys" (11). And she continues on to list some structural features which they tend to have in common: "monologue, personal introduction, gnomic or homiletic conclusion, and the ordered repetition of words and sounds, amounting occasionally to refrain or rhyme" (11). While not every Old English elegy will tick all of these boxes, these are still common enough themes and features to be considered characteristic. Of course, there are detractors to the characterization of elegy, generally on account of the fact that not every poem meets every qualification. Green and Klinck are both clearly cognizant of this fact, with Green noting that the force of tradition is often what keeps the poems in the same category (17) and Klinck calling the classification "inevitably somewhat arbitrary" (11). One

detractor from the elegy-as-genre concept goes so far as to write, "it is no longer generally held that all seven of these poems belong to the same literary genre, or even that the term 'elegy' is properly applied to any of them" (Orton 354). However, the absoluteness of this assertion does not stand in the face of subsequent scholarship, with scholars not only referring to the elegiac tone[15] but also to the elegies themselves as a genre.[16] Ultimately, Klinck will bring up the fairly common conclusion (first proposed by B. J. Timmer) that, instead of an elegiac genre, there is a widespread elegiac mood, further defending the conversation among these particular poems on account of their presence in the same manuscript (12). Working with *The Seafarer*, then, I will presume it to be squarely within this elegiac mood, pointing out the relevant characteristics as they occur in the text. The premise of *The Seafarer* as an elegy also gives some insight its worldview. Klinck writes, "All of the elegies as we have them, though containing earlier elements, are the products of a Christian society, composed by and designed for people with Christian beliefs" (231). In the most general sense then, the worldview behind *The Seafarer* is a Christian one. From that starting point, the specifics can be further refined.

Because the poem is an expression of a worldview, it will be telling the same overarching story which that worldview is telling. The development of this poem reflects a singular stream of thought, and each part is dependent upon the others to make sense of the overall theme. Thus, this analysis will demonstrate the validity of a reading of *The Seafarer* as one unified text instead of multiple pieces, each of its parts working to accomplish the larger purpose of telling its overarching narrative. To the idea that the unity of *The Seafarer*'s voice must still be explained, I offer the explanation that its unity comes from that way of looking at the world which underlies it.

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[15] See, for example, Matto 178 and Wagner 3, 17.
[16] See, for example, Iliásics 5, 17-18 and Warren 129.

Analysis of *The Seafarer*

The Seafarer is categorized as one of the Old English elegiac poems, and its first half especially fits this classification. A speaker, alone and exiled, has suffered significant loss and laments his unfortunate lot in life. As in several of the other Old English elegies, the speaker of *The Seafarer* will eventually go on to relate his lamentable physical situation to a lesson or moral principle for which his situation serves as an illustration. However what is unique to this poem is the overwhelming prevalence of such discourse. With roughly half of the text devoted to very obviously homiletic discourse, *The Seafarer* seems to be just as interested in communicating important ideas as it is in evoking emotion or telling a story.

As the poem opens, the speaker introduces himself as an exile who has gone out to sea, away from his home, his friends, and everything he holds dear. He opens with these lines:

> *Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,*
> *siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum*
> *earfoðhwile oft þrowade*
> *bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,*
> *gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela* (1-5)[17]
> "I will utter a true song concerning myself; tell of my trials, how I often suffered times of trouble in days of hardship, I have experienced bitter sorrow of heart, ventured in a ship to many places of sorrow"

The seafarer's assurance of veracity from the very first words is crucial to the interpretation of the poem. As Dorothy Whitelock writes, "we are given no hint of any kind that the beginning of the poem is anything other than a realistic description," indeed quite the opposite (443). And this promised *soðgied* (true song or story) may have an even deeper meaning than simply pointing to

[17] See Appendix for a full translation of *The Seafarer* with notes.

the accuracy of the story. One scholar characterizes it as reflecting "the idealized monastic private confessional," and this echo of confession will become important as the narrative proceeds. (Matto165).

The poem continues for several lines with the seafarer detailing all that he has endured and the situations which engendered his "bitter sorrow of heart." He lists the trials inherent in sea voyages, the dangerous waves and weather and the emotional difficulties which stem from prolonged solitude. In addition, he deliberately sets himself apart from other people, writing,

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. (27-30)

"Therefore, he who has experienced few bitter journeys, the joy of life in cities, bold and merry with wine, little believes how I, weary, often must remain in the path of the sea."

Here, the seafarer emphasizes his place as an exile, though he does not say exactly why he is one. This will become important in the next few lines as several interpretive possibilities come into view, but it is also worth noting here for its own sake. Roy F. Leslie points out that the seafarer "has…carefully planted the information that he understands the pleasures of the hall" (101). This exile is one who has lived a different sort of life at some time in the past, but now his life is separated from the lives of those who live in cities to such a degree that they cannot even comprehend his lot. This is a classic image of Old English elegiac poetry.

Then, just a few lines later, the poem will take an unexpected turn. The seafarer alters his tone, marking the transition by his use of the word *forþon*, a term commonly used in Old English poetry to mark shifts in speaker or subject. Here, the seafarer introduces a rather unexpected

element of his exile. In fact, the audience learns, in spite of his previous lamenting about how difficult a life it is, the speaker has actually chosen his life of exile. He says,

> *…Forþon cnyssað nu*
> *heortan geþohtas, þæt ic hean streamas,*
> *sealtyþa gelac sylf cunige;*
> *monað modes lust mæla gehwylce*
> *ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan*
> *elþeodigra eard gesece.* (33b-38)
>
> "Therefore, thoughts now beat against my heart, urging me to venture upon the deep seas, the tumult of the salt sea-waves; always the longing of my spirit urges my heart to journey, so that I might go to seek the country of foreigners, far away hence."

It is clear here that the seafarer's exile is self-imposed. It is his own thoughts which urge him to venture out, the longing of his own spirit. In this passage, the seafarer is almost eager to leave everything and go out to sea, a startling revelation given his initial lament. This passage also features the pivotal word *sylf* upon which much controversy has been founded. It was this passage that Pope and Greenfield debated, attempting to prove whether its antecedent is the same person who has been speaking thus far or a new character. This debate began with Pope arguing that *The Seafarer* is best read as a dialogue between two voices on account of his reading of *sylf* in line 35b as a contrast of one speaker's "myself" to another speaker (Pope "Dramatic"). Greenfield replied that Pope made several excellent points but that he had not proven the necessity of a two-voice interpretation and that *sylf* would be better translated "of my own accord" (Greenfield "*Min*"). Pope famously retracted his surety about the two speakers, though he continued to disagree with Greenfield about the exact best translation of *sylf* now claiming

that it most nearly means “alone” or “unaccompanied” (Pope “Second”). Greenfield then presented one final interpretation of *sylf* as a signal that the speaker was shifting into a position of examining his own beliefs (Greenfield “*Sylf*”). Even though they eventually came to the single-speaker consensus, this *sylf* can still have bearing on an interpretation of the poem. Michael Matto, inspired by the importance placed upon this moment in the text by Greenfield and Pope, offers an understanding of *sylf* (along with other terms of self-identification throughout the poem) as a relatively ambiguous term born out of the poet’s struggle to understand his own motivations and the relationship between his body and mind (169).

The self-imposed nature of the seafarer’s exile will also give rise to Whitelock’s pilgrimage theory as the speaker continues his new train of thought in the lines immediately following:

> *Forþon nis næs modwlonc mon ofer eorþan,*
> *ne his gifena þæs to 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.*
> *Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge ne to hringþege,*
> *ne to wife wyn ne to worulde hyht,*
> *ne ymbe owiht ells, nefne ymb yða gewealc,*
> *ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað.* (39-47)
>
> “Therefore, there is not a man upon the earth so high-spirited, nor so generous with his gifts, nor so vigorous in youth, nor so brave in his deeds, nor such a friend to his lord that he does not ever have worry for his sea-voyage, for what the Lord might bring him to.

> His thought is not on the harp or on the receiving of rings, nor is his delight in a wife, nor is his hope in the world, nor is his thought about anything else, only about the tossing of the waves, but he ever has a yearning, he who sets out eagerly to sea."

The seafarer begins to explain why it is that he is actually eager to go to sea. No matter how many good things or how much success a given man has, they all go out of his thoughts when he is out at sea. The thoughts of a man on a sea-voyage are constantly turned towards the uncertainties of his journey, the untamable sea, and the fate to which God is directing him. Taking into consideration the seafarer's choice to be exiled and these stated reasons for such, Whitelock argues that *The Seafarer* fits the same structure as *peregrinus* narratives from all over the British Isles in the Early Middle Ages. She details a number of instances of *peregrini* or pilgrims setting out from and journeying to the British Isles around the time the poem is likely to have been written. Some of these *peregrini* sought solitude in monasteries, and some went on what might now be thought of as a typical pilgrimage (i.e. a journey to the shrine of an apostle or martyr), but what they all have in common is the choice to leave their homeland to live for a significant period of time (sometimes the rest of their lives) in a foreign place for the sake of benefiting their souls (447-451). The intentional nature of the seafarer's exile indicates that he wants to turn his mind away from the things he enjoys when he is on land, and it would make sense that, as a pilgrim, he could do just that, thinking instead about the fate that God is preparing for him. This pilgrim narrative becomes a stronger possibility as the poem continues. For instance, several lines later, the seafarer asserts:

> *...Forþon me hatran sind*
> *dryhtenes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,*
> *læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no*

þæt him eorðwelan ece stondað. (64b-67)

"Truly, for me the delights of the Lord are more alive than this dead life, transitory on land. I do not at all believe that earthly riches stand eternal."

Whitelock goes so far as to call these "the central lines of the poem" (447). These lines are the key to the seafarer's worldview and thus to a sound interpretation of the whole poem. Here the seafarer explicitly states what is most important to him and confirms that he wants to go to sea in order to think about spiritual things. While we earlier learned that he is familiar with the joys of land, and he does not say that they are not joys, it is now clear that he places other joys immeasurably higher. It is this seeking for spiritual things that most makes the seafarer like a pilgrim.

For Whitelock, the evidence to support the pilgrimage theory is quite clear. Given that the poem is set up to be a literal, true story, there must be an interpretation which allows for a real sort of character who would exile himself for the sake of spiritual things. And indeed, her theory has remained deeply entrenched in the scholarship surrounding *The Seafarer*. But that is not to say everyone has always been in agreement. For example, Pope responds, "I am not sure, even so, that there is a way to distinguish between the literal voyage that might be contemplated for spiritual ends…and the allegorical voyage that might stand generally for the devout life amid the turbulent seas of the world" ("Dramatic" 554). Pope is one of a few scholars who have remained unconvinced by Whitelock's confidence that the poem is meant to be read as a literal narrative. On the other hand, a more recent scholar is convinced that *The Seafarer* is a literal narrative but does not find there to be enough compelling evidence for the pilgrimage theory. Sebastian I. Sobecki notes the impression the seafarer gives of having been to sea multiple times, unlike the *peregrini* who would generally go to sea permanently (often with a foreign shore as their

destination) or at least for a notably long time (131). Sobecki thus argues that the seafarer is a fisherman, also citing evidence such as his familiarity with regional birds and the historical evidence of the early medieval fishing trade in Britain (136-137). Still more recently, though, Michael J. Warren has discovered a line referencing the cuckoo in a Latin poem about birds in which it is said to call the Irish to go on journeys (131). This is notable as there is a cuckoo in *The Seafarer* which has often been noted to serve a similar function and because the *peregrinus* tradition is founded primarily in Ireland.

Overall, I favor Whitelock's pilgrimage reading of *The Seafarer*; nevertheless some common points remain whether it is meant to be read allegorically or literally and whether the seafarer is a pilgrim or a fisherman. As Whitelock presents it, the seafarer is actually, physically going out to sea (and so he will have to deal with the real, physical hardships both of a sea voyage and of exile), but he is eager for this journey because it will give him the chance to think about spiritual things. The seafarer as fisherman interpretation still features the speaker being glad for his journey for similar reasons, even if his journey is a shorter, recurring one. Likewise, in a strictly allegorical reading in which the speaker is only telling an extended metaphor and is not actually going out to sea (though such a reading would make little sense in light of the opening "true story" statement), this metaphor would be preparing the audience to think about spiritual things in the next section of the poem. Thus, even interpreted from disparate frameworks, *The Seafarer* communicates a unified message.

For the seafarer is interested in the improvement of more souls than just his own. The reason he is sharing the details of his own journey, his preparations for pilgrimage, is his hope that his audience will follow suit. If he does not explicitly say that his audience should go on an exilic pilgrimage like his own, he nonetheless clearly implies that they should take on his value

system, rejecting the unsatisfactory joys present world and aspiring to something better. He continues on in the next section of the text to lay out how a person may live virtuously and in so doing receive blessing. Just before the end of *The Seafarer*, the speaker upon calls his audience to share his worldview; it is not a view that he alone is meant to hold. He says,

> *Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,*
> *ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen,*
> *ond we þonne eac tilien, þæt we to moten*
> *in þa ecan eadignesse,*
> *þær is lif gelong in lufan dryhtnes,*
> *hyht in heofonum.* (117-122a)
> (Let us consider where we might have a home, and then think how we may come thither, and then let us also endeavor so that we might be let into the love of the Lord where the source of life is, bliss in the heavens.)

Having established an ethos of world-rejection, that is, the rejection of those things which are not eternal, the seafarer here provides an alternative for his audience to embrace. This is his strongest exhortation. The first person plural subjunctive of the verbs *tilien* and *moten* signifies a course of action which he and his audience can take together. The heavenly reward which the seafarer hopes to attain through his exilic pilgrimage is here presented as a shared and unifying goal. Matto points out that the linguistic shift which culminates in these lines (from "I" to "one" to "us") also marks a replacement in the seafarer's subjectivity from his somewhat uncertain *sylf* to a more confident position of communal experience (173). Further, Matto argues, this shift is tied in with the earlier mention of *þis deade lif* "this dead life." By calling his life dead, the seafarer does not simply mean that he is leaving a life on land behind to go to sea, but he is also moving

away from his own complicated mind-body relationship which he no longer has to consider if he identifies himself as a member of a community (173-174).

Whitelock characterizes this final passage of the poem as "a normal homiletic conclusion…'Let us strive to reach our heavenly home'" (447). If the first lines of *The Seafarer* are the most characteristic of an elegy, the last are where the homiletic nature of the poem is the strongest. If there is another life for the soul after this one, if indeed a whole other world will come into existence when this one has ended, then the fate of the soul in eternity is of much greater significance than the happiness of the soul in the moment. So then, the seafarer proclaims, the best way to live is to orient oneself toward that eventuality. One must seek virtue, rejecting the things of the world and taking on the identity of an exile or pilgrim, recognizing that the best place to find one's identity is as a member of the community of those who strive towards such ends. The seafarer must detach himself from his present reality (literally, allegorically, or both) to set himself up for future eternal joy, and those readers must do the same who wish eternal joy for their souls' futures. Even where other elegies tend toward a gnomic or generally theological ending, it is not nearly as prominent as in *The Seafarer* where such themes take up roughly half of the text. Consider, for example, *The Wanderer* which features a similar set up detailing the speaker's inability to find hope and goodness in the world on account of significant suffering and loss. It ends, *Wel bið þam þe him are seceð, / frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð* "It will be well for him who seeks honor, consolation from the father in heaven, where we all stand fast" (114b-115). But this is all the theological hope that the wanderer character has to offer in answer to his suffering, not even two full lines, a far cry from the depth and breadth of the seafarer's exhortations.

The Worldview of *The Seafarer*

It is logical to assume that whoever wrote *The Seafarer* must have been well-read, and it reasonably follows that he may have had access to Alfred's *Consolation* and *Soliloquies*. But whether or not this author had these specific texts in front of him at any point, the thematic connections are clear. There is an interest in right ordered thinking which can be turned into action. In a similar manner to that of the Alfredian works demonstrated above, *The Seafarer* blends philosophical contemplation with practical action, both his own and that toward which he urges others. And, as with Alfred, the seafarer does not encourage practical action which is overly burdensome. Recall here that the seafarer does not shame those who enjoy worldly pleasures. Instead, he "is at pains to point out that concentration on happiness in one's earthly life alone leaves one no time to prepare for the eternal one" (Leslie 101). The seafarer's detachment is not about self-flagellation; it is a detachment which provides the time and space to prepare for something better. The seafarer is not imposing moral strictures; he is instead relating to his audience the way in which he lives out his sincere devotion to his faith.

Finally, then, we must lay out the worldview presented in *The Seafarer*. On the subject of origin, the seafarer begins with the premise that the world and everything in it have been created by God. He, like Alfred, thinks of life as *læne on londe* or "loaned on land." The seafarer takes for his moral compass the injunction to not give in to the transitory pleasures of the world, represented by a life on land instead of at sea and, further, to actively choose a life which will enable him to get closer to spiritual goods. Having chosen to go out to sea, he is confident that something good awaits him at the end of his journey; that is to say, his ultimate destiny is to enter into the joys of Heaven once his life has come to its end. Thus, the seafarer's purpose or

meaning is to choose his pilgrimage, his life at sea, seeking eternal treasures rather than the treasures of warriors and kings which will pass away.

CHAPTER 4

A WORLDVIEW OF HOPE

Considering these three works together, the worldview presented therein is more complicated and nuanced than if one were simply to say that the early medieval English people were Christianized. Given the hard and frightening world in which they lived, the faith which had been brought to their island gave them a framework from which to make sense of life, not simply a list of confessions which it was convenient to repeat. We see in this literature a method of interpreting elements of Christianity and using them to define a manner of right living which made sense in its context as Alfred's translations rework their original sources in a way which is ready for his readers to apply.

As alluded to above, this way of being in the world is not what one may have expected from a tumultuous and martial culture. It should be noted here that there is not anything inherently unique in the fact that life for the early medieval English people was often hard or unpredictable. Certainly Augustine and Boethius suffered. However, what the early medieval English did have was poetry and writing which expressed their view of life as inherently difficult. The elegiac poems dealt with themes of war and loss and exile, and they were certainly not alone in such themes among the products of their culture. If all times and peoples have their own burdens to bear, the early medieval English held theirs as a foundation to their self-conception.

But that is exactly why the worldview presented in *The Seafarer* is meant to be transformative. A receiver should not merely contemplate it and move on to the next intriguing

idea, but he is supposed to allow it to transform his way of being in the world. Boethius used the *De Consolatione* to work out a response to his personal suffering. Augustine used the *Soliloquia* to better understand God and his own soul. Alfred's translation of these works have similar goals but are also focused on educating, both for its own sake and as a way to help orient readers to better live in the world. These are all works from which the reader is meant to walk away changed. Coming in this same tradition, *The Seafarer* expects its reader to walk away changed, too. After presenting the world at its bleakest and saddest, the seafarer is able to find hope in something outside the world while he is still living in it. His worldview gives him a firm foundation from which to move forward in his life.

I will close with two quotes which, if not expressing the exact sentiment, parallel the *Seafarer* quote with which I began. Alfred writes in his *Consolation*, *Ne nan mon ne mæg ðæm gesceadwisan mode gederian, ne him gedon þæt hit sie ðæt ðæt hit ne bið* "there is no man who can harm the discerning mind, nor render it that it should be that which is it not" (XVI.ii, 36). And in the *Soliloquies*, *for ðam þingum is ðearf þæt þu rihte hawie mid modes æagum to gode, swa rihte swa swa scipes ancer streng byð aþenæd on gerihte fram þam scype to þam ancræ* "therefore it is necessary that you look rightly with the eyes of the mind to God, just as a ship's anchor-cable is stretched straight from the ship to the anchor" (61, 23-25). Just like the seafarer, Alfred wants his people and his readers to be aware of where they hold their minds. A mind which is strong will not be able to be shaken from truth and goodness, firmly anchored, no matter what circumstances may arise.

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APPENDIX

A TRANSLATION OF *THE SEAFARER*[18]

I will utter a true song concerning myself,

tell of my trials, how I often suffered

times of trouble in days of hardship,

I have experienced bitter sorrow of heart,

ventured in a ship to many places of sorrow,

to the terrible sea,[19] where I often kept

anxious night-watch in the prow of the boat

as it drives past cliffs. My feet were

constricted with cold, bound by frost,

by cold chains, while cares sighed

hot near the heart; hunger tears the spirit of the sea-weary

from within. That man who has

the fairest lot on earth does not know[20]

how I, miserable and sad, abode on

the ice-cold sea in the winter, in the paths of an exile,

bereft of beloved kinsmen,

covered with icicles; hail showers flew.

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[18] I have used Krapp and Dobbie as my primary text with my interpretation informed largely by I. L. Gordon in addition to Krapp and Dobbie's notes and some reference to John C. Pope.
[19] Lit. "tossing of the waves," I follow Gordon in my interpretation of this phrase as a designation for the sea (33).
[20] Lit. "That man does not know whom to him on earth the fairest befalls"

There I heard nothing but the roar of the sea,
the ice-cold way. At times I took for myself
the song of the wild swan as entertainment, the cry of the gannet
and the music of the curlew in place of the laughter of men,
the seagull's singing in place of mead-drinking.
Storms beat the rocky cliffs there where the tern, icy-feathered,
called in reply; very often the eagle, dewy-feathered,
cried out to it; no protecting kinsmen
could comfort my desolate heart.
Therefore, he who has experienced few bitter journeys,
the joy of life in cities, bold and merry with wine,
little believes how I, weary, often
must remain in the path of the sea.
The shadow of night darkened, snowed from the north,
frost gripped the ground, hail fell on the earth,
the coldest grain. Therefore, thoughts now beat against
my heart, urging me to venture upon[21]
the deep seas, the tumult of the salt sea-waves;
always the longing of my spirit urges
my heart to journey, so that I might go to seek
the country of foreigners far away hence.
Therefore, there is not a man upon the earth so high-spirited,
nor so generous with his gifts,[22] nor so vigorous in youth,

[21] Lit. "that I might venture myself upon"

nor so brave in his deeds, nor such a friend to his lord[23]

that he does not ever have sorrow for his sea-voyage,

for what the Lord might bring him to.

His thought is not on the harp or on the receiving of rings,

nor is his delight in a wife, nor is his hope in the world,

nor is his thought about anything else, only about the tossing of the waves,

but he ever has a yearning, he who sets out eagerly to sea.

The woods burst into bloom, adorn the cities,

make beautiful the fields, the world hastens on;

all these urge the eager of spirit on,

urge the mind to journey, of him who so thinks

to go far away on the paths of the sea.

Likewise the cuckoo urges with its melancholy voice,

the watchman of the summer sings, forebodes sorrow

bitter in thought. The warrior does not know,

the man blessed with comfort, what they endure

who lay the tracks of an exile to the farthest regions.

Therefore now my thought takes flight over my breast,

my inmost thoughts journey far

with the sea-stream over the whale's home,

the expanse of earth, it returns to me afterward,

ravenous and greedy the lone-flier cries out,

---

[22] Lit. "of his gifts"
[23] Lit. "his lord to him so friendly/gracious"

incites the heart irresistibly onto the whale's way

over the expanse of the waves. Therefore, for me the delights of the Lord

are more alive[24] than this dead life,

transitory on land. I do not at all believe

that earthly riches stand eternal.

Always, in all circumstances, one of three things

leads to uncertainty before his time has gone;[25]

either sickness or old age or sword-hatred

wrests away life from those doomed to die, passing away.

Truly for every man the praise of the living,

those speaking after him, is the best reputation

that he can earn,[26] before he must go away,

with good deeds on the earth against the malice of enemies,

with brave deeds against the devil,

so that after death the children of men will extol him

and his glory afterward may live with the angels

forever and ever, the glory of eternal life,

joy among the heavenly host. The days are departed,

all the glory of the kingdom of earth;

there are not now kings or emperors

or gold-givers such as once there were,

---

[24] Lit. "hotter," I follow Gordon's suggestion that this term sets up a deliberate opposition to *deade* in the next line (42).

[25] As I am using Krapp and Dobbie's text, I here follow their suggestion for making sense of the untranslatable *tide ge* (297).

[26] Lit. "work; make; accomplish," I follow Gordon's translation here (43).

when they performed the greatest deeds among themselves

and they lived in the most lordly renown.

Fallen is this whole company, the joys are gone away,

those who are inferior live now and hold the world,

occupy it by means of toil. Glory is brought low,

the nobility of earth grows old and fades,

just as each man now does throughout middle-earth.

Old age overtakes him, his face grows pale,

the hoary-headed one laments, he knows his friends of former days,

the children of princes, are given up to the earth.

The flesh-home cannot then, when life is lost to it,

swallow sweetness or feel pain

or stir the hand or think with the mind.

Though a brother will strew a grave with gold

for his brother, bury him alongside the dead

with various treasures which he wishes to be with him,

gold cannot be of any help to the soul

which is full of sins in the presence of the terrible power of God,

when he hoards it before while he lives here on earth.[27]

Great is the power of the Measurer, before which the earth will turn aside;[28]

he established the firm foundations,

---

[27] I have consulted Krapp and Dobbie as well as Gordon for their suggestions for translation of the particularly difficult passage in lines 97-102. The bulk of my translation follows Krapp and Dobbie (with particular reference to their acceptance of an ellipsis in line 99b), but I follow Gordon's suggestion for *for godes egsan* (Krapp and Dobbie 297; Gordon 45-46).

[28] I have used Gordon's translation for line 103b (46).

the expanse of earth and the heavens above.

Foolish is the one who does not fear his Lord; death comes to him, unprepared for.

Blessed is the one who lives humbly; grace comes to him from the heavens,

the Measurer makes his spirit steadfast,[29] because he trusts in his power.[30]

A man must steer a strong spirit and keep it on a firm foundation,

and unfailing in pledges, pure in its way of living,

every man should hold with moderation

affection towards a friend and malice toward an enemy,

even if he may wish him full of fire

or to have his fast friend

burned up on a pyre.[31] Doom is stronger,

the Measurer is mightier than any intention of a man.

Let us consider where we might have a home,

and then think how we may come thither,

and then let us also endeavor so that we might be let

into the love of the Lord where the source of life is,

bliss in the heavens. Let us give thanks to[32] the Holy One,

that he has made us worthy, the Lord of glory,

eternal Lord, for all time. Amen.

---

[29] Lit. "makes the spirit steadfast to him"
[30] I.e. the one who lives humbly trusts in the power of the Measurer.
[31] I have largely followed Pope in my translation of the difficult (and likely corrupted) lines 112-115 as his suggestions, while not perfect, require the fewest additions or emendations to the extant text (110).
[32] Lit. "Let there be thanks for"