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Examine the vocabulary for the mind and emotions and the way in which they function.

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The Anglo-Saxons had a complex relationship with the mind and emotions; this much is clear from the way they are treated in heroic poetry. As such, it can be seen that in poems like *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*, emotions and the cognitive responses to them play a key part in the poets' construction and exposition of their characters. The vocabulary for the mind for the most part revolves around the four key words: *mod*, *hyge*, *sefa*, and *ferhð*, which can be found in all three of the poems examined here. In addition, the use of kennings and compound words means that poets are able to construct many different meanings for the mind and emotions in different contexts which we must consider. Furthermore, in order to assess the vocabulary for the mind and emotions in heroic texts we must also direct our attention toward the differences between modern Western culture and Anglo-Saxon philosophy in the perception of the mind and emotions and their existence and function. This essay will attempt to interpret Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the mind and emotions and how they functioned using the evidence given in heroic poetry, which presents us with an ideal source for exploring the early medieval psyche due to its status as popular culture.

It is sometimes easy to forget when reading Anglo-Saxon texts in translation that around a millennium lies between us and their original audiences; even with an adequate understanding of the mechanics of the heroic society in which they lived, more subtle aspects of early medieval life and thought can be wrongly influenced by contemporary assumptions. This is especially true of discourse on the mind and emotions, with modern readers being influenced by the Cartesian tradition of mind/body dualism and the general acceptance of the physical location of the mind in the head. Some scholars have suggested that the Anglo-Saxons had different beliefs about the relationship between mind and body, which could affect our interpretation of vocabulary for the mind and emotions. For instance, Lockett argues that the Anglo-Saxons operated under the belief in the 'hydraulic model' of thought in which the mind was 'corporeal, localized in or near the heart, and subject to spatial and thermal changes'.[1] This contrasts greatly with modern assumptions about the mind and physical reactions to emotion and shows that it is necessary to modify our approach as contemporary readers in order to understand as much as possible the terms used for the mind and emotions and how Old English poets made use of them. In doing so, we are also able to radically alter our interpretation of the vocabulary used for the mind and emotions, calling in to question much of the metaphoricity in description of the mind and emotions in Old English poetry which we might have taken for granted before.

Essentially, what this means is that Anglo-Saxon audiences may have had different, more physical responses to emotions than modern readers do. The modern tradition of the philosophy of emotion can be divided into two schools of thought: those who advocate 'the primacy of bodily feelings who argue that physiological reverberations are what makes an

[1] Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2011), p. 13.

emotion emotional' versus 'those who consider cognitive capacities and rational dispositions to be at the heart of emotional life'.[2] We can see that there may be some support for the hydraulic model in the former, but unfortunately it is the latter which has dominated modern discourse on emotional function. However, the vocabulary used for the mind and emotions in heroic poetry suggests that this divide was not so strongly present in Anglo-Saxon thought, if present at all, and that the physical response was a key aspect of emotion due to belief in the hydraulic model. In Old Norse culture the idea of a berserker, a warrior in a battle frenzy who was practically invincible, is common and this idea is possibly reflected in Anglo-Saxon culture through the approach to emotion in heroic poetry. Evidence for this advantageous quality of emotion can be seen in the final part of *Beowulf*, when the eponymous hero at first wrestles with his emotions when his precious hall is destroyed. He wonders what he has done to anger God and provoke such furious wrath, and the poet describes in lines 2331-2 how 'breost innan weoll / þeostrum geþoncum'. There is a physicality to Beowulf's emotion here which the poet revisits later during the fight with the dragon in lines 2550 onwards: 'Let ða of breostum ða he gebolgen waes / Weder-Geata leod word ut faran / stearcheort styrmde'. Here Beowulf's grief and anger bursts out of his chest in the form of words and it is as if the poet is suggesting that the strength of the emotion channelled here is a rival to the fiery breath of the dragon. This shows the audience, in a very literal sense, the raw power which emotion can lend a warrior in battle.

Furthermore, there are other instances in *Beowulf* in which the idea of the hydraulic model of the mind can be seen. Some of this evidence comes in the form of compound words such as 'cearwylmas' in line 282, which combines the 'cear', meaning care or sorrow, with the noun wylm, meaning a surge, and which is also connected to the verb 'wyllan', meaning 'to boil'. This short word clearly functions not only as an evocative description of emotion but as a depiction of physical response to said emotion. Here the poet is describing Hrothgar's physical and mental 'turmoil' at Grendel's reign of terror.[3] By using a word for emotion that has both physical and mental implications, the poet shows the audience that Hrothgar is literally overcome, and held in thrall by his fear. Both the words 'cear' and 'wylm' occur in *Beowulf* again in lines 1992-3, upon Beowulf's return home, when Hygelac expresses his prior worries about the quest: 'Ic ðaes modceare / sorhwylmum seað'. In this instance, the poet intensifies Hygelac's worry by compounding 'cear' with 'mod', which certainly seems to consciously situate the emotion in the breast. The poet then goes on to pair 'sorh' with 'wylm' to form a similarly animated form of sorrow as with 'cearwylm', which is emphasized by the verb 'seað'. The poet therefore animates both Hrothgar's and Hygelac's emotions, thereby intensifying them in the minds of the audience.

It is also worth considering that in cases of Hrothgar and Hygelac, the fear in question is caused by the spectre of Grendel, which looms large over much of the poem. However, Hrothgar and Hygelac's fears weigh differently on the heroic scale, despite having the same root cause and being similarly described. It has been argued that poetry was 'a kind of privileged medium in which warriors can lament openly without demeaning their masculine dignity',[4] which suggests that while Hrothgar's fear clearly gets the better of him, in Hygelac's case the poet could be signifying the appropriate emotional response of a lord when his thane is in danger. The importance of the relationship between lord and retainer is also one of the key themes in *The Wanderer*. For example, the narrator tells us in line 9, 'Nis nu cwicra nan / þe ic him modsefan minne durre / sweotule asecgan' ('There is none now living to whom I dare clearly speak of my innermost thoughts') which suggests that the

[2] René Rosfort and Giovanni Stanghellini, 'In the Mood for Thought: Feeling and Thinking in Philosophy', *New Literary History* 43 (Summer 2012): 396.
[3] Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 11.
[4] Thomas D. Hill, 'The Unchanging Hero: a Stoic Maxim in the Wanderer and its Contexts', *Studies in Philology* 101 (Summer 2004): 249.

relationship between a lord and his retainers as portrayed in heroic poetry was deeply emotional and involved a level of trust that extended not only to loyalty in battle but also in thought and emotion.

This brings us to consider the relationship between thought and emotion as presented in Old English heroic poetry. For modern readers, this relationship is generally clear, since 'emotions have traditionally been criticized because of what was considered their opposition to reason', meaning that most people believe the mind has little or even no control of emotion, positive or negative.[5] In contrast to this, Godden suggests that the Anglo-Saxon mind was associated 'at least as much with passion as with intellect',[6] which indicates that in heroic thought emotions were seen as something that were actively called upon by the mind. He argues that because, in most instances, emotions are seen to be 'taken' using the verb 'niman' rather than felt, or experienced, that they 'did not just take hold of one from the outside or inside but involved, at some level, an act of will'.[7] This can possibly be seen in line 50 of *The Wanderer* as the narrator laments: 'Sorg bið geniwad / þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð' ('Sorrow is renewed when the mind surveys the memory of kinsmen') as the poet directly links the actions of the mind to the feeling of sorrow. However, this does not mean that the Anglo-Saxons believed the mind was in total control of its own emotional state, as the poet also gives us a sense of the mind being at conflict with the narrator in *The Wanderer*. As such, we get the 'impression that the speaker is right, his mind wrong — disobedient, undisciplined, unguarded'.[8] This suggests that while rational and emotional thought may have been less distinct for the Anglo-Saxons, this did not preclude conflict between the mind and emotions.

The Wanderer and *The Seafarer* are poems of a similar nature, with narrators lamenting their exile from heroic society, and both are laden with emotional language. In only the second line of *The Wanderer* the poet uses the word 'modcearig', which literally means 'heart-sorry', but which can also be translated as 'sad in mind'.[9] The word 'mod' has a variety of meanings pertaining to the heart and mind being and its physical location in the chest which can be interpreted differently, once again depending upon how we interpret Anglo-Saxon beliefs and the validity of the hydraulic model. The suffix, '-cearig', appears again in line twenty-four in 'wintercearig', which supports the idea that the Anglo-Saxons felt a connection between emotion and internal temperature. By imbuing the narrator with 'wintersorrow', the poet not only accesses the tradition of the hydraulic model with the temperature reference, but also hints at the importance of community, the security and warmth of hearth and hall, to the Anglo-Saxons. Likewise, in line 10 of *The Seafarer* the narrator suffers from loneliness and the poet describes to us how 'þaer þa ceare seofedun / hate ymb heortan; hungor innan slat / merewearges mod'. The heat described here contrasts with the coldness described in *The Wanderer* but conforms to our understanding of the hydraulic model and the physical nature of the Anglo-Saxon mind in reaction to strong emotion.

Another variety of emotion which was important to Anglo-Saxon society heroic society and which can be seen in the vocabulary used in heroic poetry was happiness. Much emphasis is placed upon 'seledreamas', joy or happiness in the hall. *The Wanderer*-poet, using the alternative 'wyn' for 'joy' gives the phrase in line 36, 'Wyn eal gedreas', in a eulogy for the once vibrant and convivial community of the narrator, but there are other ways

[5] Luc Faucher and Christine Tappolet, 'Introduction: Modularity and the Nature of Emotions', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 36 (2006): 20.
[6] M. R. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Old English Literature: critical essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), p. 284.
[7] Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', p. 299.
[8] T. A. Shippey, '*The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as Wisdom Poetry', in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, eds. Henk Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremner (Amsterdam: VU UP, 1994), p. 155.
[9] Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World: an anthology* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 50.

in which the heroic ideal of happiness can be seen to go awry. The theme of prosperity and its decline seems to have been important in Old English poetry, and poets often focused upon the danger of destruction from the inside rather than outside threats. For instance, in *Beowulf* the poet includes the tale of King Heremod, who 'breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas'. The poet shows us that in murdering his retainers Heremod committed the ultimate sin against heroic society and the bond of comitatus. Here the poet uses a derivation of 'gebolgen', meaning enraged, compounded with 'mod', which could suggest a kind of madness within King Heremod. As a result, we are told that he 'dreamleas gebad' ('lived joylessly') due to his murderous betrayal of those under his protection. Violence was clearly a serious problem in heroic society which poets were preoccupied with. Beowulf's death is seen as a tragedy since he was a great man and a good king, but the poet afterward implies that the real tragedy will be the deaths to come, as Wiglaf says 'þaet ys seo faeðo on se feondscipe / waelnið wera ðaes ðe ic wean hafo'. This extreme condemnation of the violence inherent in heroic society also shows us how precious joy and happiness must have been to the Anglo-Saxons, even if it were often short-lived.

However, it has also been suggested that in *The Wanderer* the poet is connecting the idea of 'heroic stoicism' with the more Christian tradition of *apatheia* and 'expressing a suspicion of and an implicit contempt for the ideal of "happiness" that was part of the literary culture of the Anglo-Saxons and presumably of their life as well'.[10] This message is most clearly felt in line 16, 'ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman' ('nor does a troubled mind do any good'). Here the narrator seems to accept the unhelpfulness of his emotions, before asking, 'Forþon ic geþencan ne maeg geond þas woruld / for hwan modsefa min ne gesweorce / þonne ic eorla lif eal geondþence', in line 58. This part of the poem appears to be a rhetorical device used by the poet to move towards the more overtly Christian section of the poem. So, it can be argued that emotions could have been seen by some Anglo-Saxons, like *The Wanderer*-poet, as superfluous. This could be due to the belief in the separation between the conscious mind to which the narrator's 'heortan geþohtas' belong to and the immortal soul, which was referred to as the 'sawol' or 'gast' which it was believed lay ultimately in the care of God.

Evidently, Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the mind emotion go far beyond what we might have expected from them. The vocabulary used shows a strikingly alternative belief system in which emotions operated on both a physical and cognitive level which may have had important social implications for the Anglo-Saxons. Understanding these differences not only leads to different interpretations of the texts used, but also allows us to see how contemporary assumptions can skew our understanding of different cultures. Finally, the mind and emotions clearly play an important part in the development of heroic characters like Beowulf; in dealing with themes such as between heroism and the mind, or emotional states, Old English poets have given us an insight into the complex beliefs and relationships which their audiences had with the mind and emotions.

[10] Hill, 'The Unchanging Hero', p. 237.

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