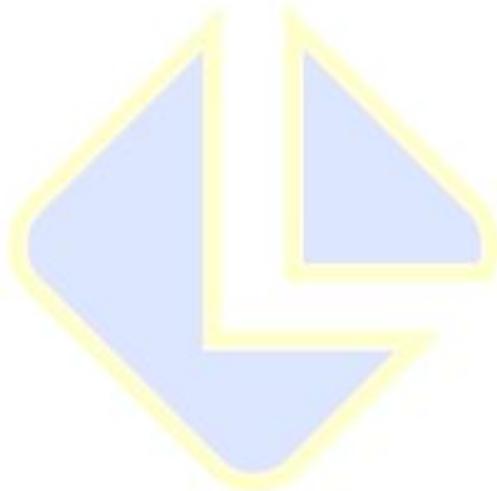


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LEDGE ENGLISH CENTER

*Prepared by
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POETRY:ANGLO SAXON]

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Anglo Saxon Age:

The Anglo-Saxons were a cultural group who inhabited England from the 5th century. They comprised people from Germanic tribes who migrated to the island from continental Europe, their descendants, and indigenous British groups who adopted many aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture and language. The Anglo-Saxons established the Kingdom of England, and the modern English language owes almost half of its words – including the most common words of everyday speech – to their language.

Historically, the Anglo-Saxon period denotes the period in Britain between about 450 and 1066, after their initial settlement and up until the Norman conquest. The early Anglo-Saxon period includes the creation of an English nation, with many of the aspects that survive today, including regional government of shires and hundreds. During this period, Christianity was established and there was a flowering of literature and language. Charters and law were also established. The term Anglo-Saxon is popularly used for the language that was spoken and written by the Anglo-Saxons in England and eastern Scotland between at least the mid-5th century and the mid-12th century. In scholarly use, it is more commonly called Old English.

Language:

Old English (*Ænglisc*, *Anglisc*, *Englisc*) or Anglo-Saxon is the early form of the English language that was spoken and written by the Anglo-Saxons and their descendants in parts of what are now England and southern and eastern Scotland between at least the mid-5th century and the mid-12th century. Old English is a West Germanic language closely related to Old Frisian and Old Saxon. It had a grammar similar in many ways to Classical Latin. In most respects, including its grammar, it was much closer to modern German and Icelandic than to modern English.

Anglo-Saxon Poetry

Anglo-Saxon Poetry (or Old English Poetry) encompasses verse written during the 600-year Anglo-Saxon period of British history, from the mid-fifth century to the Norman Conquest of 1066.

Almost all of the literature of this period was orally transmitted, and almost all poems were intended for oral performance.

As a result of this, Anglo-Saxon poetry tends to be highly rhythmical, much like other forms of verse that emerged from oral traditions.

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Anglo-Saxon poetry does not create rhythm through the techniques of meter and rhyme, derived from Latin poetry, that are utilized by most other Western European languages.

Instead, Anglo-Saxon poetry creates rhythm through a unique system of alliteration. Syllables are not counted as they are in traditional European meters, but instead the length of the line is determined by a pattern of stressed syllables that begin with the same consonant cluster. The result of this style of poetry is a harsher, more guttural sound and a rhythm that sounds more like a chant than a traditional song.

Although most Anglo-Saxon poetry was never written down and as such is lost to us, it was clearly a thriving literary language, and there are extant works in a wide variety of genres including epic poetry, Bible translations, historical chronicles, riddles, and short lyrics. Some of the most important works from this period include the epic *Beowulf*, Caedmon's hymn, Bede's *Death Song*, and the wisdom poetry found in the Exeter Book such as *The Seafarer*, and *The Wanderer*.

Linguistic and Textual Overview

A large number of manuscripts remain from the 600 year Anglo-Saxon period, although most were written during the last 300 years (ninth–eleventh century), in both Latin and the vernacular. Old English is among the oldest vernacular languages to be written down. Old English began, in written form, as a practical necessity in the aftermath of the Danish invasions—church officials were concerned that because of the drop in Latin literacy no one could read their work. Likewise King Alfred the Great (849–899), noted that while very few could read Latin, many could still read Old English. He thus proposed that students be educated in Old English, and those who excelled would go on to learn Latin. In this way many of the texts that have survived are typical teaching and student-oriented texts.

In total there are about 400 surviving manuscripts containing Old English text, 189 of them considered major. Not all of these texts can be fairly called literature, but those that can present a sizable body of work, listed here in descending order of quantity: sermons and saints' lives (the most numerous), biblical translations; translated Latin works of the early Church Fathers; Anglo-Saxon chronicles and narrative history works; laws, wills and other legal works; practical works on grammar, medicine, geography; and lastly, poetry.

Nearly all Anglo-Saxon authors are anonymous, with a few exceptions.

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Works

Old English poetry is of two types, the pre-Christian and the Christian. It has survived for the most part in four manuscripts. The first manuscript is called the Junius manuscript (also known as the Caedmon manuscript), which is an illustrated poetic anthology. The second manuscript is called the Exeter Book, also an anthology, located in the Exeter Cathedral since it was donated there in the eleventh century. The third manuscript is called the Vercelli Book, a mix of poetry and prose; how it came to be in Vercelli, Italy, no one knows, and is a matter of debate. The fourth manuscript is called the Nowell Codex, also a mixture of poetry and prose.

Old English poetry had no known rules or system left to us by the Anglo-Saxons, everything we know about it is based on modern analysis. The first widely accepted theory was by Eduard Sievers (1885) in which he distinguished five distinct alliterative patterns. The theory of John C. Pope (1942) inferred that the alliterative patterns of Anglo-Saxon poetry correspond to melodies, and his method adds musical notation to Anglo-Saxon texts and has gained some acceptance. Nonetheless, every few years a new theory of Anglo-Saxon versification arises and the topic continues to be hotly debated.

The most popular and well-known understanding of Old English poetry continues to be Sievers' alliterative verse. The system is based upon accent, alliteration, the quantity of vowels, and patterns of syllabic accentuation. It consists of five permutations on a base verse scheme; any one of the five types can be used in any verse. The system was inherited from and exists in one form or another in all of the older Germanic languages. Two poetic figures commonly found in Old English poetry are the kenning, an often formulaic phrase that describes one thing in terms of another (e.g. in *Beowulf*, the sea is called the "whale road") and litotes, a dramatic understatement employed by the author for ironic effect.

Old English poetry was an oral craft, and our understanding of it in written form is incomplete; for example, we know that the poet (referred to as the Scop) could be accompanied by a harp, and there may be other aural traditions of which we are not aware.

The poets

Most Old English poets are anonymous; twelve are known by name from Medieval sources, but only four of those are known by their vernacular works to us today with any certainty: Caedmon, Bede, King Alfred, and Cynewulf. Of these, only Caedmon, Bede, and Alfred have known biographies.

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Other poets names from the sources:

Aldhelm

Scop

Aelnoth Of Canterbury

Alcuin

Athelwulf

Wulfstan

Aeduwen

Anlaf

King Cnut

Dunstan

Hereward

Baldulf

Caedmon is the best-known and considered the father of Old English poetry.

According to the account in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, he was first a herdsman before living as a monk at the abbey of Whitby in Northumbria in 7th century.

Only a single nine line poem remains, called Caedmon's Hymn, which is also the **oldest surviving text in English**:

"Hymn"

Now let us praise the Guardian of the Kingdom of Heaven

the might of the Creator and the thought of his mind,

the work of the glorious Father, how He, the eternal Lord

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established the beginning of every wonder.

For the sons of men, He, the Holy Creator

first made heaven as a roof, then the

Keeper of mankind, the eternal Lord

God Almighty afterwards made the middle world

the earth, for men.

Bede is often thought to be the poet of a five-line poem entitled Bede's Death Song, on account of its appearance in a letter on his death by Cuthbert. This poem exists in a Northumbrian and later version.

Alfred is said to be the author of some of the metrical prefaces to the Old English translations of Gregory's Pastoral Care and Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy. Alfred is also thought to be the author of 50 metrical psalms, but whether the poems were written by him, under his direction or patronage, or as a general part in his reform efforts is unknown

Cynewulf has proven to be a difficult figure to identify, but recent research suggests he was from the early part of the 9th century. A number of poems are attributed to him, including The Fates of the Apostles and Elene (both found in the Vercelli Book), and Christ II and Juliana (both found in the Exeter Book).

Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne (d. 709), is known to us through William of Malmesbury, who recounts that Aldhelm performed secular songs while accompanied by a harp. Much of his Latin prose has survived, but none of his Old English remains.

Heroic poems

The Old English poetry which has received the most attention deals with the Germanic heroic past. The longest (3,182 lines), and most important, is Beowulf, which appears in the damaged Nowell Codex. It tells the story of the legendary Geatish hero, Beowulf. The story is set in Scandinavia, in Sweden and Denmark, and the tale likewise probably is of Scandinavian origin. The story is historical, heroic, and Christianized even though it relates pre-Christian history. It sets the tone for much of the rest of Old English poetry. It has achieved national epic status in British literary history, comparable to The Iliad of Homer, and is of interest to historians, anthropologists, literary critics, and students the world over.

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Beyond Beowulf, other heroic poems exist. Two heroic poems have survived in fragments: The Fight at Finnsburh, a retelling of one of the battle scenes in Beowulf.

Waldere, a version of the events of the life of Walter of Aquitaine.

Other poems mention heroic figures:

Widsith is believed to be very old, dating back to events in the fourth century concerning Eormanric and the Goths, and contains a catalogue of names and places associated with valiant deeds.

The 325 line poem Battle of Maldon celebrates Earl Byrhtnoth and his men who fell in battle against the Vikings in 991. It is considered one of the finest Old English heroic poems, but both the beginning and end are missing and the only manuscript was destroyed in a fire in 1731.

A well known speech is near the end of the poem:

Thought shall be the harder, the heart the keener, courage the greater, as our strength lessens.

Here lies our leader all cut down, the valiant man in the dust;

always may he mourn who now thinks to turn away from this warplay.

I am old, I will not go away, but I plan to lie down by the side of my lord, by the man so dearly loved.

—(Battle of Maldon)

Wisdom poetry / The Elegies:

Related to the heroic tales are a number of short poems from the Exeter Book which have come to be described as "Wisdom poetry." They are lyrical and Boethian in their description of the up and down fortunes of life.

Gloomy in mood is The Ruin, which tells of the decay of a once glorious city of Roman Britain (Britain fell into decline after the Romans departed in the early fifth century).

The Wanderer, in which an older man talks about an attack that happened in his youth, in which his close friends and kin were all killed. The memories of the slaughter have remained with him all his life. He questions the wisdom of the impetuous decision to engage a possibly superior fighting force; he believes the wise man engages in warfare to preserve civil society, and must

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not rush into battle but seek out allies when the odds may be against him. This poet finds little glory in bravery for bravery's sake.

Another similar poem from the Exeter Book is *The Seafarer*, the story of a somber exile on the sea, from which the only hope of redemption is the joy of heaven.

King Alfred the Great wrote a wisdom poem over the course of his reign based loosely on the neo-platonic philosophy of Boethius called the *Lays of Boethius*.

Deor is a lyric, in the style of Boethius, applying examples of famous heroes, including *Weland* and *Eormanric*, to the narrator's own case.

Classical and Latin poetry

Several Old English poems are adaptations of late classical philosophical texts. The longest is a tenth-century translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* contained in the Cotton manuscript.

Another is *The Phoenix* in the Exeter Book, an allegorization of the works of Lactantius.

Christian poetry

Saints' Lives

The Vercelli Book and Exeter Book contain four long narrative poems of saints' lives, or hagiography. The major works of hagiography, the *Andreas*, *Elene*, *Guthlac*, and *Juliana* are to be found in the Vercelli and Exeter manuscripts.

Andreas is 1,722 lines long and is the closest of the surviving Old English poems to *Beowulf* in style and tone. It is the story of Saint Andrew and his journey to rescue Saint Matthew from the Mermedonians. *Elene* is the story of Saint Helena (mother of Constantine) and her discovery of the True Cross. The cult of the True Cross was popular in Anglo-Saxon England and this poem was instrumental in that promulgation of that belief.

In addition to Biblical paraphrases there are a number of original religious poems, mostly lyrical.

Considered one of the most beautiful of all Old English poems is *Dream of the Rood*, contained in the Vercelli Book. It is a dream-vision, a common genre of Anglo-Saxon poetry in which the narrator of the poem experiences a vision in a dream only to awake from it renewed at the

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poem's end. In the Dream of the Rood, the dreamer dreams of Christ on the cross, and during the vision the cross itself comes alive, speaking thus:

"I endured much hardship up on that hill. I saw the God of hosts stretched out cruelly. Darkness had covered with clouds the body of the Lord, the bright radiance. A shadow went forth, dark under the heavens. All creation wept, mourned the death of the king. Christ was on the cross."

—(Dream of the Rood)

The dreamer resolves to trust in the cross, and the dream ends with a vision of heaven.

There are also a number of religious debate poems extant in Old English.

The longest is Christ and Satan in the Junius manuscript, which deals with the conflict between Christ and Satan during the 40 days in the desert.

Another debate poem is Solomon and Saturn, surviving in a number of textual fragments, Saturn, the Greek god, is portrayed as a magician debating with the wise king Solomon.

Specific features of Anglo-Saxon poetry

Simile and Metaphor

Anglo-Saxon poetry is marked by the comparative rarity of similes. This is a particular feature of Anglo-Saxon verse style. As a consequence of both its structure and the rapidity with which its images are deployed it is unable to effectively support the expanded simile. As an example of this, the epic Beowulf contains at best five similes, and these are of the short variety. This can be contrasted sharply with the strong and extensive dependence that Anglo-Saxon poetry has upon metaphor, particularly that afforded by the use of kennings.

Rapidity

It is also a feature of the fast-paced dramatic style of Anglo-Saxon poetry that it is not prone, as was, for example, Celtic literature of the period, to overly elaborate decoration. Whereas the typical Celtic poet of the time might use three or four similes to make a point, an Anglo-Saxon poet might typically make reference to a kenning, before quickly moving to the next image.

Historiography

Old English literature did not disappear in 1066 with the Norman Conquest. Many sermons and works continued to be read and used in part or as a whole through the fourteenth century, and

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were further catalogued and organized. During the Reformation, when monastic libraries were dispersed, the manuscripts were collected by antiquarians and scholars. These included Laurence Nowell, Matthew Parker, Robert Bruce Cotton, and Humfrey Wanley. In the 17th century a tradition of Old English literature dictionaries and references was begun. The first was William Somner's *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum* (1659).

Because Old English was one of the first vernacular languages to be written down, nineteenth century scholars searching for the roots of European "national culture" took special interest in studying Anglo-Saxon literature, and Old English became a regular part of university curriculum. Since World War II there has been increasing interest in the manuscripts themselves—Neil Ker, a paleographer, published the groundbreaking *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* in 1957, and by 1980 nearly all Anglo-Saxon manuscript texts were in print. J.R.R. Tolkien is credited with creating a movement to look at Old English as a subject of literary theory in his seminal lecture *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (1936).

Old English literature has had an influence on modern literature. Some of the best-known translations include William Morris' translation of *Beowulf* and Ezra Pound's translation of *The Seafarer*. The influence of Old English poetry was particularly important for the Modernist poets T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and W. H. Auden, who all were influenced by the rapidity and graceful simplicity of images in Old English verse. Much of the subject matter of the heroic poetry has been revived in the fantasy literature of Tolkien and many other contemporary novelists

Manuscripts:

Anglo-Saxon poetry is known by the manuscripts in which it survives. The most important manuscripts are from the late 10th and early 11th centuries. They are known as the **Cædmon manuscript, the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the Beowulf manuscript.**

Old English literature consists of: sermons and saints' lives; biblical translations; translated Latin works of the early Church Fathers; Anglo-Saxon chronicles and narrative history works; laws, wills and other legal works; practical works on grammar, medicine, geography; and poetry. In all there are over 400 surviving manuscripts from the period, of which about 189 are considered "major"

Caedmon Manuscript:

The Junius manuscript is one of the four major codices of Old English literature. Written in the 10th century, it contains poetry dealing with Biblical subjects in Old English, the vernacular

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language of Anglo-Saxon England. Modern editors have determined that the manuscript is made of four poems, to which they have given the titles **Genesis, Exodus, Daniel, and Christ and Satan**. The identity of their author is unknown. For a long time, scholars believed them to be the work of Cædmon, accordingly calling the book the Cædmon manuscript. This theory has been discarded due to the significant differences between the poems.

The manuscript owes its current designation to the Anglo-Dutch scholar Franciscus Junius, who was the first to edit its contents and who bequeathed it to Oxford University. It is kept in the Bodleian Library.

Genesis

Genesis is a paraphrase of the first part of the biblical book of Genesis, from the Creation through to the test of Abraham's faith with the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22).

The work is now recognised as a composite work formed of two originally distinct parts, conventionally referred to as Genesis A and Genesis B; the latter, lines 235-851 of the poem as we have it, appears to have been interpolated into an older poem to produce the current text.

It is Genesis B which has attracted the most critical attention. Its origin is notable in that it appears to be a translation from a ninth-century Old Saxon original; this theory was originally made on metrical grounds, in 1875 by the German scholar Sievers, and then confirmed by the discovery of a fragment of Old Saxon verse that appears to correspond to part of the work in 1894. The writer of the interpolated passage most probably the German may have lacked Cædmon's craftsmanship but his genius was great.

Thematically and stylistically, it is distinctive: it tells the story of the falls of Satan and Man in an epic style, and has been suggested as an influence for Beowulf, and even, perhaps, for Paradise Lost.

Exodus

Exodus is not a paraphrase of the biblical book, but rather a retelling of the story of the Israelites' Flight from Egypt and the Crossing of the Red Sea in the manner of a "heroic epic", much like Old English poems Andreas, Judith, or even the non-religious Beowulf. It is one of the densest, most allusive and complex poems in Old English, and is the focus of much critical debate.

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Exodus brings a traditional "heroic style" to its biblical subject-matter. Moses is treated as a general, and military imagery pervades the battle scenes. The destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea is narrated in much the same way as a formulaic battle scene from other Old English poems, including a 'Beast of Battle' motif very common in the poetry.

The main story is suspended at one point to tell the stories of Noah and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Some scholars consider this change of subject a feature of the "epic style" comparable with the similar digressions in Beowulf, while others have proposed it is a later interpolation. Edward B. Irving edited the poem twice, 1955 and 1981: the first edition excerpted the Noah and Abraham portion as a separate poem; on later reflection, Irving recanted, admitting it was an integrated part of the Exodus poem. There appears to be justification in patristic sermons for connecting the crossing of the Red Sea with these topics.

In recent decades, attention has shifted away from the "heroic" aspects of Exodus to consider its densely allusive structure and possible typology. Peter J. Lucas, for instance, has argued that the poem is an allegorical treatment of the Christian's fight with the devil. The Crossing of the Red Sea has been seen as echoing the Baptismal liturgy and prefiguring the entrance into Heaven. The Pharaoh may be associated with Satan through some subtle verbal echoes. However, these readings are still controversial and much-debated. A more balanced view would accept that though certain intermittent parts of the narrative of Exodus merge into typological allusion, this is not sustained throughout the poem.

Daniel

A short paraphrase of the book of Daniel, dwelling particularly on the story of the Fiery Furnace, deals with the first five chapters of the Book of Daniel.

Christ and Satan

A three-part poem detailing the Fall of Satan, Christ's harrowing of Hell (from the Apocryphal New Testament Gospel of Nicodemus), and Christ's temptation in the desert.

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The Exeter Manuscript:

The Exeter Book, Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, also known as the Codex Exoniensis, is a tenth-century[1] book or codex which is an anthology of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The book was donated to the library of Exeter Cathedral by Leofric, the first bishop of Exeter, in 1072. It is believed originally to have contained 131 leaves, of which the first 8 have been replaced with other leaves; the original first 8 pages are lost. The Exeter Book is the largest known collection of Old English literature still in existence. In 2016, UNESCO recognized the book as one of the "world's principal cultural artifacts". The precise dates that it was written and compiled are unknown, although proposed dates range from 960 to 990.

Contents:

Christ I, II, III

Guthlac A and B

Azarias

The Phoenix**Juliana****The Wanderer**

The Gifts of Men

Precepts

The Seafarer

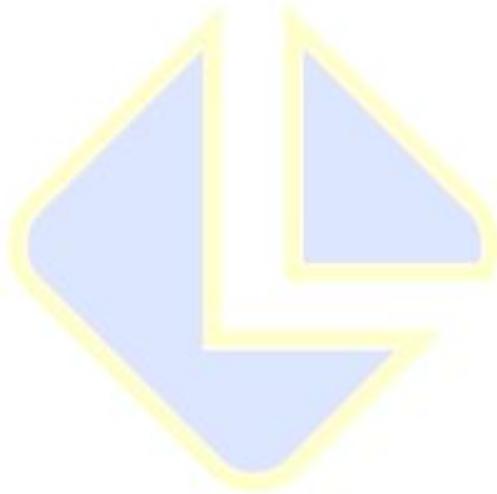
Vainglory

Widsith

The Fortunes of Men

Maxims I

The Order of the World

The Rhyming Poem

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The Panther

The Whale

The Partridge

Soul and Body II

Deor

Wulf and Eadwacer

Riddles 1-59

The Wife's Lament

The Judgment Day I

Resignation

The Descent into Hell

Alms-Giving

Pharaoh

The Lord's Prayer I

Homiletic Fragment II

Riddle 30b

Riddle 60

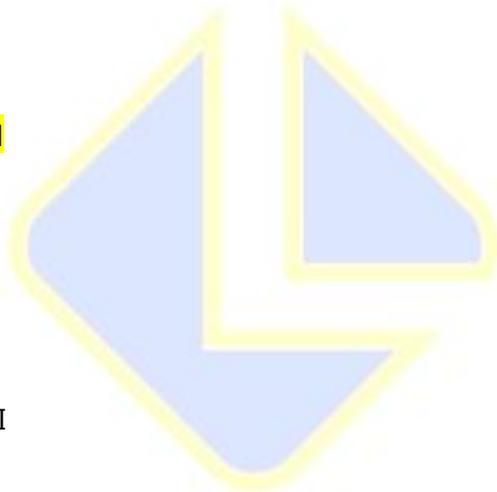
The Husband's Message

The Ruin

Riddles 61-95

Riddles:

There are over ninety riddles in it. They are written in the style of Anglo-Saxon poetry and range in topics from the religious to the mundane. Some of them are double entendres, such as Riddle 25.



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Ex:

I am a wondrous creature for women in
expectation,
a service for neighbors. I harm none of the citizens
except my slayer alone.
My stem is erect, I stand up in bed,
hairy somewhere down below. A very comely
peasant's daughter, dares sometimes,
proud maiden, that she grips at me,
attacks me in my redness, plunders my head,
confines me in a stronghold, feels my
encounter directly,
woman with braided hair. Wet be that eye.

—Riddle 25 (Marsden 2015)

Answer: Onion

The Elegies:

The Exeter Book contains the Old English poems known as the 'Elegies': **The Wanderer; The Seafarer ; The Riming Poem; Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer ; The Wife's Lament ; The Husband's Message ; and The Ruin .**

The term "elegy" can be confusing due to the diverse definitions from different cultures and times. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary states: "In Greek and Latin literature elegiac metre was used for poetry expressing personal sentiments on a range of subjects, including epigrams, laments, sympotic poetry, and (in Rome) love poetry. " In Victorian literature, an elegy is generally a poem written for the dead and although the naming of these poems as 'elegiac' was a Victorian invention, it can be a useful term.

As Anne Klinck in her book 'The Old English Elegies' writes: 'genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific meter or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose — more crudely, subject and audience)'. In regards to the Exeter Book Elegies, this term can be widened to include **"any serious meditative poem"**. The poems included in the Exeter book share common themes of longing, loneliness, pain, and the passage of time.

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The Vercelli Manuscript:

The Vercelli Book is one of the oldest of the four Old English Poetic Codices. It is an anthology of Old English prose and verse that dates back to the late 10th century. The manuscript is housed in the Capitulary Library of Vercelli, in northern Italy.

The Vercelli Book comprises 135 folios, and although the manuscript was probably compiled and written in the late 10th century, not all of the texts found in the manuscript were originally written at that time. The poems ascribed to Cynewulf (The Fates of the Apostles and Elene) could have been created much earlier.

The Vercelli Book contains 23 prose homilies (the Vercelli Homilies) and a prose vita of Saint Guthlac, interspersed with six poems:

Andreas

The Fates of the Apostles

Soul and Body

Dream of the Rood

Elene

a fragment of a homiletic poem

The Dream of the Rood:

The Dream of the Rood is one of the Christian poems in the corpus of Old English literature and an example of the genre of dream poetry. Like most Old English poetry, it is written in alliterative verse. Rood is from the Old English word *rōd* 'pole', or more specifically 'crucifix'. The poem may be as old as the 8th-century Ruthwell Cross, and is considered one of the oldest works of Old English literature.

The poem is set up with the narrator having a dream. In this dream or vision he is speaking to the Cross on which Jesus was crucified. The poem itself is divided up into three separate sections: the first part (ll. 1–27), the second part (ll. 28–121) and the third part (ll. 122–156).

In section one, the narrator has a vision of the Cross. Initially when the dreamer sees the Cross, he notes how it is covered with gems. He is aware of how wretched he is

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compared to how glorious the tree is. However, he comes to see that amidst the beautiful stones it is stained with blood

In section two, the Cross shares its account of Jesus' death. The Crucifixion story is told from the perspective of the Cross. It begins with the enemy coming to cut the tree down and carrying it away. The tree learns that it is not to be the bearer of a criminal, but instead Christ crucified. The Lord and the Cross become one, and they stand together as victors, refusing to fall, taking on insurmountable pain for the sake of mankind. It is not just Christ, but the Cross as well that is pierced with nails. The Rood and Christ are one in the portrayal of the Passion—they are both pierced with nails, mocked and tortured. Then, just as with Christ, the Cross is resurrected, and adorned with gold and silver.

In section three, the author gives his reflections about this vision. The vision ends, and the man is left with his thoughts. He gives praise to God for what he has seen and is filled with hope for eternal life and his desire to once again be near the glorious Cross.

Nowell Codex/ Beowulf Manuscript:

The Nowell Codex is the second of two manuscripts comprising the bound volume Cotton MS Vitellius A XV. It is most famous as the manuscript containing the unique copy of the epic poem **Beowulf**. In addition to this, it contains first a fragment of **The Life of Saint Christopher**, then the more complete texts **Wonders of the East** and **Letters of Alexander to Aristotle**, and, after Beowulf, a poetic translation of **Judith**. Due to the fame of Beowulf, the Nowell codex is also sometimes known simply as the Beowulf manuscript. The manuscript is located within the British Library with the rest of the Cotton collection.

First codex

The first codex contains four works of Old English prose: a copy of Alfred's translation of Augustine's Soliloquies, a translation of the Gospel of Nicodemus, the prose Solomon and Saturn, and a fragment of a life of Saint Quentin.

Second codex

The second codex begins with three prose works: a life of Saint Christopher, Wonders of the East (a description of various far-off lands and their fantastic inhabitants), and a translation of a Letter of Alexander to Aristotle.

These are followed by Beowulf, which takes up the bulk of the volume, and Judith, a poetic retelling of part of the book of Judith. Great wear on the final page of Beowulf and other

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manuscript factors such as wormhole patterns indicate Judith was not originally the last part of the manuscript, though it is in the same hand as the later parts of Beowulf.

Beowulf:

Beowulf is an Old English epic poem consisting of 3,182 alliterative lines. It is one of the most important works of Old English literature. The date of composition is a matter of contention among scholars; the only certain dating pertains to the manuscript, which was produced between 975 and 1025. The anonymous poet is referred to by scholars as the "Beowulf poet". It has reached national epic status in England (although its setting is Scandinavia, not the British Isles).

Beowulf is considered an epic poem in that the main character is a hero who travels great distances to prove his strength at impossible odds against supernatural demons and beasts. The poem also begins in medias res or simply, "in the middle of things," which is a characteristic of the epics of antiquity. Although the poem begins with Beowulf's arrival, Grendel's attacks have been an ongoing event. An elaborate history of characters and their lineages is spoken of, as well as their interactions with each other, debts owed and repaid, and deeds of valour. The warriors form a kind of brotherhood linked by loyalty to their lord. The poem begins and ends with funerals: at the beginning of the poem for Scyld Scefing (26–45) and at the end for Beowulf (3140–3170).

In short:

The story is set in Scandinavia in the 6th century. Beowulf, a hero of the Geats, comes to the aid of Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, whose mead hall in Heorot has been under attack by a monster known as Grendel. After Beowulf slays him, Grendel's mother attacks the hall and is then also defeated. Victorious, Beowulf goes home to Geatland (Sweden) and becomes king of the Geats. Fifty years later, Beowulf defeats a dragon, but is mortally wounded in the battle. After his death, his attendants cremate his body and erect a tower on a headland in his memory.

First battle: Grendel

Beowulf begins with the story of Hrothgar, who constructed the great hall Heorot for himself and his warriors. In it, he, his wife Wealhtheow, and his warriors spend their time singing and celebrating. Grendel, a troll-like monster said to be descended from the biblical Cain, is pained by the sounds of joy. Grendel attacks the hall and kills and

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devours many of Hrothgar's warriors while they sleep. Hrothgar and his people, helpless against Grendel, abandon Heorot.

Beowulf, a young warrior from Geatland, hears of Hrothgar's troubles and with his king's permission leaves his homeland to assist Hrothgar.

Beowulf and his men spend the night in Heorot. Beowulf refuses to use any weapon because he holds himself to be the equal of Grendel. When Grendel enters the hall, Beowulf, who has been feigning sleep, leaps up to clench Grendel's hand. Grendel and Beowulf battle each other violently. Beowulf's retainers draw their swords and rush to his aid, but their blades cannot pierce Grendel's skin. Finally, Beowulf tears Grendel's arm from his body at the shoulder and Grendel runs to his home in the marshes where he dies. Beowulf displays "the whole of Grendel's shoulder and arm, his awesome grasp" for all to see at Heorot. This display would fuel Grendel's mother's anger in revenge.

Second battle: Grendel's mother

The next night, after celebrating Grendel's defeat, Hrothgar and his men sleep in Heorot. Grendel's mother, angry that her son has been killed, sets out to get revenge. "Beowulf was elsewhere. Earlier, after the award of treasure, The Geat had been given another lodging"; his assistance would be absent in this battle. Grendel's mother violently kills Æschere, who is Hrothgar's most loyal fighter, and escapes.

Hrothgar, Beowulf, and their men track Grendel's mother to her lair under a lake. Unferð, a warrior who had earlier challenged him, presents Beowulf with his sword Hrunting. After stipulating a number of conditions to Hrothgar in case of his death (including the taking in of his kinsmen and the inheritance by Unferth of Beowulf's estate), Beowulf jumps into the lake, and while harassed by water monsters gets to the bottom, where he finds a cavern. Grendel's mother pulls him in, and she and Beowulf engage in fierce combat.

At first, Grendel's mother appears to prevail, and Hrunting proves incapable of hurting the woman; she throws Beowulf to the ground and, sitting astride him, tries to kill him with a short sword, but Beowulf is saved by his armour. Beowulf spots another sword, hanging on the wall and apparently made for giants, and cuts her head off with it. Travelling further into Grendel's mother's lair, Beowulf discovers Grendel's corpse and severs his head with the sword, whose blade melts because of the "hot blood". Only the hilt remains. Beowulf swims back up to the rim of the pond where his men wait. Carrying the hilt of the sword and Grendel's head, he presents them to Hrothgar upon his return

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to Heorot. Hrothgar gives Beowulf many gifts, including the sword Nægling, his family's heirloom. The events prompt a long reflection by the king, sometimes referred to as "Hrothgar's sermon", in which he urges Beowulf to be wary of pride and to reward his thegns.

Third battle: The dragon

Beowulf returns home and eventually becomes king of his own people. One day, fifty years after Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother, a slave steals a golden cup from the lair of a dragon at Earnanæs. When the dragon sees that the cup has been stolen, it leaves its cave in a rage, burning everything in sight. Beowulf and his warriors come to fight the dragon, but Beowulf tells his men that he will fight the dragon alone and that they should wait on the barrow. Beowulf descends to do battle with the dragon, but finds himself outmatched. His men, upon seeing this and fearing for their lives, retreat into the woods. One of his men, Wiglaf, however, in great distress at Beowulf's plight, comes to his aid. The two slay the dragon, but Beowulf is mortally wounded. After Beowulf dies, Wiglaf remains by his side, grief-stricken. When the rest of the men finally return, Wiglaf bitterly admonishes them, blaming their cowardice for Beowulf's death. Afterward, Beowulf is ritually burned on a great pyre in Geatland while his people wail and mourn him, fearing that without him, the Geats are defenceless against attacks from surrounding tribes. Afterwards, a barrow, visible from the sea, is built in his memory.

Importance of the third Section:

The third act of the poem differs from the first two. In Beowulf's two earlier battles, Grendel and Grendel's mother are characterized as descendants of Cain: "[Grendel] had long lived in the land of monsters / since the creator cast them out / as the kindred of Cain" and seem to be humanoid: in the poet's rendition they can be seen as giants, trolls, or monsters. The dragon, therefore, is a stark contrast to the other two antagonists. Moreover, the dragon is more overtly destructive. He burns vast amounts of territory and the homes of the Geats: "the dragon began to belch out flames / and burn bright homesteads".

Beowulf's fight with the dragon has been described variously as an act of either altruism^[19] or recklessness. In contrast with the previous battles, the fight with the dragon occurs in Beowulf's kingdom and ends in defeat, whereas Beowulf fought the other monsters victoriously in a land distant from his home.

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Wiglaf is a younger companion to Beowulf and, in his courage, shows himself to be Beowulf's successor. The presence of a companion is seen as a motif in other dragon stories, but the Beowulf poet breaks hagiographic tradition with the hero's suffering (hacking, burning, stabbing) and subsequent death. Moreover, the dragon is vanquished through Wiglaf's actions: although Beowulf dies fighting the dragon, the dragon dies at the hand of the companion.

The dragon battle is structured in thirds: the preparation for the battle, the events prior to the battle, and the battle itself. Wiglaf kills the dragon halfway through the scene, Beowulf's death occurs "after two-thirds" of the scene, and the dragon attacks Beowulf three times. Ultimately, as Tolkien writes in *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (1936), the death by dragon "is the right end for Beowulf," for he claims, "a man can but die upon his death-day"

Dialects:

Regional dialects include: **Northumbrian; Mercian; Kentish; and West Saxon**, leading to the speculation that much of the poetry may have been translated into West Saxon at a later date.

Northumbrian:

Northumbrian was a dialect of Old English spoken in the Anglian Kingdom of Northumbria.

The earliest surviving Old English texts were written in Northumbrian: these are Caedmon's Hymn (7th century) and Bede's Death Song (8th century). Other works, including the bulk of Caedmon's poetry, have been lost. Other examples of this dialect are the Runes on the Ruthwell Cross from the Dream of the Rood. Also in Northumbrian are the 9th-century Leiden Riddle and the mid-10th-century gloss of the Lindisfarne Gospels.

Bede's Death Song:

Fore thaem neidfaerae naenig uuiurthit
 thoncsnotturra, than him tharf sie
 to ymbhycggannae aer his hiniongae
 huaet his gastae godaes aeththa yflaes
 aefter deothdaege doemid uueorthae

Caedmon's Hymn:

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Nū scylun hergan hefaenrīcaes Uard,
 metudæs maecti end his mōdgidanc,
 uerc Uuldurfadur, suē hē uundra gihwaes,
 ēci dryctin ōr āstelidæ
 hē ærist scōp aelda barnum
 heben til hrōfe, hāleg scepen.
 Thā middungeard moncynnæs Uard,
 eci Dryctin, æfter tīadæ
 firum foldu, Frēa allmectig.

Mercian:

Mercian was a dialect spoken in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia. Together with Northumbrian, it was one of the two Anglian dialects. Most of Mercia were overrun by the Vikings during the 9th century. Part of Mercia and all of Kent were successfully defended but were then integrated into the Kingdom of Wessex. Because of the centralisation of power and the Viking invasions, there is little to no salvaged written evidence for the development of non-Wessex dialects after Alfred the Great's unification, until the Middle English period.

Written texts:

The Old English Martyrology is a collection of over 230 hagiographies, probably compiled in Mercia, or by someone who wrote in the Mercian dialect of Old English, in the second half of the 9th century. Six Mercian hymns are included in the Anglo-Saxon glosses to the Vespasian Psalter; they include the Benedictus and the Magnificat.

In later Anglo-Saxon England, the dialect would have remained in use in speech but hardly ever in written documents. Some time after the Norman conquest of England, Middle English dialects emerged and were later found in such works as the *Ormulum* and the writings of the *Gawain* poet. In the later Middle Ages, a Mercian or East Midland dialect seems to have predominated in the London area. Mercian is used by the writer and philologist J.R.R. Tolkien to signify his fictional Rohirric language.

Kentish:

Kentish (Old English: Centisc) was a southern dialect of Old English spoken in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Kent.

Texts:

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The most important surviving Kentish manuscripts are the law codes of the Kentish kings, contained in *Textus Roffensis*, they were early-twelfth-century copies of much earlier laws, and their spellings and forms of English were modernised and standardised in various ways.

West Saxon:

West Saxon was the language of the kingdom of Wessex, and was the basis for successive widely used literary forms of Old English: the Early West Saxon of Alfred the Great's time, and the Late West Saxon of the late 10th and 11th centuries. Due to the Saxons' establishment as a politically dominant force in the Old English period, the West Saxon dialect became one of the strongest dialects in Old English manuscript writing.

Early West Saxon:

Early West Saxon was the language employed by King Alfred (849–899), used in the many literary translations produced under Alfred's patronage (and some by Alfred himself). It is often referred to as Alfredian Old English, or Alfredian. The language of these texts nonetheless sometimes reflects the influence of other dialects besides that of Wessex.

List of texts:

- King Alfred's Preface to Gregory's Pastoral Care
- The Old English translation of Orosius's *Historia adversus paganos*
- Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173: The Parker Chronicle The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

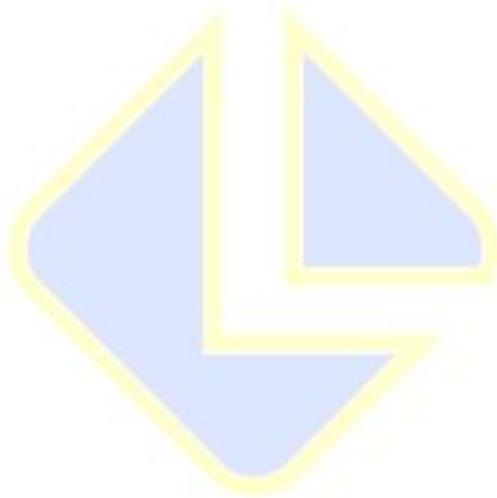
Late West Saxon

By the time of the Norman conquest of England in 1066, the language had evolved into Late West Saxon, which had established itself as a written language and replaced the Alfredian language, following the Athewoldian language reform set in train by Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester. The name most associated with that reform is that of Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham, Ælfric the Grammarian.

Late West Saxon was the dialect that became the first standardised written "English" ("Winchester standard"), sometimes referred to as "classical" Old English. This dialect was spoken mostly in the south and west around the important monastery at Winchester, which was also the capital city of the Saxon kings. However, while other Old English dialects were still

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spoken in other parts of the country, it seems that all scribes wrote and copied manuscripts in this prestigious written form. Well-known poems recorded in this language include Beowulf and Judith. However, both these poems appear to have been written originally in other Old English dialects, but later translated into the standard Late West Saxon literary language when they were copied by scribes.



OLD ENGLISH/ ANGLO SAXON POETRY**Nowell Codex** *Beowulf**Judith***Junius MS** *Genesis A, B**Exodus**Daniel**Christ and Satan***Vercelli Book** *Andreas**"The Fates of the Apostles"**"Soul and Body I"**Dream of the Rood**Elene**"Homiletic Fragment I"***Exeter Book** *"Christ I"**"Christ II"**"Christ III"**"Guthlac A, B"**"Azarias"**"The Phoenix"**"Juliana"**"The Wanderer"**"The Gifts of Men"**"Precepts"**"The Seafarer"**"Vainglory"**"Widsith"**"The Fortunes of Men"**"Maxims I"**"The Order of the World"**"The Rhyming Poem"**"The Panther"**"The Whale"**"The Partridge"*

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"Soul and Body II"
 "Deor"
 "Wulf and Eadwacer"
 Riddles 1–59
 "The Wife's Lament"
 "The Judgment Day I"
 "Resignation"
 "The Descent into Hell"
 "Alms-Giving"
 "Pharaoh"
 "The Lord's Prayer I"
 "Homiletic Fragment II"
 Riddle 30b
 Riddle 60
 "The Husband's Message"
 "The Ruin"
 Riddles 61–95

Metrical charms

"Æcerbot"
 "Against a Dwarf"
 "Against a Wen"
 "A Journey Charm"
 "For a Swarm of Bees"
 "For Loss or Theft of Cattle"
 "For Delayed Birth"
 "For Water-Elf Disease"
 "Nine Herbs Charm"
 "Wið færstice"

Chronicle poems

"Battle of Brunanburh"
 "Capture of the Five Boroughs"
 "The Coronation of Edgar"
 "The Death of King Edgar"
 "The Death of Alfred"
 "The Death of Edward"

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"The Rime of King William"

Other poems

"Metres of Boethius"

"Paris Psalter" (BNF MS 8824)

"Finnsburh Fragment"

"Waldere A, B"

"The Battle of Maldon"

"Durham"

"Rune poem"

Solomon and Saturn

"The Menologium"

"Maxims II"

"Proverb from Winfrid's time"

"Judgment Day II"

"An Exhortation to Christian Living"

"A Summons to Prayer"

"The Lord's Prayer II"

"The Gloria I"

"The Lord's Prayer III"

"The Creed"

"Old English Psalms" (fragments)

"The Kentish Hymn"

"Psalm 50"

"The Gloria II"

"A Prayer"

"Thureth"

"Aldhelm"

"The Seasons for Fasting"

Cædmon's "Hymn"

"Bede's Death Song"

"Leiden Riddle"

"Latin-English Proverbs"

Metrical Preface and Epilogue to Alfred's *Hierdeboc*

Metrical Preface to [Wærferth's](#) translation of the *Dialogues*

LEDGE_NET_POETRY_ANGLO SAXON AGE

Metrical Epilogue to CCCC MS 41

Brussels Cross

Ruthwell Cross

