THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *WYRM* IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

By

HANNAH KATHERINE MILLARD

A thesis submitted to The University of Birmingham for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

School of English, Drama, American and Canadian Studies

College of Arts and Law

University of Birmingham

July, 2021

Abstract

This thesis argues that, rather than being viewed as an incidental feature of Old English literary texts, the group of creatures referred to as *wyrmas* should be viewed as a significant, symbolic feature of early medieval English culture. *Wyrmas* were a diverse category of creatures which included parasites, snakes, serpents residing in Hell, grave-dwelling creatures and even dragons; it is this diversity that allowed *wyrmas* to become synonymous with imagery of death and corruption, but also with the hope of resurrection in a developing Christian society. The significance of *wyrmas* will be demonstrated through an interdisciplinary study of literary and theological sources in Old English and Latin, alongside archaeological material; these sources will be considered alongside theoretical frameworks of taxonomy and categorisation in order to facilitate a greater understanding of the meaning of *wyrmas.* This thesis will examine the stages of the human experience as understood by early medieval English people – life, death and the afterlife – to demonstrate that *wyrmas* became a way to express the anxieties and hopes of early medieval people as they reconciled with Christian beliefs and doctrine.

Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg.

‘Deor’, l. 7

For George

December 2016 – October 2021

Acknowledgements

It is difficult to overemphasise the extent of help and support that I have received throughout the course of this PhD. The past four and a half years have been an immense challenge, and that I have come to this point despite mental health struggles and a global pandemic is testament not only to myself, but to those around me.

Thanks must first be given to the University of Birmingham, College of Arts and Law who funded three years of study, without which I would not have been able to undertake this project. Further thanks go to the Centre for the Study of the Middle Ages for financial support to attend the Leeds International Medieval Congress in 2018 and 2019, and to the Royal Historical Society for their generous Covid Emergency fund bursary. I am grateful to the Early Medieval, Medieval, Renaissance, Reformation and Early Modern Forum at the University of Birmingham for the opportunity to present my first paper at their conference in 2017, and to the Medieval Animal Data Network for their support and invitation to present at the Leeds International Medieval Congress in 2019.

Throughout my PhD I have benefited from the advice and support of my two supervisors, Dr. Katharine Sykes and Dr. Philippa Semper. They have been infinitely patient and kind in their advice and encouragement both academically and pastorally throughout the past four and a half years; I count myself very lucky to have supervisors like them. The support from Kate – particularly when facing those pesky saints – has been invaluable. Special thanks, however, must go to Philippa who has not only supported me throughout this PhD but also throughout my MRes and undergraduate studies. Without her enthusiasm for Old English, first year grammar quizzes, and complete belief in my topic and ability, this thesis would not exist.

I am thankful to my PhD colleagues, particularly Dr. Georgie Fitzgibbon, Dr. Lizzie Cook, Sharon Glaas, Dr. Bernadette McCooey and Dr. Brittany Moster for their advice over coffee, shut up and work sessions, replies to worried messages and for showing it can be done! I also thank the late Nicola Taylor for giving me a role within the Academic Writing Advisory Service which was not only a job, but a great community and the opportunity to develop in confidence as an academic. Her vivaciousness and passion for her work was an inspiration and she will be hugely missed. I also thank the Academic Womens' Online Writing Retreat group for providing much-needed camaraderie and structure which enabled me to carry on writing during lockdown.

A great debt is owed to my friends, Amy Mishra, Sara Fowles and Laura Cort, and many others, for sitting and listening to rants about *wyrmas* and for reassurance that I could do this. I also thank Bloom, CanEat, Flock, Grace and James, The Early Bird Bakery and Faculty Coffee for providing me with places to rest, many warm welcomes and excellent coffee and cake when I needed it most.

Enormous thanks go to my family - my parents, Sandra and Chris, my brother Alex, his fiancée Emma, and my nan, Gerry - for their unwavering support, belief and love throughout my studies. Thanks to Ali, Dave, Euan, Simon and Lizzie Winch for understanding, and to Oliver and Isaac Winch for always being a source of joy. I also thank George for being my purring therapist and constant companion while writing.

Final thanks go to Jono, for going above and beyond to support me in every way, and for knowing what I needed to get by, even when I didn't know myself.

Contents

List of Illustrations

List of Figures

Introduction

The Great Cross: Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust.[1]

Gifer hatte se wyrm, þe þa eaglas beoð/ nædle scearpran. (Soul and Body I, ll. 116-117a)[2]

Glutton is the name of the wyrm, the one whose jaws are sharper than a needle.[3]

[1] The Staffordshire Hoard is owned by the Birmingham City Council and the Stoke-on-Trent City Council and cared for on their behalf by Birmingham Museums Trust and The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust.
[2] 'Soul and Body I', in *The Vercelli Book* [*VB*], ed. by George Philip Krapp, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 54-5. All subsequent references are to this edition.
[3] All Old English translations my own unless otherwise stated.

This description of 'Gifer the *wyrm*'[4] forms part of one of the most grotesque depictions of the destruction of the corpse in Old English vernacular literature, yet the *wyrm* is defined by the Bosworth-Toller *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*[5] simply as:

i) A reptile, serpent

ii) A creeping insect, a worm

While this definition presents a suitable translation for the term, it fails to adequately inform the audience what the *wyrm* actually is; indeed, for modern translators, broad terms such as 'reptile' or 'insect' provide little clarification for the form of the creature. If we apply this definition to 'Gifer the *wyrm',* we are left with a conundrum; we know that 'Gifer' is resident in the grave and we might, therefore, safely assume that we can define it as an earthworm. However, that 'Gifer's' jaws are 'nædle scearpran' immediately eliminates the possibility of 'Gifer' being an earthworm as we understand one – is it perhaps another type of serpent? Yet this raises questions as to why a snake or serpent is resident in the grave at all. Clearly, the ambiguity of the definition provided by Bosworth-Toller may leave readers with more questions as to the features of *wyrmas* than might be expected.

In this thesis I will argue that, rather than being a series of isolated references to unrelated creatures, *wyrmas* had widely understood symbolic meanings which span early medieval English vernacular text and culture. Indeed, the *wyrmas* which decorate the Staffordshire Hoard's 'Great Cross' demonstrate the wide-ranging uses of *wyrmas*, as its appearance on a processional cross suggests that *wyrmas* may not have only represented fear

[4] Throughout this thesis I will use the Old English term *wyrm* and the plural form *wyrmas* without translation. This is due to the problem of finding a satisfactory definition for the term which does not have unhelpful associations.

[5] 'Wyrm' in *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* < https://bosworthtoller.com/> [accessed June 2021]. At the time of writing the *Dictionary of Old English Online* has published letters A-I and has not yet reached 'w': I await their definition with interest.

and encouraged penance like ‘Gifer’ but may also have served as a positive symbol of spiritual significance. This thesis will offer an in-depth analysis of the *wyrmas* found in each part of the lives and deaths of people living in early medieval England to demonstrate the interwoven and interlinked nature of *wyrmas* and how their imagery speaks to the anxieties about the state of body and soul in a developing Christian society.

This thesis is predominantly focused on texts in English and examines the word *wyrm* in the surviving Old English vernacular corpus with the aim of understanding the meanings and association of the term. I will not consider *wyrm* in relation to the Latin term ‘uermis’ in the same way for two main reasons. Firstly, the semantic range of ‘uermis’ is broad and considering the full extent of this range would involve engaging with texts from the entire Latin-speaking world; as a result, it is beyond the scope of this project to engage fully with ‘uermis’. Secondly, the terms ‘uermis’ and *wyrm* vary in their physical and symbolic connotations, as I will discuss further in Chapter One,[6] animals which apparently fit into the indistinct category of *wyrmas* are not the same as those which fit into the category of ‘uermis’. The most prominent example of this is that of Isidore of Seville who includes separate categories in his ‘Etymologiae’ for vermin (‘uermis’) and for serpents (‘anguis') in which he places creatures which would have been referred to universally as *wyrmas* in Old English.[7] In order to avoid confusing the meaning of the two terms when comparing Anglo-Latin and Old English texts, it is necessary to focus on *wyrmas* in isolation from other related terms.

Since the focus of this thesis is on Old English texts, the majority of literary texts engaged with during this thesis are found in the substantial manuscripts: Exeter Cathedral

[6] See page 29 onwards.
[7] Isidore, IV, V, Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum, books XI-XX ed. by W M Lindsay, Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxonii : e typographeo Clarendoniano, 1911). Translations of the text from: *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. by Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 251, 258.

Library MS 3501, (the Exeter Book),[8] Biblioteca Capitolare di Vercelli MS CXVII, (the Vercelli Book),[9] London, British Library Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, (the Nowell Codex) [10] and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Junius 11 (the Junius Manuscript).[11] The texts in these manuscripts which include *wyrmas* will be examined to establish the symbolic role of *wyrmas* within them, and develop an understanding of the frequency and contexts in which *wyrmas* are used. In addition to these works, I will engage with the writings of Ælfric, Bede and anonymous homilists to gain insight into how theological questions were addressed by scholars and how doctrine was disseminated to a widely illiterate lay community.[12] I also consider medical texts such as London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D XVII, (Bald's Leechbook),[13] the Old English 'Herbarium' and 'Medicina de quadrupedibus'[14] in order to investigate the relationships between *wyrmas* and illness.

While a precise dating is often a source of debate, the texts examined in this thesis are predominantly found in manuscripts which date from the tenth and eleventh centuries. The Nowell Codex can be dated to approximately the early eleventh century.[15] The Vercelli Book

[8] The edition used for all texts from *The Exeter Book* is: *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936).
[9] The edition used for all texts from *The Vercelli Book* is: *The Vercelli Book*, ed. by George Phillip Krapp with the exception of the homilies for which the edition used is: *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts,* ed. by D. G. Scragg, EETS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[10] *Beowulf*, ed. and trans by Michael Swanton, revised edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.) All subsequent references to *Beowulf* are from this edition; for *Wonders of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* I will refer to appendices of: Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscripts* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1985; Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003).
[11] The edition used for all texts from The Junius Manuscript: Ed. G. P. Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931).
[12] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). All subsequent references to the 'HE' are from this edition.
[13] The edition used for Bald's Leechbook is: *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England,* volume II, ed. by Thomas Oswald Cockayne, in 3 vols (London: Rolls, 1864-66), pp. 1-298.
[14] The edition used for the *Herbarium* and *Medicina* is: *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de quadrupedibus,* ed. Hubert Jan de Vriend, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1984).
[15] The date of BL, Cotton MS Vitellius A XV is much debated, for further discussion see: Kevin Kiernan, 'The Beowulf Codex and the Making of the Poem', in *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (Michigan, University of Michigan, 1996), pp.171-278; Kevin Kiernan, 'The Eleventh-Century Origin of Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript', in *The Dating of Beowulf,* ed. by Colin Chase, Toronto Old English Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 9-22; E.G. Stanley, 'The Date of Beowulf: Some Doubts and No Conclusions', in *The Dating of Beowulf,* ed. by Colin Chase, Toronto Old English Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 197-212; L.E. Boyle, 'The Nowell Codex and the Poem of Beowulf', in *The Dating of Beowulf,* ed.

can be estimated to have been produced in the latter half of the tenth century before being carried to northern Italy, likely 'by some presumably wealthy Anglo-Saxon en route to or from Rome' on pilgrimage.[16] Although the production date of the Exeter Book can be estimated as the third quarter of the tenth century, the likely reference to the manuscript in 'an inventory of lands, ornaments and books Bishop Leofric of Crediton then Exeter, had acquired' demonstrates that it 'has been at Exeter since the third quarter of the eleventh century'.[17] Due to their date and their likely production within monastic settings given to the limited literacy of the laity of early medieval England, all of these manuscripts operate within and to varying extents promulgate a Christian viewpoint which influences my analysis; it is therefore important to look at as wide a range of other materials as possible in order to take account of how this viewpoint may be affecting interpretation of the *wyrmas.* Taking a purely single-discipline approach to these texts in such a study is flawed in any case, since much of the nuance of how and why the texts were produced is impacted by aspects of these disciplines. In order to facilitate a more complete understanding, therefore, this thesis will take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of *wyrmas* in early medieval England.

I understand interdisciplinary studies according to the definition offered by Allen F. Repko:

> Interdisciplinary studies is a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single

---

by Colin Chase, Toronto Old English Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp.23-32; Audrey L. Meaney, 'Scyld Scefing and the Dating of Beowulf – Again', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 71.1 (1989), 7-40; D. N. Dumville, 'Beowulf Come Lately: Some Notes on the Paleography of the Nowell Codex', *Archiv*, 225 (1988), 49-63.

[16] D.G. Scragg, 'The Compilation of the Vercelli Book, *Anglo-Saxon England,* 2 (1973), 189-207 (p.189).; Samantha Zacher and Andy Orchard, 'Introduction', in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book,* ed. by Zacher and Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 3-11(p.4).

[17] Robin Flower, 'The Script of the Exeter Book', *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry,* ed. R.W. Chambers, Max Forster and Robin Flower (London: printed and published for the dean and chapter of Exeter Cathedral by P. Lund, Humphries and co., 1933) cited in Patrick W. Conner, 'The Structure of the Exeter Book Codex. *Scriptorium,* 40.2 (1986), 233-242 (p.233).; Richard Gameson, 'The Origin of the Exeter Book of Old English poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 25 (1996), 135-185 (p.135).

> discipline, and draws on the disciplines with the goal of integrating their insights to construct a more comprehensive understanding.[18]

As this thesis makes clear, the topic of *wyrmas* and the question of their symbolic role within early medieval England is far too complex to be addressed by a single discipline. The study of surviving vernacular literature provides a substantial focus for my thesis, as this material provides the most complete evidence for the usage of *wyrmas* as a term; I will engage with literary material including poetry and prose works, secular and ecclesiastical texts and practical writings such as leechbooks. The literary analysis of texts allows me to interrogate the use of *wyrmas* in all of these contexts, and to consider the ways in which they are described, discussed and understood. However, I take a historicist approach and suggest that it is not possible to consider the literature produced in early medieval England without taking into account the historical context of the period as the two are innately connected. Repko suggests that the

> knowledge domain [of history] consists of an enormous body of *facts* […] It studies an equally enormous number of *concepts* or *ideas* […] It generates *theories* about why things turned out the way they did […] And it uses a *method* that involves critical analysis of primary sources […] and secondary sources […] to present a picture of past events or persons within a particular time and place.[19]

From this description it is easy to see how the disciplines of history and literature can be mutually beneficial. Indeed, the primary sources of historical analysis can be literary texts which are then analysed using literary methods in order to 'generate theories about why things turned out the way they did', while historical context provides further information to

[18] Alan F. Repko, *Interdisciplinary research: process and theory*, third edition (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017), p. 16.
[19] Repko, p. 4.

inform the reading of literary material.[20] In addition to considering the historical discipline, the significant religious development in England during the early medieval period means that the inclusion of theological material and techniques is essential in order to consider how the changes and development in Christian doctrine impacted both the lives and attitudes of early medieval people.

In addition to discussion of written material from a variety of different disciplinary perspectives, this thesis will also refer to and assess archaeological material in order to consider how texts contribute to the wider culture in which they were produced. Considering the significance of *wyrmas* within the grave and the anxieties surrounding consumption of the body in early medieval England, the scrutiny of burial practices is crucial, particularly when many texts depict the environment of the grave directly.[21] I have therefore extended my study to encompass such material where relevant. While predominantly focused on humanities subjects, this thesis has engaged with the scientific discipline of biology, specifically the subdiscipline of taxonomy. I was able to make use of this to develop my thinking about *wyrmas* as a category, and the ways in which modern categorisation can offer insights but also creates barriers in the quest for a full understanding of these creatures in the context of early medieval England.[22]

Drawing upon this subdiscipline has allowed me to consider the question of how *wyrmas* were understood by people in early medieval England in a new way. While interdisciplinary studies have limitations regarding the depth to which each discipline permits examination of each aspect of a question, the additional insight that this kind of study produces offers a more comprehensive understanding of *wyrmas.*

[20] Repko, p.4.
[21] For discussion of *wyrmas* in the grave see: Chapter Three, pp. 157-166.
[22] The taxonomy of *wyrmas* will be discussed further later in this Chapter.

The interdisciplinary approach of this project involved the creation of a database in which to record every known instance of *wyrm* in the surviving corpus.[23] Rather than merely considering the significance of each appearance of *wyrm* and analysing its role in a text, producing a database allows me to produce both qualitative and quantitative data which can be analysed to identify trends in how *wyrm* is used and when it appears. Building the database adhered to Repko's definition of interdisciplinary studies as it drew upon an existing body of factual knowledge – the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* – and analysed the data from this source using methods from multiple fields in order to produce a new interpretation and greater understanding of the early medieval attitude to *wyrmas.*

Of the limited amount of scholarly material which has previously been written about *wyrmas,* the majority has remained broadly focused on a particular discipline. While it does not engage directly with the period covered in my thesis, James H. Charlesworth's book *The Good and Evil Serpent* discusses serpent imagery from a theological perspective, providing useful insight into the development of serpent imagery and the possible impact of Christianity on the attitude of early medieval people towards creatures which could be described as *wyrmas.*[24] It is a book-length study of the significance of serpent imagery in Christian culture and how other cultures such as that of ancient Greece, Egypt and Mesopotamia fed into Christian interpretations of these creatures. Most significantly, Charlesworth's book summarises that the serpent's multivalency is due to the fact that it 'absorbed many contradictory meanings – light and darkness, life and death, good and evil, Satan and God', concluding that 'the serpent ceased to be a dominantly positive symbol in our culture about the fourth century CE.'[25] The multivalent nature of *wyrm* imagery is certainly observable in early medieval culture, with sources alluding to association between *wyrmas* and healing,

[23] For a discussion of the methodology behind the construction of the database see: Chapter One, pp. 61-87.
[24] James H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Chistianized* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2010).
[25] Charlesworth, p. 417.

wisdom and resurrection, despite clear evidence for the negative association of *wyrmas* as destroyers and polluters. Due to Charlesworth's considerable work studying Aramaic, Hebrew, and Classical texts, he is able to provide suggestions for reading much of the imagery associated with serpents in a Christian context. Due to its focus on the discipline of theology and since the texts with which it engages cannot be proven to have had any circulation there during the period I consider, Charlesworth's work cannot be relied upon as a resource for the interpretation and understanding of the symbolism of *wyrmas* in early medieval English culture. However, his insights into how serpent imagery developed more widely may reflect how attitudes in early medieval England were also affected by the spread and dominance of Christian beliefs and culture.

The symbolism associated with *wyrmas* is also highlighted by Heather Maring in her book *Signs That Sing: Hybrid Poetics in Old English Verse.*[26] While Maring's book focuses on the development of her concept of 'hybrid poetics', Maring engages with *wyrmas* in the second chapter through discussion of the connected terms 'gifre' and 'grædig' as part of a wider 'devouring-the-dead' theme. Maring illustrates how description of *wyrmas* as 'gifre' and 'grædig' in the 'Soul and Body' poems connects them with other uses of the words in depictions of Hell, funeral pyres, and sin to contribute to a recognised theme surrounded the fate of the body. [27] I will build on this in my discussions of *wyrmas* in the grave and the afterlife to consider how the links Maring makes can be seen in a wider range of texts and contexts than Maring's study explores.

The study of *wyrmas* in my thesis contributes to current areas of interest within the studies of Old English, early medieval England and Medievalist research more widely.

[26] Heather Maring, *Signs that Sing: Hybrid Poetics in Old English Verse* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 2017).
[27] Heather Maring, pp. 40 – 49.

Animal studies[28] is a broad interdisciplinary area which 'engages the many ways that human individuals and cultures are now interacting with and exploring other-than-human animals, in the past have engaged the living beyond our own species, and in the future might develop ways of living in a world shared with other animals.'[29] In addition to considering how humanity interacts with animals, animal studies goes further to consider questions of identity, otherness and how it may be possible to break down the human imposed binaries which exist between human and non-human animals.[30]

While this thesis is not a work of animal studies, it does engage with the natural world more generally and is concerned with the relationships between early medieval communities and the natural world. The interest in the natural world within the discipline of history has increased in particular due to growing resistance to the 'historic invisibility' of animals,[31] anthropocentrism and the replacement of these views with the understanding of animals as active agents in past societies rather than merely as an aspect of material culture.[32] People in early medieval England had a human-centric view of the natural world, largely due to the Christian paradigm of human-animal separation.[33] However, considering the importance that animals had, practically and culturally, the relationships between humans and animals and their impact on society cannot be downplayed. The importance of interactions between humans and the natural world in early medieval England is made clear by the fact that the majority of references to animals which survive in literature describe those creatures which

[28] Aubrey Manning and James Serpell ed., *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* ed. by Marie Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Cary Wolfe, 'Human, All Too Human: "Animal Studies" and the Humanities, *PMLA,* 124.2 (2009), 564-575; Susan McHugh, 'Modern Animals: From Subjects to Agents in Literary Studies, *Society and Animals,* 17.4 (2009), 363-367; Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages,* 2nd edn (London; New York: Routledge, 2011); Kristopher Poole, 'Engendering Debate: Animals and identity in Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Archaeology,* 57.1 (2013), 61-82; Brian Boyd, 'Archaeology and Human-Animal Relations: Thinking Through Anthropocentrism', *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 46 (2017), 299-316.
[29] Paul Waldau, *Animal Studies: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 10.
[30] Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2012), p.5.
[31] Weil, p. 26.
[32] Joyce E. Salisbury, p.1.
[33] Joyce E. Salisbury, pp.1-7.

exist in service to, or in conflict with, human communities. As such, aspects of animal studies research can be used to understand how aspects of the natural world, both real and mythical impacted the lives of people in early medieval England.[34]

Scholars researching early medieval England have discussed attitudes towards the concept of 'the natural world', or lack thereof, and in terms of evidence for attitudes towards particular creatures. Jennifer Neville's *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* exemplifies how texts can be interpreted in the context of early medieval relationships with animals in order to gain greater insight into why certain creatures were written about, while others were not.[35] Neville argues that 'not many animals, whether literary or native, appear regularly in poetry; being noticeable, useful, or even dangerous, does not guarantee a place in an Old English poem' and so those that are included should be viewed as having some specific significance that contributes to the work's meaning or process.[36] Neville acknowledges the significance of the group of creatures referred to as the 'beasts of battle' which have previously been discussed by critics including Adrien Bonjour and M.S Griffith, but also considers the role of other literary creatures including *wyrmas.*[37]

In more recent years, scholars researching the natural world have become interested in less visible creatures, including insects. John Baker notes that when studying perceptions of the natural world 'it is easy […] to overlook the less visibly or physically striking parts of the animal kingdom'.[38] However, as his work demonstrates through the appearance of these

[34] Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages,* Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011); Susan Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain,* First Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).
[35] Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[36] Jennifer Neville, p. 10.
[37] Bonjour, '*Beowulf* and the Beasts of Battle', *PMLA,* 72.4.1 (1957); M.S. Griffith, 'Convention and Originality in the Old English 'Beasts of Battle' Typescene', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 22 (1993), 179-199.
[38] John Baker, 'Entomological Etymologies: Creepy-Crawlies in English Place-Names', in *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia,* ed. by Michael D.J. Bintley and Thomas J.T. Williams (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), pp. 229-252 (p. 229).

creatures in place names, 'creepy-crawlies' were seen as significant in early medieval England due to their usefulness, ubiquity and often the nuisance they caused.

In 'Arachnophobia in Early English Literature', Megan Cavell considers the ways in which spiders have been presented and judged in classical, biblical and Latin texts to contextualise early medieval works in order to make an informed judgement regarding societal attitudes towards spiders.[39] While Cavell acknowledges the connection between spiders and other venomous or dangerous creatures, her intention is not to locate spiders within the context of other creatures with similar behaviours or features, but to recognise the significance of one creature in its own right. Cavell's work exemplifies how scholarly interest has moved to consider not only creatures which are commonly depicted within Old English texts, but instead the importance of human-animal relationships which may only be hinted at in surviving literary texts, but which may nonetheless offer important insights into early medieval cultural norms and expectations in relation to the natural world.

Much like Cavell's spiders and Baker's 'creepy-crawlies', *wyrmas* lack the prominence of creatures such as the 'beasts of battle' or those animals central to daily life in early medieval England like horses or livestock. I suggest, however, that *wyrmas* exemplify the breaking down of the binaries which exist between human and non-human animals, as their presence in and around the human body throughout life and after death makes their existence innately connected with that of the human. Indeed, while Old English texts do not invite 'critical empathy' towards *wyrmas,* the traits connected to these creatures are often recognisably human, such as the 'frod' (old and wise)[40] dragon or the 'gifre and grædig' (eager and greedy)[41] *wyrm* in the grave. These human features, along with the familiarity that early medieval people would have had with the majority of *wyrmas* contribute to the

[39] Megan Cavell, 'Arachnophobia in Early English Literature', *New Medieval Literatures,* 18 (2018), 1-43.
[40] *Beowulf,* l. 2277a.
[41] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* l.69a.

monstrousness of these creatures, and it is this monstrousness which requires my research to consider monster theory.

Monster theory has been described by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen as having seven theses: that monsters are of a certain cultural moment; that the monster always escapes; that monsters cannot be placed into a category; that monsters are 'other' but retain some similarities to 'us', with main differences being cultural, political, racial, economic or sexual; that monsters act beyond what is usually possible, that monsters are inherently appealing; and that monsters ask us a question about ourselves and our societies.[42] Aspects of these monstrous elements have been identified in early medieval monsters, and as such, monster theory has significantly impacted the study of early medieval England and its vernacular texts. The theses set out by Cohen can in particular be applied to the character of Grendel in *Beowulf,* who is can be read alongside Freud's theory of the 'unheimlich' or 'uncanny' in order to demonstrate that the reason for the fear response created by the Grendelkin is their role as uncanny hall-thegns and their mirroring of Beowulf.[43] The monstrous aspects of *Beowulf* are most famously addressed by J.R.R Tolkien in his landmark lecture and essay 'The Monsters and the Critics'.[44] Aspects of monster theory are present in the research undertaken for this thesis; indeed, many of the seven features of monsters defined by Cohen can be related to *wyrmas.* Cohen's third thesis, that monsters exist outside of typical categories, is particularly relevant to *wyrmas* and this concept will be explored further in Chapter One of this thesis.[45]

While discussion of *wyrmas* has been included in scholarly works such as Neville's monograph, the significance of *wyrmas* as a complete category has not been subject to a

[42] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses), in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25.
[43] David Sandner, 'Tracking Grendel: The Uncanny in *Beowulf', Extrapolation*, 40.2 (1999), 162- 177; Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny,* ed and trans by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 155-189.
[44] J.R.R Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics', in *The Monsters and the Critics: and Other Essays,* ed by Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).
[45] See Chapter One, pp. 38- 51.

book-length study, a gap which this thesis intends to fill. It is however, the case that scholars have considered specific appearances of *wyrmas* or touched on aspects of this broad area of study in their discussion of other topics. The most complete consideration of the *wyrm* prior to this thesis appears in 'The Gravestone, the Grave and the *Wyrm',* the fifth chapter of Victoria Thompson's 2004 monograph *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* which examines *wyrmas* from a predominantly historical perspective, but does draw to an extent on literary works.[46] In her introduction to the chapter, Thompson claims that 'many Anglo-Saxon texts and images attest to a heightened awareness that the body, living and dead, is threatened with being eaten at every stage of its existence' and that 'the *wyrm* […] is most continually linked to the condition of both body and soul.'[47] In this paragraph, Thompson engages with the key unifying element of *wyrmas* and acknowledges the significance of their consistent presence in the lives of early medieval people. Thompson also identifies that, despite their variety of forms, '*wyrmas* partake of some common qualities with which a Linnaean system of classification fails to cope, including poisonousness, an intimate relationship with human flesh, a taste for the same, an uncanny way of moving ('creopende'), the ability to disappear underground and a closeness to the dead.'[48] While I disagree with some of the specific qualities Thompson regards as 'common' to all *wyrmas,* such as the generalisation that they all enjoy the taste of flesh or have a closeness with death, her recognition of the failure of a Linnaean system to classify *wyrmas* is central to my understanding of the group as a whole.

The first sub-section of her chapter discussing 'the wyrm in written sources' aims to provide an overview of the significance of the written *wyrm*. To do this Thompson draws on texts from the Old English corpus and the works of literary critics including M.S. Griffith and

[46] Victoria Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge; Rochester: Boydell Press 2004), pp. 132-169.
[47] Thompson, p.132.
[48] Ibid.

J.R.R Tolkien to identify a number of significant themes, such as the relationship between *wyrmas* and Christian imagery (pp. 133-4), the frequency of parasitic infection (p.136) and the relationship between physical affliction and spiritual damnation (pp. 136-7). As is clear from the number of pages devoted to these ideas, however, Thompson does not engage with the wealth of source material available on these topics in order to explore the impact which *wyrmas* imagery had in these contexts, likely because the section is only intended to provide a summary of the topic. The following two sub-sections, 'The Aggressive *Wyrm'* and 'The Soul and Body Poems' are connected by their shared discussion of the *wyrm* as a consumer of the body, and the anxiety that this produced. Thompson makes interesting comparisons here between the *wyrm* and the beasts of battle and summarises *wyrmas* as 'dangerous, mysterious and hungry' which is a pleasing summary of much of their role within the grave.[49] In her discussion of the 'Soul and Body' poems, Thompson again highlights key themes and identifies the clear anxiety which exists in the poems surrounding whether the bodies of saved souls ought to be consumed in the grave, or whether individual sin and decay are related. As with the previous sub-sections, Thompson is limited by the scope of her discussion, with the two subsections together taking up only six pages.[50] There are certainly significant implications for the reading of *wyrmas* and interdisciplinary study following Thompson's discussion, as she is innovative in bringing together existing ideas about *wyrmas* in each of the texts described with archaeological evidence such as the York Coprolite. While she certainly achieves her apparent aim of providing an overview of the significance of *wyrmas* in literature, this brief summary, I believe, raises more questions than it answers regarding just how significant *wyrmas* were in the lives of early medieval English people.

In total, Thompson devotes only ten pages of 'The Gravestone, the Grave and the Wyrm' to explore the complex imagery which surrounds *wyrmas* in Old English literature;

[49] Thompson, p. 137.
[50] Thompson, pp.137-143. Page 139 is a whole page image and as such has not been included.

for the remaining twenty-six pages the focus shift to the appearances of *wyrmas* on physical objects such as the Masham Cross and York Minster stones. [51] While this is not a fault of Thompson's book and obviously reflects her areas of interest as an archaeologist and art historian, the choice not to pursue the insightful discussions about *wyrmas* in literature which Thompson initiates leaves extensive scope for further discussion. In the conclusion of her chapter, Thompson acknowledges that '*wyrmas,* big, small, good and bad, embody many ideas, but they meet around themes of transformation, providing interpretative frameworks for making sense of fundamental experiences of change, growth and decay.'[52]

My research in this thesis builds upon the questions raised by Thompson's work and addresses the current lack of depth and continuity in the examination of the significance of *wyrmas* as a whole grouping by taking an interdisciplinary approach. There are inherent challenges to recovering cultural ideas and their significance; clearly, with limited records and no surviving document containing discussion of cultural tropes, the interpretation of *wyrmas* must be pieced together from many, often fragmentary, sources which does raise the spectre of misinterpretation or misunderstanding. The most effective way to protect against incorrect assumptions is the engagement of as wide an array of sources as possible to ensure that a full sense of the cultural significance of the topic is considered. Careful consideration of the range of possible meanings and the effect that context has upon this is also essential. As such, the interdisciplinary approach I have taken in this thesis, using written records, archaeological data and theological texts both in Latin and Old English, will allow me to best consider the context within which *wyrmas* were encountered and understood.

[51] Ibid.
[52] Thompson, p.169.

The initial intention of this thesis was to examine the term *wyrmas* in its entirety and to include the semantically related terms *draca* and *næd[d]re*[53] in this discussion, as well as some rarer terms such as *angeltwicce* (bait-worm). During the data collection stage of research, it became increasingly apparent that the inclusion of *draca* and *næd[d]re* would produce a greater volume of data than it would be possible to process and discuss within the limitations of this thesis. A simple search of the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* produces 326 results for *draca* and 328 for *næd[d]re* in addition to the 428 instances of *wyrm* and its compounds which are included within my completed database.[54] In many cases, including in 'Beowulf' and the 'Letter from Alexander to Aristotle,' the terms *draca* and *næd[d]re* are used interchangeably with *wyrm* in relation to an individual creature; furthermore, there are appearances of these terms which I feel are central to the understanding of the culture surrounding these creatures, most notably in the case of the *draca* in 'Maxims II'.[55] Therefore, while this thesis is unable to engage in depth with the possible implications of the use of *draca* or *næd[d]re* rather than *wyrm*, it is necessary to include these terms in some of my discussion to avoid overlooking key contexts.

In addition to being unable to include a broader assessment of the terms surrounding *wyrm*, the scope of this thesis means I have been unable to provide an in-depth study of each type of creature which is classified as *wyrm.* An example of such a study is Christine Rauer's monograph entitled *Beowulf and the Dragon*, which focuses on dragons specifically and discusses how their role in Old English texts were influenced by Classical sources and Norse

[53] As with *wyrm*, because both *draca* and *næd[d]ran* are key terms within this thesis, they will be italicised and left without translation.
[54] *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* < http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/> [accessed July 2021]. When searching the *DOEC* for *næddran* I performed a search for the two most common spellings 'næddran' which produced 152 results and 'nædran' which produced 176; however, as there are other spellings, the final number of instances of this term is likely far higher than 328.
[55] Ellion Van Kirk Dobbie (ed), 'Maxims II', in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poem*s (London: Routledge, 1942), pp, 55-56 (l.27a).

analogues.[56] This work provides a model for in-depth study of a particular trope in early medieval English culture: Rauer's text is central to the understanding of how dragons were understood and how ideas and stories may have been transmitted between cultures.[57] The first section of *Beowulf and the Dragon*, '*Beowulf* and Early Medieval Dragon-fights' draws attention to the 'fact that the dragon is clearly intended to be understood as a monster of serpentine shape, as witnessed by the most frequently used term for the 'Beowulf' dragon, OE *wyrm* […] in conjunction with OE *draca';* this is the only reference which Rauer makes to the *wyrm* class and she does not discuss the significance of classifying the dragon as part of this group.[58] Much as with the limited discussion of *wyrmas* in *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England*, the lack of discussion of *wyrmas* in Rauer's book is result of its specific focus: the aim of *Beowulf and the Dragon* is not to locate dragons within the wider context of other creatures, *wyrmas* or otherwise, since this was beyond the remit of its research. While an in-depth study of each *wyrm* individually might have provided further insights into the origins of early medieval attitudes to *wyrmas*, the contribution of my research aims is to analyse the breadth of the group of creatures and consider what it is possible to learn about their impact from purely early medieval English sources, rather than to look into any one *wyrm* in greater detail as Rauer does. Rauer's exploration of Germanic literary dragon fights observes that the young heroes Sigurðr, Frotho and Friðleifr triumph against dragons, while Ragnarr, who triumphs against a dragon in youth, is killed by serpents in old age.[59] The motif of young heroes triumphing against dragons, while aged heroes are killed by them can also be seen in 'Beowulf' where the aged Beowulf is killed and the

[56] Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000).
[57] For more on the varied meanings of dragons, see: Louise W. Lippincott, 'The Unnatural History of Dragons', *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, 77.3334 (1981), 2-24; J Keith Wilson, 'Powerful Form and Potent Symbol: The Dragon in Asia, *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, 77.8 (1990), 286-323; Jonathan Evans, 'Medieval Dragon-lore in Middle-Earth', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 9.35 (1998), 175-191; Robert Blust, 'The Origin of Dragons', *Anthropos*, 95.2 (2000), 519-536; Sara Kuehn, *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011); Daniel Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents, and Slayers in the Classical and Early Christian Worlds: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[58] Rauer, p. 32.
[59] Rauer, pp. 41- 44.

youthful Wiglaf effectively kills the dragon, despite his comparative inexperience in battle.[60] This association of age provides a connection to the role of the *wyrmas* more widely as a bringer of violent death to some, but also to their accepted role within the natural orders of life and death; young, fit individuals are seen to be able to defeat a symbol of death while elderly individuals are less able to overcome it.

The research undertaken by scholars such as Thompson, Cavell and Rauer, and their excellent analysis of the significance of their chosen subjects, have enabled me to consider some of this in-depth study of *wyrmas* in my thesis. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary nature of my research has enabled me to apply the research undertaken by scholars in many disciplines to my question and further inform my understanding of the role of *wyrmas* in early medieval England. In order to demonstrate how imagery around *wyrmas* is present throughout the lives of people in early medieval England, my thesis is organised around life, death and afterlife. As each chapter addresses subject matter which requires particular theoretical grounding and contextual material, I will now outline the content of each chapter and present some of the key texts used in my research for each chapter.

Chapter One:

Chapter One is an extended methodological chapter which addresses the complex issues surrounding the categorisation of *wyrmas* as a group. As previously stated, the definition provided for *wyrm* by Bosworth-Toller is unsatisfactory due to the diverse and apparently unrelated features of many creatures which Old English texts describe as *wyrmas.*

This chapter addresses how the monstrousness of *wyrmas* is in part related to their lack of a defined category; this idea is not only explored by Cohen in relation to monster theory, but also by Mary Douglas in her discussion of 'swarming creatures' and food

[60] *Beowulf*, ll. 2672b- 2709a.

prohibitions.[61] I will suggest that *wyrmas* should be viewed as a 'fuzzy set', a theory based on categories with undefined boundaries first proposed by Lofi A. Zadeh and Joseph A. Goguen. [62] When approaching the categorisation of any object, Rosch states that 'issues of categorization […] have to do with explaining the categories found in a culture and coded by the language of that culture at a particular time.'[63] This view is central to my approach in categorising *wyrmas* as modern perceptions of how creatures should be grouped into categories inevitably varies from that of people in early medieval England due to the vast cultural shift which has occurred. Chapter One will consider how the influence of the Bible and of scholars such as Isidore of Seville may have impacted early medieval English peoples' understanding of the natural world; considering the impact of Bible on the period, and the influence of Isidore on many of the major scholars of the time including Bede and Ælfric, it is important to determine how the observable physical characteristics and traits of creatures described both by Isidore and by the Bible influenced the perception of *wyrmas*. In addition to examining what influenced contemporary understanding of *wyrmas*, I will assess modern taxonomical methods of categorising creatures and compare this with the available influences that may have impacted the principles of categorisation understood by early medieval people in order to conclude that the conscious or unconscious imposition of modern standards of Linnean categorisation on the wyrmas is profoundly unhelpful because when presented with *wyrmas* these systems 'fail to cope'.[64] Instead, I will show that *wyrmas* may be usefully

[61] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002).
[62] Joseph A. Goguen, 'The Logic of Inexact Concepts', *Synthese*, 19.3/4 (1969), 325-373; Brian Attebery, Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula, in *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1992); Lofi A. Zadeh, 'Fuzzy Sets and Systems', in *Fuzzy Sets, Fuzzy Logic, and Fuzzy Systems: Selected Papers by Lotfi A. Zadeh*, ed. G. J. Klir, B. Yuan (Singapore: Wold Scientific Publishing, 1996), pp. 35-43 (p.35); G. J. Klir, B. Yuan ed., *Fuzzy Logic, and Fuzzy Systems: Selected Papers by Lotfi A. Zadeh*, (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 1996).
[63] E. Rosch, 'Principles of Categorization', in *Cognition and Categorization*, ed. by Eleanor Rosch and Barbara B. Lloyd (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1978), pp. 27- 48 (p.28).
[64] Thompson, p. 132.

viewed in terms of how well they relate to the model of an ideal *wyrm*, rather than the adherence to certain criteria for category membership.

The remainder of Chapter One will provide details of my methodological approach to the categorisation of *wyrmas* within the database built to collect and collate each known appearance of *wyrm* in the surviving Old English corpus. To contextualise the full database provided on disk as an appendix to this thesis, I will present the key fields included in the database and justify my decision-making in relation to certain challenging examples from the Old English corpus. This chapter, along with my appendices, also presents tables including some of the key data from my research which contributes to the understanding of *wyrmas* within the framework of a 'fuzzy set'.

Chapter Two:

Chapter Two considers how *wyrmas* impacted upon the lives of people in early medieval England. There is a blurring of the boundaries between those *wyrmas* which existed in early medieval Britain, those which were real but non-native, and those which were entirely imagined. The boundaries between these states which exist in modern thought are not relevant when considering the role of *wyrmas* in the lives of early medieval English people; indeed, while those *wyrmas* native to Britain would be more commonly encountered, there would be no discernible difference between *wyrmas* which only existed in other lands and those which did not exist at all.

Despite the range of real and imagined *wyrmas* discussed in Chapter Two, their shared commonality is the disrupting influence associated with them. I will build upon Mary Douglas's argument for the belief in the corrupting influence of *wyrmas* if they were consumed in order to suggest that exposure to *wyrmas* more generally would have been

viewed as corrupting.[65] This will be argued in particular through the discussion of venom, and how the association between *wyrmas* and venom contributes to their perception as a corrupting influence on the body.[66] References to 'onflyge' (flying venom), have been connected with a basic understanding of infectious disease and, as a result, venomous creatures or creatures considered to be venomous likely became connected with sickness in general.[67]

The remainder of Chapter Two focuses on parasitic *wyrmas* which appear predominantly in leechbooks, as these are the most prevalent type of *wyrmas* within the surviving vernacular corpus.[68] While the high proportion of remedies which were against parasites might be dismissed as being simply a result of the endemic nature of parasitic infection during the period – and this is certainly a factor – the strong association between *wyrmas*, venom, and both physical and spiritual disruption suggest that the desire to rid the body of parasites was more than purely medical. Douglas and Meens suggest that 'unclean' animals including *wyrmas* inhabit a role as potential polluters which disrupted the balance of bodily and spiritual order; therefore, the association between *wyrmas* and illness leads to discussion of the relationship between disease and sin and how *wyrmas* may have been seen to factor into this relationship.[69] The discussion of *wyrmas* in life being corrupters of the body concludes by considering the relationship between *wyrmas* and *wyrms*, a term which the Bosworth-Toller Dictionary defines as 'corrupt matter'.[70] I suggest that their similar application within medical texts and their homophonic nature would have inevitably resulted in confusion between whether a creature or infection was present. Considering the

[65] Meens, p. 16.
[66] Audrey L. Meany, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness', in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture,* ed. Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall and David Klausner, Centre of Medieval Studies (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.12-32 (p.14).
[67] Meany, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness', pp.15-16.
[68] See Appendix II.
[69] Douglas, pp.56-57; Meens, p.16.
[70] 'wyrms', *Bosworth Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* < https://bosworthtoller.com/> [accessed June 2021].

associations between *wyrmas* and corruption already discussed, blurring of these two terms would have served to strengthen associations between *wyrmas* and the corruption of the body.

Chapter Three:

The third chapter of this thesis considers the significance of *wyrmas* in relation to normative death and the events surrounding death in England during the early medieval period. I define the term 'normative death' as referring to that experienced by individuals who die by any cause and are subject to the natural processes of death such as decay, and any of the usual cultural practices associated with the period.[71] While it is generally the case that so-called 'deviant' burials, those which do not conform to normal patterns of mortuary practices, are excluded from conversations around typical mortuary practice, it is unnecessary for my research to exclude these deviant burials as, while they are treated differently by the community, they are subject to the same laws of nature as other more typical corpses.[72] The main group that I exclude from my discussion of death in this chapter is those for whom the usual laws of nature do not apply – most notably the saints whose bodies remain incorrupt within the grave; these non-normative deaths will be discussed in the following chapter.

In order to contextualise the conversation around death, Chapter Three begins with an exploration of early medieval English mortuary practices and the surviving evidence which provides details about cultural attitudes towards death. I have relied upon the work of historians and archaeologists for accounts and analysis of key cemetery sites such as Spong Hill, Sutton Hoo and Raunds Furnells.[73] In addition to information regarding cemetery sites,

[71] For further reading on normative mortuary practices see: Dawn M Hadley and Jo Buckberry, 'Caring for the Dead in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Tinti (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), pp.121-147; Victoria Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England*; Jo Buckberry and Annia Cherryson ed., *Burial in Later Anglo Saxon England c.650-1100AD* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010); Duncan Sayer, 'Christian Burial Practice in the Early Middle Ages: Rethinking the Anglo-Saxon Funerary Sphere', *History Compass*, 11 (2013), 133-146; Clifford M. Sofield, 'Living with the Dead: Human Burial in Anglo-Saxon Settlement Contexts', *Archaeological Journal*, 172:2 (2015), 351-388.
[72] Reynolds, Andrew, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[73] Andy Boddington, *Raunds Furnells: the Anglo-Saxon Church and Churchyard*, English Heritage Archaeological Report, no. 7 (London: English Heritage, 1996); Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: a Seventh-Century*

analysis by Howard Williams and Marilyn Dunn around the possible cultural implications of archaeological evidence has provided a basis for some of my own work.[74] Dunn's book *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons (2009)* considers how Christian conversion impacted mortuary practice and attitudes towards some pre-Christian rituals. Dunn's exploration of ritual exposure, and the symbolic importance of the separation of flesh from bone through decay or cremation in relation to the bonds between body and soul, was central to shaping my argument that pre-Christian beliefs about the role of consumers within mortuary practice were adapted to conform to Christian doctrine.[75] To build upon the work of Dunn and Williams, I will consider how literary accounts of death and mortuary ritual can be used cautiously to enhance knowledge of behaviour around death.

Following my discussion of mortuary ritual and normative death, Chapter Three will consider how *wyrmas* contributed to the anxieties around consumption of the body and the interference of animals. I will consider how *wyrmas* relate to the group of creatures referred to as the 'beasts of battle' which *wyrmas* 'hover on the edge' of.[76] I will argue that archaeological evidence and depictions of *wyrmas* in the grave demonstrate that mourners felt the need to protect their dead against the interference of *wyrmas,* the only 'beast' from which burial was not sufficient protection. I will also consider how the imagery of consumption, and the attempts of mourners to protect the dead, reflects anxieties surrounding the role of *wyrmas,* remembrance of the deceased and the relationship between decay and damnation.

Princely Burial Ground and its Context, Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, no. 69 (London: British Museum Press, 2005); Kenneth Penn and Birte Brugmann, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Inhumation Burial: Morning Thorpe, Spong Hill, Bergh Apton and Westgarth Gardens,* East Anglian Archaeology, no. 119 (Dereham: Norfolk Museums Service, 2007).

[74] Howard Williams, 'Remembering and Forgetting the Medieval Dead', in *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003), pp.227-254; Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Marilyn Dunn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons c. 597-c.700: Discourses of Life, Death and Afterlife* (London: Continuum, 2009); Howard Williams, 'Engendered Bodies and Objects of Memory in Final Phase Graves', in *Burial in Later Anglo-Saxon England c.650-1100AD,* ed. Jo Buckberry and Annia Cherryson (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), pp. 26-37.

[75] Dunn, pp. 9-11; 85-100.

[76] Thompson, p.137.

This discussion leads to the consideration of how the grave is presented as an uncanny reimagining of the security of the Hall[77] and how the consumption of the body by *wyrmas* contributes to the trope of 'sleeping after the feast' suggested by Paul Battles.[78] Chapter Three concludes by suggesting that *wyrmas* were used to present the pre-Christian belief in the preservation of memory by the remembrance of deeds as futile and to direct audiences to the understanding of a spiritual afterlife over an earthly one.

Chapter Four:

Chapter Four considers the role of *wyrmas* following death in relation to the Christian afterlife; I will address Judgement Day, Hell, Heaven and Purgatory in turn to demonstrate that, although complex and varied, the symbolic importance that *wyrmas* had during life and death extended into the afterlife. Indeed, the continuation of *wyrmas* imagery contributes to the uncanny and monstrous nature of *wyrmas* as creatures which are simultaneously both familiar and unfamiliar.[79]

Unsurprisingly, depictions of Judgement and Hell in early medieval vernacular texts are broadly negative, with *wyrmas* depicted as tormentors of the damned, and sharing many physical and behavioural traits with the grave-dwelling *wyrmas* described in Chapter Three. Texts such as the 'Judgement Day' poems draw upon Biblical imagery in order to urge audiences to focus on the fate of their eternal soul as opposed to their earthly bodies and other transitory things. When compared to Judgement Day and Hell, there are comparatively few

[77] For further reading on the significance of the Hall see: Kathryn Hume, 'The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 3 (1974), 63-74; Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Nicolas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
[78] Paul Battles, 'Dying for a Drink: "Sleeping after the Feast" Scenes in Beowulf, Andreas and the Old English Poetic Tradition', *Modern Philology,* 112.3 (2015), 435- 457.
[79] For further reading on the uncanny see: Maria M. Tatar, 'The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny', *Comparative Literature,* 33.2 (1981), 167-182; Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny,* ed and trans by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 155-189; Sarah Bienko Eriksen, 'Traversing the Uncanny Valley: Glámr in Narratological Space', in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150-1400,* ed by Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd, The Northern Medieval World (Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp.89-108.

descriptions of Heaven which survive in early medieval vernacular literature, and *wyrmas* do not feature in the landscape of Heaven. However, rather than focusing on Heaven itself, Chapter Four considers how imagery of resurrection and rebirth relates to *wyrmas*, particularly in relation to Eden and the interim Paradise. Here, I return to some of the material relating to resurrection and skin-shedding that I have previously explored in chapter one, the focus in this chapter is less on taxonomy and more on theological implications. I analyse biblical instances relating *wyrmas* to resurrection alongside Isidore, Ovid and the silkworm metaphor for rebirth which appears in Ælfric's 'Catholic Homilies.' The positive imagery surrounding *wyrmas* in relation to resurrection and wisdom demonstrates the complexity of *wyrmas* imagery and the ability of early medieval English people to understand a single grouping to have multiple interpretations.

The majority of Chapter Four is concerned with the representation of the interim period between death and Judgment which developed into Purgatory.[80] In order to fully understand the impact of Purgatory on Old English literature and culture specifically, Ananya Jahanara Kabir's *Paradise, Death and Doomsday* and Helen Foxhall Forbes's *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England* have allowed me to consider how ideas relating to an interim paradise and post-mortem purgation developed prior to a more formalised acceptance of purgatorial doctrine in later centuries.[81] It is important to note however, as Foxhall Forbes states, that the impact of the Church and the papacy was uneven, meaning that 'what was

[80] My understanding of the development of Purgatory within Catholic religious doctrine was informed by a number of theological texts including: Graham Robert Edwards, 'Purgatory: 'Birth' or Evolution?', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 36.4 (1985),634-46; Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature,* Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.1-2; Jacques LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory,* trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984; 1986); Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Helen Foxhall Forbes, 'Diuduntur in Quattuor: the Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England', *The Journal of Theological Studies,* 61.2 (2010), 659- 684; Helen Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016).

[81] Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Helen Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016; 2013).

believed and practiced in any given local area may have been quite variable, both in terms of what was taught […] and in terms of what other beliefs might have circulated locally.'[82] Using Foxhall Forbes and Kabir as a basis, I will examine Bede's accounts of the visions of Fursa[83] and Drythelm[84] in order to establish the beliefs which were then in circulation around Purgatory. Following my discussion of the developing beliefs around post-mortem purgation, I will consider how the Exeter Book poem 'The Wife's Lament' can be read in light of the understanding of early medieval people's interest in the interim state. Elinor Lench originally proposed that speaker of 'The Wife's Lament' should be interpreted as being deceased and being a form of barrow-wight; I will suggest that it is more appropriate to view the speaker as residing in a purgatorial space.[85]

The remainder of Chapter Four considers the non-normative deaths of incorrupt saints such as SS. Cuthbert and Æthelthryth of Ely as the preservation of their bodies outside of the usual structures of life and death is uncanny and, according to Cynthia Turner Camp, 'temporally explosive and emotionally volatile.'[86] When considered alongside the material of Chapter Three, where *wyrmas* are presented as a horrible but inevitable fate of the earthly body, unrelated to damnation, the incorruption of some saints is potentially damaging to this assertion. I suggest instead that the painful consumption of the body by *wyrmas* which is described in Chapter Three should be viewed as part of the development of the belief in post-mortem purgation since both Æthelthryth and Cuthbert suffered extensively before death, cleansing them of the minimal sin which they had committed and allowing their bodies to escape the punishment of *wyrmas.* The role of *wyrmas,* then, becomes one of post-mortem purgation for venial sin as well as a necessary part of the natural process of decay.

[82] Foxhall Forbes, Heaven and Earth, p.26.
[83] Bede, 'Book III, Chapter XIX', *HE,* ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 298-277.
[84] Bede, 'Book V, Chapter XII' *HE,* ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 488-499.
[85] Elinor Lench, 'The Wife's Lament: A Poem of the Living Dead', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* 1.1 (1970), 3-23.
[86] Cynthia Turner Camp, 'The Temporal Excesses of Dead Flesh', *Postmedieval: A journal of medieval cultural studies,* 4.4 (2012), 416-426 (p.419).

By exploring the full extent of *wyrm* imagery in Old English literature and the wider culture of early medieval England, it is possible to say with confidence that the *wyrm* was a symbol which was recognised and understood by audiences in a similar way to key tropes such as the 'beasts of battle'. The multivalent and occasionally contradictory symbolism associated with *wyrmas* should not be viewed as problematic, as the creatures form part of a fuzzy set which allowed them to embody a variety of forms and behaviours as well as many meanings simultaneously. Through their associations with wisdom and healing, *wyrmas* became a symbol for resurrection and the hope of resurrection and new life after death; this imagery functioned alongside a wealth of imagery in Old English texts which depict *wyrmas* as tormentors, consumers, and corrupters of the body. Ultimately then, *wyrmas* embodied the anxieties of people engaging in discussions of bodily corruption, post-mortem purgation and afterlife in a developing Christian context, and attempting to understand how the interactions with *wyrmas* throughout their lives and deaths impacted themselves and their loved ones.

Chapter One: Opening a Can of Wyrmas: The Problems with Labelling

The 429 appearances of *wyrm,* its spelling variants and its compounds in the surviving Old English corpus describe creatures with a great deal of variation in both physical appearance and behaviour across a range of works including leechbooks, homilies and poetry.[1] As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the problems encountered when defining *wyrm* are highlighted by the vague dictionary definition provided by Bosworth-Toller; the categories provided to the translator - 'reptile, serpent, insect, worm' - cannot be easily distinguished between using the context of a text, and provide a very different set of mental images and associations when applied to a situation.[2] Indeed, while it could be argued that it is irrelevant whether a creature is understood to be a reptile or an insect, this distinction has an impact on the associations made by a modern audience, and on the interpretation of a text by those reading a text in translation. In defence of Bosworth-Toller, the constraints of the dictionary genre and the demand for a simple definition prevents the communication of the complexity of *wyrm.* However, it is necessary to consider how we impose order on a group of creatures as varied and complex as *wyrmas.* This chapter aims to demonstrate that modern expectations of taxonomy and classification must be abandoned in order to understand *wyrmas.* I will suggest instead that *wyrmas* must be understood as a 'fuzzy set' in which the blurring of boundaries between individual species forms a connected group of creatures, and that it is this blurring which allows for the richness of symbolic association which we find in the culture of early medieval England.

The first section of this chapter will consider categorisation theories and demonstrate why, despite having some flaws, it is more useful to consider the *wyrmas* category as a 'fuzzy set', rather than a category in the classical sense. The following two sections will then

[1] See Appendix III.
[2] 'wyrm', *Bosworth Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/> [accessed November 2019].

examine the methods of classification which can be applied to organisms and consider how these relate to *wyrmas.* I will begin by discussing modern methods of taxonomic classification used to categorise organisms in order to demonstrate that these are not suitable for application to *wyrmas* and that some of the scientific knowledge common in modern readers must be consciously abandoned in order to understand *wyrmas.* I will then discuss the sources of information about the natural world which were available to early medieval scholars and which may have impacted upon their understanding of *wyrmas* and the ways in which they grouped them within the order of nature. This chapter will conclude with an examination of the database I created to collect and collate the instances of the term *wyrm,* along with its compounds and spelling variants, within the surviving Old English corpus. The final section of this chapter addresses my methodological approach to the process of categorising *wyrmas* and justifies my decision-making process. I also present a summary of the key categories of *wyrmas* which will feature in this thesis to ensure clarity when these terms are encountered in subsequent chapters.

Categorisation Theory and Wyrmas

Richard A. Richards suggests that 'Classification is an unavoidable natural human tendency' and one which can be observed throughout history and across cultural boundaries; as such, scholars such as Aristotle, Plato and Augustine have attempted to find and impose order on the world.[3] When approaching classification and categorisation, classical set theory establishes a binary system summarised by George Lackoff and Mark Johnson:

> On the objectivist view, a category is defined in terms of set theory: it is characterized by a set of inherent properties of the entities in the category. Everything in the universe is either inside or outside the category. The things that are in the category are

[3] Richard A. Richards, *Biological Classification: A Philosophical Introduction*, Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy and Biology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p.10.

> those that have all the requisite inherent properties. Anything that fails to have one or more of the inherent properties falls outside the category.[4]

When approaching *wyrmas* in the surviving Old English corpus it is perhaps tempting to consider an objectivist view, as the 'inherent property' in each text is simply whether a creature is either described as *wyrm* or is not. However, taking an objectivist approach to language in isolation is problematic as there is too much variation between texts in terms of the ways in which creatures are described. For example, while snakes are exclusively described as *wyrmas* in 'Judgement Day II', they are described interchangeably as *wyrmas* and as *næd[d]ran* in 'Genesis B', placing snakes between two categories; furthermore, 'Marvels of the East' describes snakes only as *næd[d]ran,* meaning that if we use 'Marvels of the East' as a basis for classification, snakes cannot be placed in the *wyrm* category at all.[5] When categorising the *wyrmas* themselves, the flaws of an objectivist view are exposed further as the problem of variation applies to a greater extent; when attempting to establish a 'set of inherent properties' for *wyrmas,* it is not possible to devise a satisfactory list. Indeed, if we examine four creatures for which there is at least one surviving example of them being described as *wyrmas,* an earthworm, a spider, a snake and a slowworm, there are no 'inherent properties' which are identifiable in all of them. However, the use of *wyrm* to describe each of these creatures suggests that there must be a reason beyond observable properties for their grouping and that creatures can be part of the group to a varying degree. It is clear that attempting to establish an objective sense of a creature being a *wyrm* or not being a *wyrm* is not possible, since they do not fit an established pattern. This is a result both of the variation within the group and the fact that '[d]ifferent people may have different category rankings depending on their experience or their knowledge or their beliefs'; indeed, as surviving texts

[4] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we Live By* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.123.
[5] See Appendix IV

were produced in a variety of centres and based on diverse sometimes unknown analogues, individuals likely had different opinions regarding which creatures should be called *wyrmas.*[6]

Instead of approaching *wyrmas* with an objectivist view, it is necessary to accept the blurring and subjectivity between membership and non-membership of the class. Fuzzy set theory, developed by Lofti A. Zadeh, suggests that 'instead of just being in the set or not, an individual is in the set to a certain degree', and that this can be represented numerically as a number between zero and one, with zero being an entity with no relation to the class, and one being full membership.[7] This can certainly be applied to *wyrmas* as the frequency which creatures are described as *wyrm* in Old English varies, as do the *wyrm*-like features of each. I would regard snakes to have a membership degree of one as they are commonly described as *wyrmas* and exemplify the features I consider *wyrm*-like, while an unrelated creature such as a dog would have a membership degree of zero. Complexity arises when considering the degrees of membership between 0 and 1. Dragons could be regarded as 0.5 as their appearance in the corpus as *wyrm* is less widespread, primarily found in 'Beowulf', and they demonstrate features such as flight and fire breathing which are not typical of *wyrmas.* Spiders may be considered to have a membership of 0.3 or less as they are a relative outlier to the group as they are referred to as *wyrm* only twice and differ considerably in appearance to the more typical members of the group such as snakes.[8] Despite its merits in allowing for varying degrees of membership, this approach is flawed as this grading is based upon my personal understanding of categorising *wyrmas* based on my perception of the group. Due to the individual nature of categorisation and the cultural and contextual distance between modern audiences and early medieval ones, my judgement cannot be taken as a basis for understanding how people in early medieval England understood *wyrmas.*

[6] George Lakoff, 'Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts', *Journal of Philosophical Logic,* 2.4 (1973), 458-508 (p. 461).
[7] Lakoff, 'Hedges', p.461.
[8] Further discussion of spiders can be found on pages 78-79.

Similarly to Zadeh, Eleanor Rosch argues that people think of category membership as a matter of degrees and that membership to a noun category is 'coded […] neither by means of lists of each individual member […] nor by means of a list of formal criteria necessary and sufficient for category memberships but […] in terms of a prototype of a typical category member.'[9] Lakoff and Johnson assert that due to this, '[t]here need be *no fixed core* of properties that are shared […] because each [entity], in its different way, is sufficiently close to the prototype.'[10] Lakoff defines degrees of membership in the following way:

a. A robin is a bird. (true)

b. A chicken is a bird. (less true than a)

c. A penguin is a bird. (less true than b)

d. A bat is a bird. (false, or at least very far from true)

e. A cow is a bird. (absolutely false)[11]

In this example, the robin is the central member of the category, with all other birds relating to the robin; Lakoff calls this prototypical example of a category the member 'par excellence'.[12] Lakoff takes this further by establishing that categories can be extended using modifiers, which he calls 'hedges' which 'pick out the prototype for a category and that define various kinds of relationships to it.[13] For example:

Par excellence: the prototypical member of a category.

Strictly speaking: nonprototypical cases that ordinarily fall within the category.

[9] Eleanor Rosch, 'Human Categorization', in *Studies in Cross-Cultural Psychology,* vol.1, ed. Neil Warren, 2 vols (London: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 1-49 (p.30).
[10] Lakoff and Johnson, p. 123.
[11] Lakoff, 'Hedges', p.461.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, p.471.

> Loosely speaking: things that are not ordinarily in the category because they lack some central property but which share enough properties so that for certain purposes it could make sense to consider them category members.[14]

The approaches of both Rosch and Lakoff can usefully be applied to *wyrmas* as many of the category members can be regarded as nonprototypical, and thus become members of the category to various degrees, strictly or loosely speaking. This gives the creatures the same sense of degrees of membership as Zadeh's 'fuzzy set' but by removing the requirement for numerical grades to be assigned to each creature, Rosch's and Lakoff's approaches provide a greater amount of freedom to allow for variation between individual perceptions of the set.

A problem still arises when attempting to identify the *wyrm par excellence.* There are contenders for this role based on which creatures we most often believe *wyrm* refers to; however, based on the data collected for this thesis, the prototypical *wyrm* would be the parasite as this is the most common type of *wyrm* in the surviving corpus.[15] Due to the limited written corpus which survives and our inability to access the society which formed the *wyrmas* category, it is not possible to use frequency to reach conclusions regarding what the prototypical *wyrm* is. The example of the prototypical bird is largely based on observable physical features and abilities; however, it is difficult to establish physical and behavioural traits for the *wyrmas* prototype due to the range of variation within the category. *Wyrmas* can be legless or have up to eight legs; they can be microscopic in size or gigantic; furthermore, some *wyrmas* fly while others reside within the body. Similarly, *wyrmas* cannot be categorised by purpose or role as while certain roles such as consuming bodies or aggressive behaviour are often displayed, they are not consistent enough to be viewed as a defining feature of the creatures. Considering the complexity of the set and the lack of a *wyrm par*

[14] Ibid.
[15] See Appendix II.

excellence, fuzzy set theory and other methods of understanding categorisation are not fully satisfactory in understanding *wyrmas.* Despite this, the basic concept defined by Zadeh, Lakoff and Rosch that categories do not have firm boundaries and their members vary in their degree of membership can still be used effectively to consider *wyrmas.* Certainly, approaching *wyrmas* as a fuzzy set for which we as modern readers cannot access the prototype allows us to rationalise the membership of creatures which modern preconceptions would immediately discount from the group.

The preconceptions which are inevitably applied by modern readers due to our education in evolutionary science and modern taxonomic classification cannot be entirely removed. However, in order to approach *wyrmas* in a constructive way, it is necessary to understand how modern conceptions of classifying organisms impact upon our ability to recognise *wyrmas* as a group.

Understanding the classification of organisms began with Aristotle who argued that 'to determine the essence of a thing, it is necessary to determine first its *generic* nature and second, its *specific* attributes – the *differentia* that distinguish it from other kinds of things that share the generic nature.'[16] In early medieval Europe the biological works of Aristotle were essentially forgotten, but works by Plato and others who drew on Aristotle influenced later scholars such as Augustine who 'interpreted Plato's metaphysics within a Christian framework, where *species* were ideas in the mind of God' and that these ideas governed creation.[17] Ultimately, it was the work of Carolus Linnaeus and then Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which paved the way for the methods of categorisation recognised by modern science.

[16] Richards, p.40.
[17] Richards, p.53.

Taxonomy is the systematic classification of living organisms; while there are accepted methods of classification in modern science, debate still exists around what the most effective methods of classification are, as the imposition of artificial categories on nature is inherently flawed.[18] When considering how to decide the 'correct' way to categorise organisms, Brian Garvey poses two separate questions:[19]

(i) *How are we to decide which creatures should be grouped together?*

(ii) *How are we to decide how to rank different groupings?*

This chapter is concerned with the first of these two questions as this is most relevant to considering how early medieval people viewed *wyrmas.*[20] Linnaeus concluded that 'all individual organisms are grouped into species that are then grouped together into higher level taxa – genera, orders, classes, and kingdoms', and it is this basis from which we have the familiar hierarchical structure of biological classification.[21]

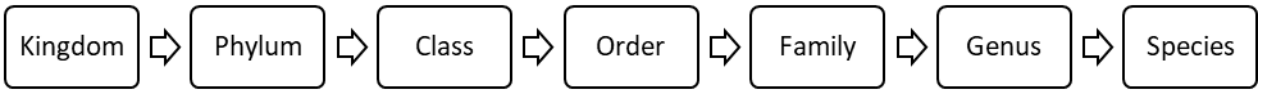


Figure One: Taxonomic Rank

While this method of hierarchical classification provides a structure for taxonomists, it does not address the decision-making process around deciding which organisms should be grouped together. Modern science is concerned with identifying 'natural kinds' which 'are categories that are actually there *in nature*, as opposed to being impositions on nature for our own

[18] For an introduction to debates around categorisation see: Brian Garvey, *Philosophy of Biology* (Stocksfield: Accumen, 2007; London, New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.127-142.
[19] Garvey, p.131.
[20] The discussions around taxonomy by philosophers and biologists are too complex for me to fully explore in this thesis. The introductory texts used to inform this chapter are: Marc Ereshefsky, *The Poverty of the Linnaean Hierarchy: A Philosophical Study of Biological Taxonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Brian Garvey, *Philosophy of Biology*, 2014; Richard A. Richards, *Biological Classification: A Philosophical Introduction*, 2016*;* David M. Williams and Malte C. Ebach, *Cladistics: A Guide to Biological Classification*, Third Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[21] Richards, p. 6.

convenience.'[22] In order to do this, there are two central methods for grouping creatures, 'phenetic taxonomy, [which] is based on how similar organisms are to each other [and] cladistic taxonomy, [which] is based on what creatures are descended from what.'[23] With these two approaches in mind, we can use three ocean-dwelling creatures as examples: the blue whale, the blue shark and the blue-fin tuna.

When approaching these three organisms from the perspective of phenetic taxonomy it is possible to identify a number of currently observable shared traits, such as having a blue appearance, using swimming as method of locomotion, surviving through the consumption of other organisms and being ocean-dwelling. While these factors are not entirely arbitrary in telling an observer about the organisms in question, it is not sufficient to establish the classification of the blue shark, the blue fin tuna and the blue whale because some features are superfluous and are not features of fundamental scientific interest. It may be arguable that the fact that all of these creatures swim is sufficient to classify them as a single category: 'Linnaeus classified whales as mammals because they possess mammary glands, a warm bilocular heart and so on. In making this decision, he probably thought of these as essential features of mammals, and having legs or living on land as non-essential', as such, it is not the act of swimming which is important for the classification of the whale.[24] Similarly, the majority of features shared between the tuna, the blue whale and the blue shark are not essential to their classification. In order to be classed together it is necessary to identify a large cluster of shared traits between organisms which is very strongly marked but does not eliminate some variation between individual organisms.

[22] Garvey, p. 127. I am indebted to Brian Garvey and to Sarah Hitchen for kindly sending me a copy of the lecture notes for a lecture given by Garvey on Taxonomy at Lancaster University, Autumn 2020.
[23] Garvey, p. 132.
[24] Garvey, p. 132.

Unlike phenetic taxonomy which looks to identify clusters of shared traits between organisms, cladistic taxonomy focuses on establishing common ancestry between organisms. Garvey summarises as follows:

> Whales belong with mammals and not with fish because there is a common ancestor that all and only all the other mammals, plus whales, have. To find a common ancestor with whales and fish, you would have to go a lot further back in evolutionary history. […] [T]he reason whales themselves constitute a natural kind, is that they share a common ancestor with each other that they do not share with anything else.[25]

For the reasons outlined by Garvey, the whale must be separated from the blue fin tuna and the blue shark. Furthermore, while the blue shark and the blue fin tuna may appear more closely related than either is to the whale, they too are classified separately due to the deviation of their common ancestry which makes one part of the classes *Actinopterygii* and *Chondrichthyes* respectively, demonstrating that they have no more recent a common ancestor with each other than to the whale. While it is more objective than phenetic classification, cladistic taxonomy is not without its faults.

Ultimately, Garvey suggests that regardless of the method used to classify organisms in modern taxonomy, there are limitations to its usefulness which requires us to accept indeterminate answers. That modern taxonomy remains a complex philosophical and biological debate demonstrates the problematic nature of attempting to classify organisms; however, for classifications which are broadly accepted, such as the fact that whales are mammals, it is very difficult to disregard this knowledge. When examining the fields of ethnobiology and ethnotaxonomy, the study of how other cultures approach classifying organisms, Richards highlights that '[e]thnobiologists typically approach and understand the thinking of the local informants within the framework of their own scientifically informed

[25] Garvey, p. 134.

views. If they know much about Linnaean classification […] then this likely becomes the basis of comparison.'[26] This is certainly the case when approaching *wyrmas* as it is not possible to entirely disconnect ourselves from our modern understanding of evolution and the knowledge that many of the creatures referred to as *wyrmas,* such as spiders and snakes, are only very distantly related.

Figure 2: Comparison Between Four *Wyrmas*

	Common European Earthworm	Adder	Slow worm	Domestic House Spider
	 27	 28	 29	 30
Kingdom	Animalia	Animalia	Animalia	Animalia
Phylum	Annelida	Chordata	Chordata	Arthropoda
Class	Clitellata	Reptilia	Reptilia	Aracnida
Order	Haplotaxida	Squamata	Squamata	Araneae
Family	Lumbricidae	Viperidae	Anguidae	Agelenidae
Genus	*Lumbricus*	*Vipera*	*Anguis*	*Tegenaria*
Species	*Terrestris*	*Berus*	*Fragilis*	*Domestica*

[26] Richards, p. 12.
[27] Aruna, 'Earthworm', Digital Photograph CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12602652> [accessed May 2020].
[28] By Thomas Brown, 'European Adder (Vipera berus)', Digital Photograph, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27451147> [accessed May 2020].
[29] Anon, 'Slowworm', Digital Photography, CC BY-SA 3.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=22209 [accessed May 2020].
[30] David Short, 'Common (Domestic) house-spider', CC BY 2.0 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=63873340> [accessed May 2020].

Figure two shows the taxonomy of four examples of creatures which I previously placed into the *wyrm* fuzzy set to some degree: the snake, earthworm, slowworm and spider. For this example, it is necessary to specify the species of creature, so I have chosen four creatures native to England which, therefore, may have been encountered in early medieval England: the adder, common European earthworm, the slowworm and the domestic house spider. The common European earthworm, domestic house spider and the adder share only their Kingdom, *Animalia*, demonstrating that their common ancestry is very distant; indeed, the deviation of the chordate and arthropod phyla is estimated to have occurred 993 +/- 46 million years ago.[31] The slowworm and the adder share a more recent common ancestor as they both inhabit the Order *Squamata*; however, they deviate at this point, a deviation which results in the slow-worm occupying the family *Anguidae* and so being recognised as a legless lizard while the adder is classified a snake.[32] In phenetic terms, the slow-worm and the adder appear to share some features with the earthworm, as they are legless, smooth and inhabit similar environments; however, these are clearly not features which modern science would consider central to their classification and analysis of their phylogeny shows that they do not share a recent common ancestor as they occupy different Families. It is perhaps unsurprising that the phenetic analysis of creatures performed by an untrained observer finds similarities between slowworms, adders and earthworms and this group alone would suggest that the *wyrm* fuzzy set has a *wyrm par excellence* which shares the traits of this group. However, it is difficult to see how similarities can be found between the domestic house spider and the other three creatures, as they are arthropods with jointed legs and an exoskeleton, demonstrating the variation possible within the set when the creatures which are at the 'fuzzy' edges of the set are added for comparison.

[31] D Y Wang, S Kumar, and S B Hedges, 'Divergence time estimates for the early history of animal phyla and the origin of plants, animals and fungi', *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences,* 266, 1415 (1999), 163–171 (p. 167).
[32] University College London, 'Vertebrate Diversity' <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums static/obl4he/vertebratediversity/squamata.html> [accessed 16 June 2022].

Figure Three: Observable traits of *wyrmas*

	Legs	**Flight**	**Arthropod**	**Venom**	**Sheds Skin**	**Lays Eggs**
Reptilia (serpent)	0<	X	X	✓	✓	✓
Insecta (locust, caterpillar)	6	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
Arachnida (Spider, scorpion)	8	X	✓	✓	✓	*Some*
Clitellata[33] (Worm)	0	X	X	X	X	✓
Helminth (Parasitic worm)	0	X	X	X	*Some*	✓
Dragon	>2	✓	X	✓	✓	✓

In order to understand why the creatures at the edges of the set, such as spiders, might be considered alongside more typical members, figure three shows the similarities and differences between creatures which are described as *wyrmas* in Old English texts on at least one occasion.

What is clear from figure three is that no two creatures share the clusters of traits which would usually be expected to be used to group creatures together through phenetic taxonomy. The two traits which are expressed in almost all *wyrmas* are the ability to shed their skins and the production of young through laying eggs and this may provide some basis for the inclusion of spiders in the fuzzy set on some occasions. Despite egg-laying being common to all *wyrmas,* it is not possible to base the classification of *wyrmas* as a group on this single

[33] While the Class clitellata includes some parasites, such as leeches, the parasites I regard as the most significant in terms of Old English *wyrmas* are those of the Class Helminth.

feature as it would require creatures such as birds and many fish to be forced into the *wyrm* category. Further complexity when using these two traits as a basis for categorisation results from the extent to which it is possible to observe these traits; indeed, while we are able to study the behaviours of the majority of *wyrmas* in a modern context, some of these traits may not have been clear to early medieval observers. The scorpion, which like spiders is described as *wyrm* on rare occasions, is problematic for this reason since they can reproduce both through viviparity, giving birth to live young, and through ovoviviparity, meaning that they produce eggs, but that these eggs are retained by the mother and hatch within the body; without scientific equipment it is difficult to observe the difference between these two processes, so it would appear that the scorpion always produces live young.[34] Similarly, nematodes (roundworms) shed their skins as they grow while cestodes (tapeworms) do not; however, cestodes are made up of segments which shed regularly as part of the reproductive process. Therefore, while they do not shed in the same way as nematodes, their shedding does leave visible discarded body parts.

For both scorpions and parasitic worms, furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain how much knowledge audiences in early medieval England had about their traits due to them being largely unseen. Certainly, while parasitic infestation would have been commonplace, infection with parasites would be unlikely to provide any clear information regarding their lifecycle. Similarly, as scorpions are mentioned comparatively few times compared to more typical *wyrmas* and are never described in detail there would be little information available about their traits. Furthermore, as scorpions are not native to England, it seems very unlikely that early medieval authors or audiences would have encountered one in order to observe behaviours for themselves. This lack of opportunity to observe traits is most significant in relation to the dragon as, in a modern context, they are understood to be fictional. As I will

[34] Michael Warburg, 'Scorpion reproductive strategies, allocation and potential; a partial review', *European Journal of Etymology*, 108, 2 (2011), pp. 173-181 (p.173).

further establish in the following chapter, the boundaries between real and imagined creatures are blurred in the context of early medieval England as those creatures which cannot be observed due to being non-native are, practically speaking, as fictional as dragons. The classification of creatures as *wyrmas* is clearly not problematised by the ability to observe certain traits, nor is there requirement for a large number of traits to be shared in order to be considered a *wyrm.*

Clearly modern taxonomy cannot provide a basis for why certain creatures are categorised as *wyrmas.* Cladistical taxonomy and the understanding of common ancestry which shapes modern perceptions of biological relationships must be disregarded since Linnaeus was not to begin publishing until 1735, and Darwin did not publish *On the Origin of Species* until 1859.[35] However, the basis of observed similarities between creatures cannot be entirely discounted as a basis for the grouping of *wyrmas,* as studies in ethnotaxonomy show us that cultures throughout the world categorise creatures without recourse to western scientific models.[36] Despite this, when we examine *wyrmas,* it is not necessarily clear which observable features would provide a basis for the group.

I suggest instead that it may be this very fact which defines the *wyrmas:* rather than allowing a modern desire to find relationships between creatures to influence our thinking, we should regard the *wyrmas* as a group as a result of the feeling they evoke in those who encounter them. This is the case in ethnobiological studies where it is necessary to disregard the Linnean system because 'folk taxonomies may be eclectic, incorporating practical and cultural criteria as well as biological.'[37] As I will discuss in the following three chapters, all *wyrmas* are depicted as 'other' and produce a feeling of unease and often revulsion; indeed, as with cultures studied by ethnobiologists, it may be necessary to consider the key

[35] Charles Darwin, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [accessed March 2021].
[36] Richards, pp. 11- 21.
[37] Richards, p.21.

categorising trait of *wyrmas* to be their impact on humanity as opposed to a feature they themselves possess.

How did people in early medieval England classify organisms?

When considering how categorisation can be understood, Eleanor Rosch states that:

> [t]he issues of categorisation with which we are primarily concerned have to do with explaining the categories found in a culture and coded by the language of that culture at a particular point in time. When we speak of the formation of categories, we mean their formation in the culture.[38]

Due to the cultural shift highlighted by Rosch, it is in many ways impossible to ascertain how early medieval people categorised organisms themselves. Indeed, our own cultural understanding of organisms in entirely incompatible with that of early medieval England as Neville notes the absence of a term in Old English which defines 'the natural world', stating that 'this gap in the […] vocabulary is not an accident caused by the loss of manuscripts. It reflects the absence of the concept itself.'[39] On this basis, in order to clearly consider what defines *wyrmas* it is necessary to disregard modern taxonomy and focus upon what was available to early medieval observers of the natural world. However, texts written during the period, and those texts which we have evidence were available to some individuals, offer insight into how early medieval scholars viewed animals as they provide evidence for the cultural and linguistic basis for the formation of the category.[40]

[38] Eleanor Rosch, 'Principles of Categorization', in *Cognition and Categorization*, ed by E. Rosch and B. B. Lloyd (Hillsdale, NS: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1977), p. 28.
[39] Neville, p. 2.
[40] It is beyond the scope of this project to examine every last source which may have had influence on early medieval approaches to classifying organisms. Instead, my discussion addresses the major texts in this area, although it cannot be claimed with absolute certainty that the texts discussed here always had a more significant impact on early medieval scholars than texts I do not discuss.

Isidore of Seville's 'Etymologiae' was available to early medieval scholars and is a likely source for the 'Liber Monstrorum' and works by Ælfric and Bede.[41] The 'Etymologiae' groups creatures into several categories, including livestock and beasts of burden, small animals and birds; while there are a number of categories which may include creatures which early medieval English people recognised as *wyrmas,* I will focus my discussion on three of the groups described by Isidore, namely the categories of 'bestiae', 'anguis' and 'vermis'. 'De Bestiae' is a broad grouping, but notably, Isidore explicitly excludes serpents from this category:

> II) De Bestiis. Bestiarum vocabulum proprie convenit leonibus, pardis, tigribus, lupis et vulpibus canibusque et simiis ac ceteris, quae vel ore vel unguibus saeviunt, exceptis serpentibus.[42]

Isidore clearly views the method of attack used by these animals as the key features by which to classify them, disregarding physical differences such as being bipedal or quadrupedal, and including domesticated animals such as dogs. The additional clause of 'excepting serpents' demonstrates that, while serpents appear to belong in the category of beasts due to their prominent teeth, Isidore thinks it appropriate to exclude them. It is interesting too that Isidore sees fit to specify serpents' separation from this group; this may suggest that he believed the majority of people would classify serpents with beasts and wished to correct them. Regardless of the reason for the inclusion of this phrase, Isidore clearly felt it necessary to explicitly clarify that serpents were not members of this group rather than to merely omit them from the list of creatures which he does regard as 'beasts'. As such, serpents have an

[41] *Etymologiae*, *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/fontes> [accessed March 2021].
[42] Isidore, 'II.1', ed. by W M Lindsay. 'Beasts: The term 'beast' properly speaking, includes lions, tigers, wolves, foxes, dogs, apes and other animals that attack either with their mouth or their claws, excepting serpents.' Translation by Stephen A. Barney, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.251.

entirely independent category in which Isidore described twenty-eight different creatures along with explaining more generally the traits of serpent creatures:

> De serpentibus. Anguis vocabulum omnium serpentium genus quod plicari et contorqui potest […] Colubrum ab eo dictum, quod colat umbras, vel quod in lubricos tractus flexibus sinuosis labatur. […] Serpens autem nomen accepit quia occultis accessibus serpit […] Quorum tot venena quot genera, tot pernicies quot species, tot dolores quot colores habentur.[43]

The description of serpents as defined by their creeping movement is particularly significant as Old English texts most often describe the movement of *wyrmas* using the verbs 'creopan', 'slincan' and 'snican.'[44] Furthermore, Leviticus XI specifies that 'All that creepeth upon the earth shall be abominable', again placing focus on the creeping movement of certain creatures as a defining and problematic feature.[45] Similarly, The Old English 'Hexameron' describes serpentkind moving in this way, 'On ðam syxtan dæge ure Drigten gecwæð: Acenne seo eorðe nu cuce nytenu on heora cynryne and þa creopendan wyrmas and eall deorcynn on heora cynrynum'.[46] As with Isidore's description, it is the creeping movement of serpents which is given as their defining feature by the author of the 'Hexameron' as they too include 'creopan'. Considering that little description is given of other creatures beyond the 'deorcynn,' that the author finds the way that *wyrmas* move significant enough to include it

[43] Isidore, IV.1, ed. by Lindsay. ''Serpent' (anguis) is the term for the family of all snakes, because they can bend and twist […] The coluber (i.e another word for 'snake') is named thus because it 'inhabits the shadows' (colit umbras) or because it glides in slippery (lubricus) courses with sinuous curves. […] The snake (serpens) takes its name because it creeps (serpere) by discreet approaches […] Of these animals there are as many poisons as there are kinds, as many varieties of danger as there are of appearance, and as many causes of pain as there are colours.' trans. by Barney, p.255.

[44] There are thirteen uses of *creopan, slincan* and *snican* in the data recorded for this project. While this does not represent a large percentage of total *wyrmas,* these terms are used more commonly to describe movement than any other term.

[45] Leviticus XI, 41. All references to the Bible are from:
The Holy Bible: translated from the Latin vulgate: diligently compared with the Hebrew, Greek, and other editions in divers languages: The Old Testament, first published by the English college at Douay, A.D. 1609 and The New Testament, first published by the English college at Rheims A.D. 1582, ed. by George Haydock, rev. and cor. Fredrick Canon Oakeley and Thomas G. Law, 2 volumes (London: Virtue and Company, 1899).

[46] On the sixth day our Lord said: now may the earth bring forth live animals in their generation and the creeping *wyrmas* and all the wild animals in their kind.

as part of a list where simply the noun may have been sufficient is indicative of the importance of creeping movement to the concept of what *wyrmas* are.

A further category which Isidore describes is vermin:

> De vermibus. Vermis est animal quod plerumque de carne, vel de ligno, vel de quacumque re terrena sine ullo concubitu gignitur; licet nonnumquam et de ovis nascuntur, sicut scorpio. Sunt autem vermes aut terrae, aut aquae, aut aeris, aut carnium, aut frondium, aut lignorum, aut vestimentorum. [47]

As stated in my introduction, there are etymological links between the Latin 'vermis' and the Old English *wyrm* as the *Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British Sources* [*DLMBS*] provides both 'vermin' and 'worm' as translations for 'vermis.'[48] While Isidore sees fit to separate 'vermis' from other creatures such as serpents or beasts, this distinction is not made in Old English literature, with both scorpions and spiders included within the *wyrm* category alongside serpents. Clearly early medieval scholars in England regarded spiders, scorpions and serpents as similar enough to be classified within the same fuzzy set while Isidore places them into clearly separate categories; it is for this reason that this thesis does not engage in depth with the category of 'vermis' as it clearly differs in its boundaries and implications. Figure three demonstrates the difference in how the *wyrmas* and 'vermis' categories differ; the majority of the creatures which Old English authors described as *wyrmas* did lay eggs, suggesting that this trait may contribute towards the classification of *wyrmas.* However, this was clearly not sufficient for Isidore to consider grouping all egg-laying 'vermis' together as

[47] Isidore, V.1, ed. by Lindsay. 'Vermin (De verminibus): 1. Vermin (vermis) are animals that are generated for the most part from flesh or wood or some earthy substance, without any sexual congress – but sometimes they are brought forth from eggs, like the scorpion. There are vermin of the earth, the water, the air, flesh, leaves, wood, and clothing.' trans by Barney, p.258.
[48] 'Vermis', *Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British Sources,* <http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/Default.aspx> [accessed July 2021].

creatures which lay eggs, such as serpents, are placed in categories separate from egg-laying 'vermis'.

In addition to Isidore's 'Etymologiae,' other texts available to early scholars can be used to inform our ideas surrounding the understanding of *wyrmas.* The 'Liber Monstrorum' draws on a wide range of sources of both Christian and Classical origin including the 'Etymologiae' which is 'freely plundered' by the author.[49] While a full discussion of the content and origins of the *Liber* is not necessary for this thesis, the structure of the text is of particular interest.[50] Andy Orchard describes the 'Liber Monstrorum' as being '[a] catalogue of almost 120 monstrosities [which is] divided up into three books of diminishing length (and, one suspects, dwindling authorial interest) which deal respectively with monstrous men, beasts, and serpents.'[51] Orchard certainly seems correct in suggesting the author's lack of interest in the final book considering the concluding statement that 'there are also still very many snakes of serpentine kind […] concerning which I have now found nothing remarkable or worthy of notice'; however, despite this lack of interest, the author still finds it necessary to discuss serpents within a separate book.[52] The description provided for 'beasts' in the Prologue to 'Liber Monstrorum II' states that '[w]hatever is found on land or in the sea of unknown and fearsome form of terrible bodily appearance can be called a beast'; certainly, considering that serpents are described living on land and in water, and are described as 'terrible' and 'fierce', in addition to having the ability to kill, there appears to be little logic to why serpents are not merely considered with 'beasts'.[53] Unfortunately, the author of the

[49] For a full discussion of the sources and analogues of the 'Liber Monstrorum', see: Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1985; Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003).
[50] Ibid.
[51] Orchard, p.87.
[52] 'Sunt quoque plurimi adhuc serpentine generis angues […] de quibus iam nihil singular et admiration dignum reperri'. Latin text and translation from Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies,* p. 317.
[53] The description 'terrible' is used twice in *Liber III;* Serpents are described as being 'fierce' or having 'fierceness' three times. One serpent is specifically described as living in water, the others appear to reside on land.

‘Liber Monstrorum’ chooses not to describe the serpent group in the same way as they have described the beast group; this may suggest that the clarity around the boundaries of the category, and the traits necessary for a creature to be placed within it, were not entirely understood by the author. Despite their apparent lack of interest in serpents compared to monsters or beasts, the author of the ‘Liber Monstrorum’ also chooses to emphasise this group in the prologue more than any other when they specify that they will ‘record the monstrous parts [or ‘births] of men, and the horrible and innumerable forms of wild beasts, and the most dreadful kinds of dragons, and serpents, and vipers.’[54] While the groups of ‘wild beasts’ and ‘monstrous […] men’ are described collectively, the ‘dragons, and serpents, and vipers’ are referred to separately. This certainly seems odd, particularly as ‘vipers’ can easily be considered to be ‘typical’ snakes from a modern viewpoint and are included in the ‘serpent’ book of the ‘Liber Monstrorum’. Furthermore, dragons are not described in the ‘Liber Monstrorum’ except for in the Prologue, with the author describing only serpents of great size. Clearly, the author of the ‘Liber Monstrorum’ struggled to decide how best to group the creatures in their third book, perhaps due to the contradictions in many of the sources which they drew upon.

Although the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* database only records six entries of texts influenced by it, Pliny’s ‘Historia Naturalis’[55] must also be considered as having some influence over perceptions of the natural world in early medieval England. Two of the entries which *Fontes* lists are texts by Bede, suggesting that Bede had some access to a copy of the ‘Historia Naturalis’; its influence on Bede would have resulted in indirect transmission of Pliny’s ideas through the circulation of Bede’s writings. The ‘Historia Naturalis’ is less informative than the ‘Liber Monstrorum’ or ‘Etymologiae’ regarding how to identify or

[54] Orchard (ed, trans), p. 255.
[55] Pliny, ‘Natural History’, ed. and trans. by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, in 10 volumes (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1938). All subsequent references to this edition.

group serpents because the loose structure of the 'Historia Naturalis' prioritises 'sums of facts and source-books over thoughtful categorization, storage over coherent argument'; as a result, the discussion of serpents is not restricted to one section or book within the 'Historia Naturalis'.[56] Serpents are often depicted as attacking other creatures; the serpents attacking elephants are described as being huge in size and able to bite and consume all of the blood of an elephant[57] while others are described as 'pestilential'.[58] Unlike later sources such as the 'Liber Monstrorum' and the 'Etymologiae', Pliny demonstrates some positivity in regard to serpents, noting that they are 'commonly kept as pets even in our homes',[59] suggesting that there were not as significantly negative connotations with serpents as suggested by other texts.[60] Pliny apparently groups vipers with snails and lizards as a result of their practice of hibernation;[61] while this is an association due to their behaviours and cannot be said to be a category of creatures, the observation of similarities between serpents and creatures which might be considered 'vermin' is notable, particularly as snails and lizards are not harmful to humans.

All three texts discussed here have a significant similarity in their portrayal of serpents as possessing venom. Pliny specifies that 'all [serpents] have a deadly venom',[62] and while the 'Liber Monstrorum' does not specify that all serpents are venomous, it lists venom as a feature in descriptions of some individual types of serpent and depicts those attacked by others as 'swelling' in a way which may suggest a poisonous bite.[63] Isidore discusses venom at some length and while he does not specify as Pliny does that all serpents are venomous, it

[56] Trevor Murphy, *Pliny the Elder's Natural History: The Empire in the Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 34.
[57] Pliny, 8.12.
[58] Pliny, 8.35.
[59] Pliny, 29.4.
[60] For a more in-depth study of the positive symbolic associations of snakes in the classical world see: Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent,* pp.125-187.
[61] Pliny, 8.59.
[62] Pliny, 8.35.
[63] The serpents expressly stated as being venomous are: the snake of Lerna (III.1); serpents in India (III.7); Coluber (III.17). The snakes which cause swelling are Corsiae (III.6).

is implied by the statement that snakes are not dangerous at night because they and their venom are cold.[64] The association made between serpents and venom is certainly visible in relation to *wyrmas;* as stated previously, venom is a common feature amongst many *wyrmas* and is the basis for associations between not only physical danger but also spiritual corruption. This link between venom and spiritual corruption can also be connected to Isidore as he states that 'Omne autem venenum frigidum est, et ideo anima, quae ignea est, fugit venenum frigidum.'[65] Considering the appearance of *wyrmas* in early medieval English texts in the context of the grave, Hell, and in the bodies of sinful individuals such as Herod, Isidore's suggestion that the venom which all or most serpents produce should be incompatible with the soul is certainly logical.

In addition to the influence of the sources discussed thus far, biblical text must have underpinned the understanding of the natural world that scholars had in early medieval England due to the basis of education in monastic settings. In addition to providing a basis for the understanding of the intellectual elite, religious teachings through spoken sermons may have had some influence on wider perceptions of the natural world within the laity, although this cannot be said with any certainty.

In order to illustrate some of the biblical imagery which influences *wyrmas* I have collected examples of the term 'vermis' in the Vulgate Bible; there are twenty-five uses of 'vermis' in the Vulgate which are listed in Appendix I. [66] While the variation is not as marked as that of *wyrmas,* the 'vermes' found in the Vulgate bible clearly represent numerous creatures which would not be grouped together using modern taxonomical principles. The Vulgate 'vermes' take the form of imagined Hell-serpents, for which a clear physical description cannot be obtained, maggots which inhabit crops, parasites or maggots in

[64] Isidore, IV.40, ed. Lindsay.
[65] Isidore, IV.42, ed. Lindsay. 'all venom is cold, hence the soul, which is fiery, flees the cold venom' trans. by Barney, p.258.
[66] See Appendix I.

the human body, and earthworms consuming the body in the grave. All these actions are described being performed by creatures described using the term *wyrm* in the Old English corpus on one or more occasions.

The majority of the Vulgate 'vermes' take the role of destroyer or physical corrupter to crops or flesh and this is usually seen as punishment for the humans affected as a result of their transgressions against God. *Wyrmas* also act as spiritual corrupters due to their associations with Hell, Satan and sin which are discussed in depth in Chapter Four.[67] Direct comparisons can be made between descriptions of 'vermes' in the Vulgate and *wyrmas* in the Old English corpus; for example, 'vermes' are depicted as a central provider of eternal torment for the damned souls in Isaias 66.24.[68] Similar imagery appears in the description of Hell in Vercelli 'Homily VIII': 'þære syndon þa undeaðlican wyrmas þe næfre ne sweltað, þæt fyr ne bið næfre adwæsced, ac hit to widan feore byrneð, eowra synna on eowrum sawlum þær byrnað.'[69] The *wyrmas* in these passages are both depicted as immortal and appear alongside fire as punishments; clearly, as homiletic texts, the 'Vercelli Homilies' are likely to draw upon biblical material and the similarities in imagery and language surrounding *wyrmas* in both the Vulgate and the 'Vercelli Homilies' are unsurprising.[70] A further similarity is the lack of description provided of the *wyrmas* themselves in either text; as with many of the *wyrmas* discussed in this thesis, the physiological features of the *wyrmas* are less important than the exhibited behaviour or the role played within a particular situation.

Similarly, comparisons can be made between the portrayal of *wyrmas* in the earthly grave in Old English texts and the *vermes* in the Vulgate Bible. Job 24.20 describes the fate

[67] See Chapter Four, pp. 195- 208.
[68] Scragg (ed), p.147.And they shall go out, and see the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched: and they shall be a loathsome sight to all flesh.
[69] There are the immortal worms that never die a violent death, that fire is never extinguished, but it burns far and wide, you will burn there in your souls for your sins.
[70] The role of wyrmas in depictions of hell and their association with post-mortem purgation will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

of the body which is forgotten and consumed by *wyrmas*.[71] The descriptions of the role of *wyrmas* in the grave in Old English texts such as the 'Soul and Body' poems are far more graphic than that of the Vulgate, with the Old English placing greater emphasis on the cruelty of the *wyrmas* in their destruction of the body. The authors of both the 'Soul and Body' poems and the Vulgate clearly shared an understanding of *wyrmas/vermes* as performing the role of bodily consumer and connected the natural consumption of the corpse to the destruction of earthly things; however, the 'Soul and Body' poets chose to build on this to place a greater focus on the agency of the *wyrmas*.[72]

In the source texts discussed here, there is clearly a broad range of material which informed early medieval understanding of the natural world and those creatures which were referred to in Old English as *wyrmas.* What is notable is the existence in source material, and the survival in Old English texts also, of dichotomous perceptions of *wyrmas*. Indeed, creatures which would be called *wyrmas* in Old English are undeniably portrayed in classical and biblical texts as poisonous and aggressive creatures which share associations with Satan; however, in the classical world serpent imagery appeared to have a broadly positive associations, and while this was largely eradicated in the bible, positive serpent imagery remains in depictions of healing and in Christ's advice to his disciples: 'be ye therefore wise as serpents'.[73] While examining source texts cannot provide a basis for my classification of *wyrmas,* an understanding of the complexity of the information which informed early medieval perceptions of *wyrmas* provides much needed context for my approach to material. As discussed previously, the attempt to place *wyrmas* into discrete categories according to set rules is unhelpful due to the variation and ambiguity within the group. This is exemplified by the dichotomies displayed in source material as clearly those scholars writing about *wyrmas*

[71] Let mercy forget him: may worms be his sweetness: let him be remembered no more, but be broken in pieces as an unfruitful tree.
[72] Further discussion of the depiction of *wyrmas* in the grave can be found in Chapter Three.
[73] Matthew, 10.16.

in early medieval England had an understanding of these creatures based upon often conflicting material and, in some cases their own experiences. What is most important is that source material shows that early medieval scholars were not starting from an understanding of *wyrmas* within set binaries of classifying such as 'good' or 'bad'; as a result, we as modern scholars must attempt to remove our expectation of set binaries and classifications when approaching the *wyrm.*

Methodology

In the next section of this chapter, I will present the methodology used to collect and collate data and justify my approach to translating the term *wyrm* and classifying creatures. I concluded that the functionality provided by forms in Microsoft Access was most appropriate for the collection and collation of my data, as the software allowed me to present passages of written text clearly.

On the commencement of this project, I intended to compile a database which included entries for each appearance of *wyrm* but also for the creature specific, but semantically related terms such as *næd[d]re,* and *draca* along with some other less common terms such as 'maðe' (maggot). It was logical to include these specific creature terms as they are often used interchangeably with *wyrm* and often refer to the same creature. The use of semantically related terms is apparent in 'Beowulf' where the dragon is described both as *draca* and as *wyrm* by the author on multiple occasions. Due to the interchangeable use of these apparent synonyms, creatures described using these terms would clearly have contributed to the cultural perception of the creatures described as *wyrmas*. Including semantically related terms in the database would allow analysis of their use alongside *wyrm* in order to conclude whether the choice of term was dependant of scenario, alliterative meter or other factors. However, due to their common frequency, including semantically related

terms in addition to *wyrm* would have resulted in a data set which exceeded 1000 entries; as such, it was necessary to be selective in the data I chose. I concluded that alongside the term *wyrm*, its compounds and any spelling variants I would include the complete selection of semantically related terms *draca* and *næd[d]re* in the poetic corpus, along with a subsection of particularly relevant prose instances. Furthermore, I included some related terms such as 'aspide' (asp), 'angeltwicce' (bait-worm) and 'maðan'(maggot) in order to consider these rarer terms alongside the more common *wyrm*. The total number of entries in the database including these related terms is currently 581 which provides an excellent basis for the analysis of the role of *wyrm* and significant semantically related terms for this project while leaving the database open for future additions and further development in a larger project in the future.

The main key resource for compiling the database was the *Dictionary of Old English: Old English Corpus* [*DOEC*] which contains examples drawn from all extant Old English text and is, therefore, a reliable source from which to accurately collect every instance of *wyrm.*[74] The *DOEC* can be searched using a number of methods including by bibliographical information and by word or phrase; words can be searched for both approximate and exact matches. The main issue with searching the *DOEC* by term was the likelihood of overlooking terms which fell outside of the search parameters as it was often necessary for me to be aware of a word or spelling variant in order to search for it or modify my search parameters; this was particularly problematic during the early stages of the project when I was less aware of more obscure variants of *wyrm.* When focusing on compounds of *wyrm*, issues relating to proximity searching were less significant as the searches performed returned any terms containing *wyrm*, including previously unknown compounds which represented a large percentage of the terms which would have been otherwise difficult to successfully record.

[74] University of Toronto, *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, <https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doecorpus/> [accessed July 2021].

However, spelling variants such as *wurm* and *weorm* remained problematic as searches for *wyrm* did not return these variants and it was only through familiarity with texts containing these variants that I knew to use them as a search term.

When compiling the data, further difficulty was caused by the high number of results returned when searching the *DOEC* as the database returns every result with proximate spelling and it is not possible to narrow a search by a particular part of speech. As a result, a search intended to find the noun *wyrm* returned 513 results, of which eighty-seven were found to be irrelevant due to the inclusion of the verbs 'gewyrman', 'to take here', and 'gewyrman', 'to warm'.[75] Some of the examples of 'gewyrm' could be removed by using a Boolean search for 'wyrm NOT gewyrm'; however, eliminating 'gewyrm' also removed 'gewyrms'. This adjective meaning 'full of matter or purulent' is relevant to my discussion of the relationship between parasites, bodily infection and corruption in Chapter Two and so it was not possible to use the Boolean search to remove 'gewyrm' without the risk of unintentionally removing relevant material.[76] Fortunately, the verb form was generally easy to recognise and remove due to the inflections used and, where they were not immediately obvious, verbs were identified during the process of translation using surrounding context. Despite not affecting the final data, the inclusion of 'gewyrm' verbs in the initial *DOEC* search results created greater workload as each irrelevant result had to be eliminated manually and in some cases were only identified after substantial amounts of time were spent translating a passage. The same problem was apparent when searching for instances of *draca* as the compound 'ærendraca' is consistently returned but with the definition of 'messenger,

[75] A similar problem occurred with the *DOEC* returning *arandraca* alongside other instances of *draca*.
[76] *Ge-wyrms, Bosworth Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/050648> [accessed July 2021] Discussion of the relationship between *wyrmas* and 'wyrms' begins on pages 131-135 of this thesis.

ambassador, apostle, angel'. It is clearly irrelevant to my data set; as this is a more specific noun, it was far easier to eliminate using the Boolean search function.[77]

There are thirty-five variants of *wyrm* in the completed database; this includes the basic form of *wyrm* and its spelling variants along with a significant number of compound terms.

Figure Four: Frequency of Compound Terms

TERM	FREQUENCY	TERM	FREQUENCY
Anawyrm	3	*Toðwyrm*	1
Cawelwyrm	2	*Treowyrm*	3
Deawwyrm	4	*Twinwyrm*	1
Fagwyrm/Fahwyrm	3	*Weorm*	4
Ficwyrm	1	*Wurm*	34
Flæscwyrm	1	*Wyrm*	295
Gewyrms	1	*Wyrmætan*	2
Hondwyrm	12	*Wyrmcyn*	16
Hundeswyrm	1	*Wyrmfah*	1
Leafwyrm	1	*Wyrmgealdor*	1
Moldwyrm	2	*Wyrmgeard*	1
Rengwyrm	5	*Wyrmhiwe*	1
Renwyrm	8	*Wyrmhord*	1
Seolwyrm	3	*Wyrmlic*	1
Sidwyrm	2	*Wyrmsele*	1
Slawyrm	8	*Wyrmsig*	1
Smeawyrm	2	*Wyrmslite*	1
Þeorwyrm	1	TOTAL	425

Figure Four demonstrates that the basic term *wyrm* and the spelling variant *wurm* are the most commonly represented in the surviving texts while the spelling variant *weorm* is far less common. Unfortunately, there is too little evidence about how texts were composed or about manuscript production to ascertain whether the spelling variation can be linked to the dialect of the scribe or exemplars used in scriptoria. There are some spelling variants of compound

[77] *DOEC* <https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doecorpus/> [accessed July 2021].

terms; for example, in one instance the spelling 'rængcwyrm'[78] is used to describe a parasitic *wyrm*, an alternate spelling which clearly relates to the far more common spelling 'rengwyrm'.[79] In instances such as this, where there is a single example of spelling variance I have chosen to group the variant together with the related more common spelling in order to make my data clearer and to avoid obscuring trends in the data set when terms are searched for. To preserve the relationship with the original text and to avoid assumptions of spelling standardisation, where these variants appear I have included the spelling from the manuscript in the extracts transcribed within each entry of the database.

As previously stated, while a selection of semantically related terms are included within the database, my current data set does not include every instance of *næd[d]re* and *draca* in the surviving corpus. The semantically related terms which are represented include every creature in the poetic corpus and also those in texts particularly of interest to my research, such as the *næd[d]ran* which appear in 'Wonders of the East' and 'Letter of Alexander to Aristotle.'

Figure Five: *Draca, Næd[d]re* and their compound terms in my data set

TERM	FREQUENCY	TERM	FREQUENCY
Draca	108	*Nædre*	19
Eorðdraca	2	*Næddre*	11
Fyrdraca	1	*Nædercyn*	1
Ligdraca	2	Total	31
Niðdraca	1		
Sædraca	1		
Total	115		

[78] 'Rengwyrm' has nine recorded instances in the *Dictionary of Old English: Corpus* < https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doecorpus/> [accessed July 2021].
[79] 'Rængcwyrm' has one recoded instance in *Dictionary of Old English: Corpus* < https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doecorpus/> [accessed July 2021].

Of the semantically related terms represented in my data, twenty-seven of the *draca* and ten *næd[d]re* appear in the poetic corpus, making *wyrm* the most common term in the Old English poetic corpus for referring to creatures within the set. Many of the twenty-seven instances of *draca* in the poetic corpus, including all of the compound terms listed, appear as part of the 'Beowulf' manuscript and are used interchangeably with *wyrm* to describe the hoarding dragon from the final section of the text. Much as with the spelling variants of *wyrm*, it is not possible to establish why certain authors or scribes chose to use a particular term to describe a creature, or whether there is regional preference towards certain terms or compounds. In order to fully understand the use and meaning of *wyrm*, it is necessary to acknowledge the relationship with these semantically related terms. However, the frequency of *wyrm* and its use alongside other terms demonstrates that authors chose to use it despite having options to use alternative, more specific terms; therefore, it is possible to study *wyrm* in depth without extensive interrogation of the semantically related terms.

When recording the data within Microsoft Access, I chose to include fields for both 'Root Terms' and 'Exact Terms' to allow the data to be searched more easily. The three 'Root Terms' were *Wyrm, Næd[d]re* and *Draca*, with the 'Exact Term' field being used to record spelling, compounds and other variations of the root. Grouping creatures based purely on the term used was straightforward since the groupings adhered to the confines of a classical set – a creature was either referred to by one term or another. The provision of a translation of Old English terms into modern English did require decisions to be made regarding groupings and as a result, some imposition of linear classification on vague concepts did occur; however, the translations were provided for ease of use rather than with the intention of being used to search and group creatures. In order to minimise the impact of these groups on the perception of *wyrmas,* the database includes the exact written terms and I have provided translations which are as close as possible to the Old English text. As a result, there are a greater number

of translation terms within the database, often associated with only one instance of *wyrm* in the surviving Old English corpus. The provision of very specific translation prevents the modern English terms being used as the primary basis for grouping creatures and avoids the problematic practice of placing very specific Old English terms into broad umbrella categories. This practice of using specific translations has been straight-forward in instances where compound terms are used in the Old English. Elsewhere, in many cases recognising the creature being referred to by the term *wyrm* is very difficult, since little information is provided by the text and it is necessary to use a broader category in order to avoid wrongly placing a creature into a specific category without sufficient evidence.

For other categories within the database, design challenges and methodological questions were posed by the linear confines associated with the database format when presenting varied qualitative data. As this chapter has demonstrated, the attempt to impose distinct boundaries on members of a fuzzy set, particularly one for which we cannot access the cultural context, is inherently problematic. However, in order to produce patterns showing how *wyrmas* in different texts related to each other it was necessary to impose boundaries and create groups to some extent. In order to group place *wyrmas* within my database while preserving an element of the fuzzy nature of the category, I structured the database around shared characteristics rather than around terms such as ‘snake’ or ‘worm’. As a result of this, individual creatures which inhabit the fuzzy set to any extent can be grouped together and compared by particular observable attributes, traits or locations, as opposed to by a single arbitrary title; for example, while a database search for creatures with legs would not result in the appearance of a snake and a spider within the same group, a search for creatures described as poisonous would include both snakes and spiders. The ability to group creatures within the database by a range of qualities allows the overall collection of *wyrmas* to retain some fuzziness and helps to avoid the missed comparisons which result from imposing

membership of a group onto creatures.[80] My completed database contains a wide range of fields in order to accommodate the full variety of *wyrm* traits which I will outline in the following section:

Figure Six: Database Fields

Root Term	Location
Exact Term	Primary Role
Term Translation	Physiology
Text Name	Physiology (additional)
Text Short Title	Abilities
Edition	Abilities (additional)
Context	Role
Translation	Behaviour
Verse/Prose	Hoarding: Yes/No

As with the translations of terms where I have chosen to translate as accurately as possible in order to avoid forcing rarer terms into broad categories, the categories included in my database were adjusted according to the data I encountered. While I began my data collection with a core set of categories, I was open to adding new traits and new categories when I encountered *wyrmas* displaying these features in texts. This inevitably produced a greater number of categories and traits; however, I suggest that this is preferable to overlooking particular features of *wyrmas* due to a lack of conformity to a database structure. This is

[80] Much of the previous lack of focus on *wyrmas* in academic thought is a result of the imposition of such categories. For example, Christine Rauer's discussion of dragons in *Beowulf and the Dragon* could not consider the wider implications of *wyrmas* due to the confines of considering only those creatures which fit firmly into the category of dragon.

particularly important considering the varied and often unexpected roles which *wyrmas* appear to play in Old English texts.

Those categories which record the physical traits of the creatures were the most straightforward to construct due to the binary nature of these categories– a creature either has a physical trait or it does not. However, it quickly became clear as construction of the database progressed that it was necessary to include two fields for physical traits, since in some cases creatures were given more than one significant physical description. The two physical traits lists contained the same traits, with the additional category left as 'N/A' for creatures displaying only one trait.

Figure Seven: Physiological Traits

No legs/wings	Legs
Wings	Sting
Horns	Coiled Body
Massive Size	Moves by 'creeping'
Small	N/A
Colour/Beauty	

While it was easy to conclude that a physical traits category was necessary, difficulties arose in how to record creatures in this field when texts provide little or no explicit information about the physical appearance of a creature, or where physical traits are only implied by the actions of a creature. For example, the 'Beowulf' dragon is described as a 'lað lyftfloga' (hateful air-flyer) but is not specifically described as having wings; logically, we can assume that the dragon must have wings, and therefore can be recorded as winged in

the physical appearance field.[81] However, this requires some assumptions to be made as it is not inconceivable that early medieval people imagined the creature as obtaining flight through some other means and, as an imagined creature, judgements cannot be informed by knowledge of the creature itself. A further example of implied physical traits are the *wyrmas* which chew or tear flesh. While the creatures referred to as in the grave would appear to be earthworms, their behaviour implies that they have teeth which enable them to chew or bite, which earthworms do not possess. Arguably, in these cases, the impact of the modern cultural context is most likely to be problematic, as reliance on modern understanding of the physical traits of creatures may be used to fill in missing information. Ultimately, assumptions have to be made in order to categorise creatures in a way which will make searching the database useful in the results which it returns; yet to avoid excessive assumption, I have restricted the physical traits recorded to those which are clearly described or those which are easily deduced from specific behaviours such as flight. Where no information is given on physical appearance and no abilities such as flight or biting imply certain physical features, the field is left as 'N/A'. Creatures have not been placed into the 'no legs/wings' category unless this trait is specifically referred to as having changed, most notably in the context of Genesis 3. 14. Clearly, in a database referring for the most part to serpentine creatures, this category would apply to the majority of creatures automatically; in order to reduce unnecessary categories it was more efficient to group only those creatures who did have legs/wings, and those who were undertaking an apparent transition.

[81] 'Beowulf', l. 2315a.

Figure Eight: Abilities

Fire	Wisdom/cunning
Flight	Immortal
Fire and Poison	Curative
Constriction	Spinning
Strength	Swimming
Greed	Slitting Bite

As with ‘physical traits’ it became necessary to include two fields for ‘Abilities’ in order to accommodate creatures which exhibited more than one notable trait such as flight and greed. It was necessary to have an entry which combined fire and poison as some creatures which had the ability to produce fire and poison also had other abilities such as flight; however, I wished to avoid unnecessary complexity by adding a greater number of fields to accommodate abilities. In some cases, particularly that of the ‘Beowulf’ dragon, creatures will exhibit numerous abilities during the course of a text. For this reason, I have categorised creatures each time they appear, rather than having a rigid set of abilities which apply consistently to a creature. This is potentially problematic as in every appearance of the ‘Beowulf’ dragon, regardless of whether it is depicted as breathing fire, it has the ability to and therefore, arguably, every appearance should be returned when the ‘fire’ trait is searched for. However, if this were the case, in order to accurately represent the range of abilities displayed by the dragon - flight, fire and poison, strength, wisdom/cunning – there would need to be four ‘abilities’ fields, making the database appear more complex and producing a far greater number of results when a search is performed – potentially less useful if searching for specific examples of a particular ability. As a result, I have represented the abilities

displayed by the dragon in each extract; this could certainly lead to a misrepresentation of the creature if a user of the database were to search for a trait without other contextual knowledge of the dragon's other abilities; however, this does not affect my use of the database and considering the specialist nature of the data, I assume a level of prior knowledge in any future users.

Similarly, the 'location' category and the 'primary role' category were judged according to each appearance of a creature due to the possibility of locations changing throughout a text. This is the case for the 'Beowulf' dragon who exists within several locations during the text. The categories within the field are:

Figure Nine: Locations

Grave	Barrow
Object	Hall
Earth: Land	Earth: Water
Earth: Doomsday	Ethereal
Within the Body (medical)	N/A

As for physical traits, the location of some creatures is easy to ascertain as the location is given clearly by the text; for example, the 'Beowulf' dragon is described as residing 'on eorðsele'. In other cases, location can easily be understood from the context in which the creature appears such as those *wyrmas* in leechbooks predominantly being located on or within the body. The less obvious categories are 'ethereal' and 'object'. Ethereal is an umbrella term which I have used most often to refer to biblical locations such as Eden; since these are clearly to be viewed as distinct from earthly locations they cannot be considered within the 'earth' categories and their inhabitants should be considered separately from those

creatures which exist within earthly contexts. ‘Object’ records creatures which are described as being visible on objects as decoration, such as the ‘wyrmlic fah’ wall described in ‘The Wanderer’,[82] while these objects are on earth, the location of the creatures differs as they are present as a feature connected to another object rather than present on earth as an independent being. As with many other fields, the N/A category is present to accommodate those creatures which do not have a clear location, in order to avoid incorrect assumptions based on insufficient information.

The two most challenging fields to classify *wyrmas* into were the ‘primary role’ and ‘behaviour’ fields as they contain the most subjective and ‘fuzzy’ attributes. Inevitably, the need to place fuzzy data into binary categories results in some examples being far less securely placed within a category than others. The categories chosen for the ‘primary role’ field are intended to record the core instincts or intentions of a creature; as such, it has a smaller number of categories:

Figure Ten: Primary Roles

Natural	Evil
Devil	Ominous
Not Stated	

The two most significant categories within this field are ‘natural’ and ‘evil’ as the majority of creatures fit into one of these two categories. Natural is by far the largest category, since despite the often unpleasant or aggressive behaviour exhibited by *wyrmas* they are depicted as being naturally occurring creatures performing their necessary function. Those described

[82] ‘The Wanderer’, *EB,* l.98b. ‘stained with serpent patterns.’

as ‘evil’ usually relate directly to the devil or Hell; it was necessary to include a separate category, ‘devil’, for instances where Satan himself is described in the guise of a *wyrm.* ‘Ominous’ relates to creatures which are described performing functions where their role does not relate directly to any actions but appear to play a role of foreshadowing or signifying death. The ‘not stated’ category relates mostly to creatures which are found on objects or are metaphorical. The most difficult type of *wyrmas* to categorise into this field are the parasitic *wyrmas,* since in the context of Christian worldview some instances of disease or disability would have been regarded as providing atonement or punishment for personal sin [83] such as the *wyrmas* who attack Herod Agrippa for his pride in Acts of the Apostles 12:23.[84] On the other hand, the ‘Church Fathers held the firm conviction that Christians should rejoice in sickness as well as in health’ as sickness enabled self-reflection and improvement and the acknowledgement of bodily mortality; therefore, *wyrmas* could be regarded as providing a means through which God and religious leaders might encourage appropriate Christian behaviour.[85] Regardless of any possible religious implications, parasites would certainly have been a natural and common part of everyday life for early medieval people, and in consequence I have chosen to regard them as natural.

The ‘behaviour’ field has a similar function to the ‘primary role’ field in that it attempts to classify *wyrmas* according to their actions rather than by observable criteria such as appearance or location. The categories within the field are:

[83] ‘Physician’ in, David Lyle Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), p. 614. ‘

[84] And forthwith an angel of the Lord struck him [Herod], because he had not given the honour to God: and eaten up by worms, he expired.

[85] Darrel Amundsen ‘The Discourses of Early Christian Medical Ethics’ in *The Cambridge World History of Medical Ethics,* ed. By Robert B. Baker and Laurence B. McCullough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 202-210 (p. 207).

Figure Eleven: Behaviours

Aggressive
Non-threatening
Submissive
Useful
N/A

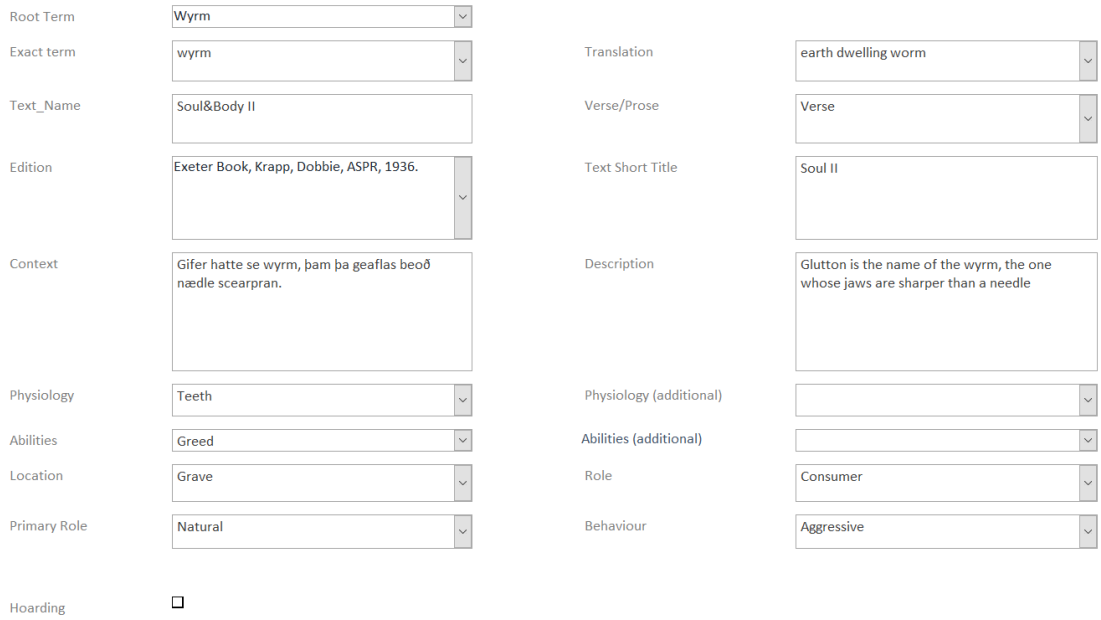
The primary difference between this category and the ‘primary role’ field is that ‘behaviour’ relates specifically to the actions of the creature, as opposed to the intention behind the actions – a creature can be aggressive but natural, for example. The purpose of this field was to be able to observe whether the majority of *wyrmas* displayed one type of behaviour, or whether their behaviours were more complex. As with other fields I have included, there is subjectivity and ambiguity in the classification of *wyrmas* in the ‘behaviour’ category. Much like the ‘primary function’ field, the categories within this field are very fuzzy; the concept of ‘aggressive’ is ambiguous and some creatures fit this definition far more than others. For example, I have classified both dragons and caterpillars as aggressive in some contexts; while traditionally dragons are perceived as being far more aggressive than caterpillars towards people, the level of destruction caused to plants by caterpillars is highly aggressive and it cannot be assumed that aggression is defined only in direct relation to human bodies. If we consider this in relation to fuzzy set theory, this variation in the suitability of classifying dragons or caterpillars as aggressive can be expressed on a scale of 0 to 1, where 1 is most comfortably fitting into the set where 0 is not a member of the set. This set can be expressed as: Aggressive: {(dragon, 1.0), (caterpillar, 0.4)}; alternatively, we could apply hedges to the category to regard dragons as ‘very much aggressive’ while caterpillars are ‘aggressive strictly speaking’.

Case Studies

For the final section of this chapter, I will discuss a range of case studies which exemplify the categorisation decisions made as part of the data collection process and use this to introduce some of the conclusions suggested by the data. The *wyrmas* discussed in these case studies exhibit a range of the traits and behaviours which demonstrate the variation within the category and exemplify the challenges which have been posed by attempting to classify them. The first example – 'Gifer' the *wyrm* – demonstrates how compound terms can be both useful and problematic in the categorisation of creatures; furthermore, 'Gifer' typifies the consuming and cruel nature of many of the *wyrmas* discussed in this thesis, making the understanding of its classification significant for the remainder of my discussion. The second case study is that of the parasitic *wyrmas* which represent the majority of *wyrmas* in surviving Old English literature; this discussion focuses on the ambiguity of certain homonyms and the challenges that similar words have presented in compiling my data. The third example examines one of the two instances of spiders being described as *wyrmas,* demonstrating the challenges I faced in understanding how to categorise an outlier to the set. Finally, I examine the *wyrmas* which can be understood as dragons; while less common than other types of *wyrm* such as the parasites or earth-dwelling *wyrmas,* the dragons exhibit traits associated with positive attitudes as well as negative, demonstrating how categorising *wyrmas* as 'good' or 'bad' is inherently flawed.

Gifer the *wyrm:*

Figure Twelve: Sample Database Entry for ‘Gifer’ the *wyrm*



Earth-dwelling *wyrmas* such as the enigmatic ‘Gifer’ in the ‘Soul and Body’ poems are the most common variety of *wyrmas* in the Old English poetic corpus, representing twenty-seven of the total ninety instances.[86] These ‘earth dwelling *wyrmas’* are placed in a distinct category as they are differentiated from other *wyrmas* because they are depicted as exclusively inhabiting the earth, and their role directly relates to this location. Due to descriptions of certain traits – such as the teeth possessed by ‘Gifer’ – I have chosen to refer to this group of *wyrmas* as ‘earth-dwelling *wyrmas’* rather than simple ‘earthworms’ in order to avoid assumptions that I am referring to the common European earthworm, *Lumbricus Terrestris.* The substantial amount of variation between creatures within this category means that the specific modern associations with the term ‘earthworm’ would be counterproductive to accessing the early medieval interpretation of *wyrmas.*

[86] See Appendix II.

While usually referred to only as *wyrmas* by authors, there are two main compound terms used to refer to earth-dwelling *wyrmas*: 'moldwyrm', which appears twice in the corpus, and 'regnwyrm', (also spelt 'renwyrm') which appears eight times. Both 'regnwyrm' and 'moldwyrm' can be translated directly as 'earthworm', with 'mold' translating as 'dust' or 'earth' and 'regn' as 'rain'; however, the assumption that these creatures relate to our modern perception of what an earthworm looks like is somewhat problematic.

Four of the eight uses of 'renwyrm' appear in the context of Latin glosses where it is given as a gloss for the Latin term for earthworm, 'lumbricus'.[87] Common earthworms, *Lumbricus terrestris* are characterised by segmented bodies and lack distinct mouthparts or teeth because they feed on detritus and considering their wide distribution it appears unlikely that an individual living in early medieval England would not have encountered *Lumbricus terrestris* in their daily life. While the appearance as a gloss for 'lumbricus' provides no description of the *wyrm*, the glossing of 'lumbricus' with 'renwyrm' in three separate texts provides some evidence for the likelihood of 'renwyrm' referring to a common earthworm as the three glossators concluded that a 'renwyrm' is a 'lumbricus' in separate contexts. Furthermore, the gloss provided in Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus MS 32 & London, British Library MS Additional 32246 translates 'lumbricus' both as 'renwyrm' and as 'angeltwicce', a rare term which translates as a bait-worm for fishing, implying the every-day nature of the 'renwyrm'.[88] The use of 'regnwyrm' in 'Riddle 40' is a translation of Aldhelm's Latin Enigmata 100 which also refers to 'lumbricus'.[89] Unlike the other glosses discussed however, the riddle author uses the *wyrmas* in a metaphorical sense: 'me is snægl swiftra, snelra

[87] Lowell Kindschi, 'The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS 32 and British Museum Additional 32246' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1955).
[88] Angeltwicce is listed three times in the *Dictionary of Old English: Old English Corpus* <https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/> [accessed July 2021].
[89] A.M. Juster, ed. and trans, *Saint Aldhelm's Riddles* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 62-3.

regnwyrm ond fenyce fore hreþreor'.[90] The metaphorical use of the 'renwyrm' to exemplify slow movement suggests that there was widespread experience of 'renwyrm' which would allow audiences to relate to the metaphor provided by the riddle author. The *wyrmas* in these three texts could certainly be described with some confidence as being earthworms without the risk of incorrect associations with *Lumbricus terrestris,* as it seems likely that the 'renwyrm' in these examples was indeed what modern audiences would understand as an earthworm. However, the *wyrmas* which appear in the 'Soul and Body' poems exemplify the problem of using the term earthworm since the physical features described are not typical of *Lumbricus terrestris;* and for this reason, 'earth dwelling *wyrm'* is the most appropriate translation for the creature.

The context of 'Soul and Body I' leaves no doubt that 'Gifer' resides specifically within a grave due to its role as bodily consumer. The poet vividly depicts the consumption of the body by the *wyrmas*, and the choice of name, 'Gifer', meaning gluttonous or eager defines the creature by its characteristic as an unrelenting consumer.[91] The description of 'Gifer's' consumption of the body means that it is not difficult to categorise it as a consumer within the 'role' field. It is common for earth-dwelling *wyrmas* to be depicted as consumers of the earthly body; of the twenty-seven creatures in the Old English corpus which I have classified as earth-dwelling worms twenty-five take on the role of a consumer.[92]

The earth-dwelling *wyrmas,* including 'Gifer', are not only depicted as consuming the corpse but are also given agency in that they appear to take pleasure in the act: 'ond þe sculon her moldwyrmas manige ceowan, slitan sarlice swearte wihta, gifre ond grædige'.[93] Despite

[90] 'Riddle 40', *EB,* ll. 70-71, 'the snail is swifter than me, the earthworm quicker, and the fen-frog journeys faster'.
[91] 'Gifer', *Dictionary of Old English* https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doe/ [accessed July 2021]
[92] See Appendix VI
[93] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* Ll. 67-69a, 'And there many earthworms will chew you, the dark creatures painfully slit, cruel and greedy.'

their eagerness to consume the body, earth-dwelling *wyrmas* do not appear to be regarded as evil. The behaviour of the *wyrmas* is certainly intended to be unpleasant but although their 'greedy' consumption embodies what would be sinful behaviour in a human, they are not evil because their behaviour is natural for their kind. This contrasts with other bodily consumers such as Grendel and his mother in 'Beowulf' who are described as being rejected by God as 'Caines cynne' and so are inherently evil. No such terms are attached to *wyrmas* consuming the body in the grave, implying that the role of the *wyrmas* is part of the natural order as opposed to unnatural evil like the behaviour of the Grendelkin.[94] Regardless of their natural role, and their classification within the 'natural' category of the 'Primary Role' field, creatures described as *wyrmas* appear to inhabit an imagined space between reality and the supernatural. Certainly, rather than being associated with *Lumbricus terrestris,* the earth-dwelling *wyrmas* inhabit a space between an earthworm and a snake or similar creature, enabling them to have an aggressive demeanour when undertaking the task of destroying the body in the emotive way suitable for a moralising text such the 'Soul and Body*'* poems while still maintaining a link to identifiable creatures.

The aggressive behaviour displayed by 'Gifer' is typical of *wyrmas,* as my data and categorisation has found that aggression can be attributed to the majority of *wyrmas* in the surviving vernacular corpus.

[94] The *Beowulf* poet describes Grendel as 'Caines cynne' in line 107a. In line 1261b Cain is used again in reference to Grendel and his mother.

Figure Thirteen: Frequency of Aggressive Behaviour

Aggressive	258	60%
Non-threatening	19	4%
Submissive	4	0.9%
Useful	8	1.9%
N/A	111	26%

While the distance between the modern reader's context and that of early medieval scholars prevents definitive conclusions being made about what the *wyrm par exellence* might be, data such as this suggests that it is likely that the prototypical *wyrm* would have displayed aggressive behaviour, because the majority of other creatures categorised by early medieval scholars share this trait.

Parasitic *Wyrmas*

Figure Fourteen: Sample Database Entry for Parasitic *wyrmas*

Root Term	Wyrm		
Exact term	WYRM	Translation	worm [parasitic]
Text_Name	Old English Herbarium	Verse/Prose	Prose
Edition	Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus, de Vriend, EETS, 1984.	Text Short Title	Lch I (Herb)
Context	Wyð þæt wyrmas ymb þone nafolan on þam innoðe derigen genim ðas ylcan wyrte and ysopan & nytrum & cærsan, cnuca tosomne ealle, syle drincan on wætere.	Description	For worms that harm the innards in the navel, take the same wort and hyssop and salt and watercress, pound them all together, give to drink in water.
Physiology	N/A	Physiology (additional)	N/A
Abilities	N/A	Abilities (additional)	
Location	Within the Body (medical)	Role	Attacker Physical
Primary Role	Natural	Behaviour	Aggressive
Hoarding	☐		

Parasitic worms represent the largest group of *wyrmas* in the surviving Old English corpus when both poetic and prose texts are included, making up 31% of the total creatures referred to as *wyrm.*[95] While earth-dwelling *wyrmas* appear to be relatively similar in their behaviours and traits, the parasitic *wyrmas* are varied, and this is reflected by the variety of compound terms used to describe them.

Parasitic *wyrmas* are generally defined by their location in the body rather than their physical appearance as little, if any, description is given of the creatures themselves. This is the case this remedy against '*wyrmas* that harm the innards' from the Old English 'Herbarium'. As a result, the 'physiology' fields have been left as N/A as no accurate information regarding its physical appearance can be ascertained. While this parasite is described only as *wyrm,* parasitic *wyrmas* are also referred to using compounds which usually provide further information regarding their location within or effect upon the body; in some cases, compounds also state whether the host of the parasite is human, animal or other organism. The linking of *wyrmas* with their location in the body may be due to the apparent belief that *wyrmas* may have been in some way responsible for illnesses themselves. The association between *wyrmas* and the cause of illness is exemplified by the ideal of 'onflyge', or 'flying venom' which can be seen as a sense of infectious disease.[96] As I will explore further in chapter one, the association between venom, ideas of *wyrmas* as polluters and their genuine involvement in some ailments may have resulted in them being blamed for a wide range of illnesses where causes were unknown.

[95] See Appendix II.
[96] Meany, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness', p.17.

Figure 15: Compound Terms for Parasitic *wyrmas*

Hondwyrm	hand-worm
Deawwyrm	Ringworm
Þeorwyrm	a worm in a boil
Anawyrm	intestinal worm
Flæscwyrm	flesh-worm
Smeawyrm	penetrating worm
Rengwyrm	intestinal worm
Twinwyrm	poisonous beetle found in grass which cattle eat and are caused to swell up
Hundeswyrm	a worm in a dog
Toðwyrm	a worm in a tooth
Ficwyrm	fig-worm: an intestinal worm, possibly thought to be the cause of haemorrhoids which are referred to as 'the bloody fig'.

The appearance of the above compounds simplified the classification of parasitic *wyrmas* as it removed any ambiguity regarding the location of a *wyrm.* In the case of texts which simply use the basic term *wyrm* to describe a creature, context was relied upon to conclude whether the *wyrm* was related to the body. This was generally simple to ascertain as medical miscellanies are clear regarding the ailment they are treating and state that the remedy is 'wiþ wyrm', leaving little doubt that the *wyrm* is understood to be related to the body. *Wyrmas* in medical miscellanies could not be assumed to always be included as an ailment, as they also appear, infrequently, as an ingredient; the significance of *wyrmas* as an ingredient in remedies is discussed further in Chapter Two.[97]

Further complexity was caused by the similar noun 'wyrm' which refers to corruption or purulence rather than a physical creature within medical miscellanies. Due to the grammatical and contextual similarities between these two terms there is often ambiguity regarding whether a *wyrm* should be considered physically present or whether a remedy refers to infection. I have chosen to include two categories 'wyrm [parasitic]' and 'wyrm [corruption]' to differentiate between instances where each type is used. As I discuss further

[97] See Chapter Two, pp. 131- 135.

in Chapter Two, the fuzzy boundaries between *wyrmas* become blurred to include 'wyrm' and likely resulted in a strengthening in association between the *wyrm* as a creature and corruption.

It was, arguably, possible to be more specific in my classification of parasitic *wyrmas* because some of those described have obvious associations with parasitic infection as recognised in modern medicine. Certainly, the example provided likely refers to the presence of roundworms and threadworms in the intestines which would have been commonplace in early medieval England. In other cases, compounds such as 'deawwyrm' refer to ailments such as ringworm which is now recognised as a fungal infection. Despite this, I have chosen to use the umbrella classification of 'wyrm [parasitic]' as, while it is possible to make assumptions as to what creature was being referred to, imposing modern medical language or classification on an early medieval context would be misleading. For example, specifying that 'deawwyrm' referred to ringworm would inevitably result in modern readers understanding the raised circular appearance of ringworm rash; but for medieval readers, this may have been assumed to be a *wyrm* under the skin and attributed to a parasite, and therefore, the use of modern terms would result in a false confidence in what early medieval people understood of 'deawwyrm.'[98]

As stated previously, the most common behaviour for the *wyrmas* recorded in my data set is aggression, and the parasitic *wyrm* in the example above is no exception to this. While the *wyrm* is not aggressive in the same way as a dragon, it too attacks the body and this has a negative impact; indeed, the remedy uses the verb 'derian' to describe the action of the *wyrm*, leaving little doubt as to the active role the creature plays in causing harm.[99] Despite this, the

[98] NHS, 'Ringworm' <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ringworm/> [accessed 16 June 2022].
[99] 1. transitive: to hurt, harm, injure (someone); to damage, hurt (something), 'Derian' *Dictionary of Old English* < https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [accessed 16 June 2022]

remedy includes nothing which indicates that the *wyrm* is regarded as anything but a natural creature and is therefore placed within the 'natural' category of the 'primary role' field.

Based on this data set, the commonality of medical *wyrmas* may suggest that the *wyrm par excellence* ought to be seen as a parasite. However, of the texts which survive, medical texts are more common than literary or poetic texts and, as a result, the data is skewed by the availability of texts and the chance survival of some texts over others.

Spiders

Figure 16: Sample Database Entry for Spiders

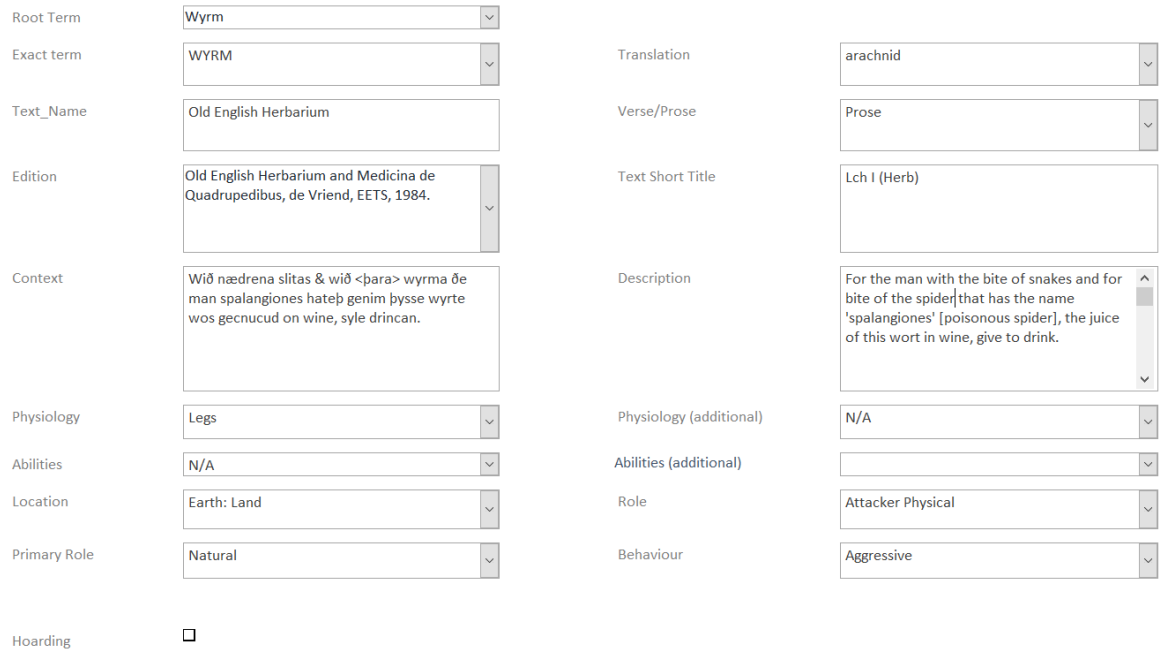


Figure sixteen is one of two database entries which record the use of *wyrm* to describe a spider, more specifically, to translate 'spalangiones', a variant of 'phalangium' which the *DLMBS* defines as a 'kind of venomous spider, esp. tarantula'.[100] Both of the examples of *wyrm* as spider are found in the Old English 'Herbarium' and provide remedies for the bite of the spider; notably, this remedy also specifies that the remedy is useful against snake bite, but the translator uses *næd[d]re* rather than *wyrm* to describe snakes.

As discussed previously in this chapter, spiders are an outlier to the *wyrm* fuzzy set as they not only lack many of the features of more typical *wyrmas* such as the snake and the parasitic worm, but also appear so infrequently. While this may be a result of text loss, texts do exist which describe spiders using terms including 'attorcoppe',[101] suggesting that the use

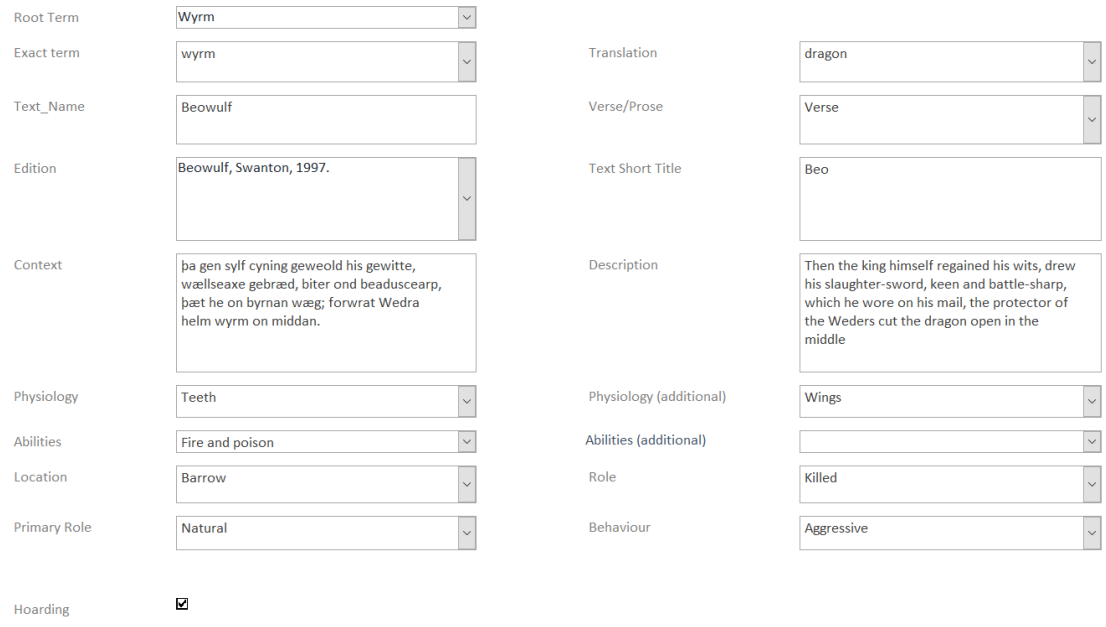
[100] 'Phalangium', *Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British Sources* <http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/Default.aspx> [accessed July 2021].
[101] Megan Cavell, 'Arachnophobia in Early English Literature', 1-43.

of *wyrm* to describe spiders was not common. Indeed, that the use of *wyrm* to describe spiders is limited to the 'Herbarium' may suggest that the spider *wyrm* is the understanding, or lack of understanding of one translator, rather than a broader acceptance of *wyrm* as a word for spider. The use of *wyrm* in this example can be interpreted in one of two ways. Firstly, that the translator believes that the 'spalangiones' are snake-like creatures and so chooses to describe it as *wyrm.* Considering that 'spalangio' describes a tarantula it is unlikely that the translator would have known exactly what the creature in the remedy was, and they may have assumed that because this remedy is effective 'wið nædrena slitas', 'spalangiones' are also snakes. It is notable that the translator refers to *næd[d]re* both in a different clause to the spider *wyrm* and using a different term. This may be because they understood that 'spalangiones' were not snakes, but with limited information about it beyond that it can be grouped alongside snakes, he assumes that it is likely part of the *wyrm* fuzzy set.

If we conclude that the translator of the 'Herbarium' did not understand 'spalangio' to be a spider, it is possible to remove spiders entirely from the group of creatures which I define as *wyrmas* in this thesis. However, I find that this is an unhelpful course of action, as it relies on my ignoring data which exists based on the assumption of scribal or translator error which it is not possible to prove. Furthermore, there are seven instances in my database from three texts in which a scorpion is described as *wyrm*. While this does not prove nor disprove the use of *wyrm* to describe spiders, it does suggest that the physical features of spiders were not sufficiently different to completely eliminate them from the set, as *wyrm* was applied to other arachnids by more than one author. As a result of this, I concluded that spiders should be included within the dataset but with the understanding that they are an outlier of the fuzzy set and were only very rarely described as *wyrmas.* The example of spiders not only demonstrates the complexity of interpreting the limited data available, but also exemplifies the usefulness of fuzzy set theory in this context as it allows me to accept spiders as being *wyrmas* to a limited extent, rather than having to draw clear boundaries between membership and non-membership of the set.

Dragons

Figure 17: Sample Database Entry for Dragons



While dragons represent only 3 per cent of the total creatures described as *wyrmas*, their classification has been challenging due to the complexity of the imagery which surrounds them. The 'Beowulf' dragon is described in far greater detail than many other *wyrmas* within the Old English corpus, particularly regarding the physical traits which it displays. From the descriptions provided, audiences are told that the dragon is fifty feet long – 'Se wæs fiftiges fotgemearces / lang on legere' (it was fifteen feet long as it lay)[102] – and is a 'lytfloga' (air-flyer) [103], a description which allows us to assume that it has wings. The dragon also breathes 'heaðufyr' (hostile fire)[104] and 'attres' (poison) [105], which appear to be its main source of attack alongside its enormous size and strength. The challenge of including all of the physical traits displayed by a creature has been most prevalent when classifying the 'Beowulf' dragon since it is the only *wyrm* in the corpus which displays this range of traits. As the database was not designed to record such a wide range of traits in relation to a single creature, I have generally included only the traits in each entry which are specifically referenced in the passage included.

The 'Beowulf*'* poet also provides extensive descriptions of the dragon's behaviour and lifecycle; we know that the dragon's location is within an 'eorðhuse' (barrow),[106] in which it is hoarding treasure, and that it travels at night since it is 'uhtsceaða' (one that robs at night or early in the morning)[107] We are also informed that 'se ðeodsceaða ðreo hund wintra / heold on hrusan hordærna sum/ ecencræftig'[108] which suggests that the dragon is at least 300 years old, but likely far older as it has managed to accumulate such a large hoard. It is clear from its abilities that the 'Beowulf' dragon is intended to be terrible and its size and

[102] 'Beowulf', ll.3042-3a.
[103] 'Beowulf', l. 2315a.
[104] 'Beowulf', l. 2522a
[105]'Beowulf', l. 2523a.
[106] 'Beowulf', l. 2232a.
[107] 'Beowulf', l. 2271a.
[108] 'Beowulf', ll. 2278-2280a. For three-hundred winters, the ravager of people had held a mighty treasure-hoard in the earth.

aggression make it easy to classify its behaviour as 'aggressive'. However, in addition to the obvious intention for the dragon to be a figure of terrifying power to the audience, it displays positive traits which complicate its image: 'He gescean sceall / hord on hrusan, þær he hæðen gold /warað wintrum frod; ne byð him wihte ðy sel'.[109] The poet is clear in his statement that the dragon 'sceall' hoard the gold. Considering the definition of 'sculan', 'to have a duty or moral obligation […] to be decreed by fate or providence […] a purpose to be served', there is a strong suggestion that the dragon is bound to hoard the gold rather than choosing to.[110] The 'Beowulf' poet's language and the suggestion that the dragon instinctively hoards gold is reflective of a passage in 'Maxims II' which states that 'draca sceal on hlæwe, frod, frætwum wlanc'.[111] As in 'Beowulf', the 'Maxims II' dragon 'sceal' (must) hoard the treasure, a removal of its agency by positioning its behaviour as something over which it has little control. As 'Maxims II' is a wisdom text[112] which outlines the principles by which the world is understood to operate, the description of two dragons which are compelled to hoard provides some justification for its actions and their effect on humans. The similar verb use by the author of 'Maxims II' who states that the dragon 'sceal' hoard may suggests that the association between dragons and hoarding behaviour was widespread. However, as Cavill notes, 'the Anglo-Saxons knew that dragons flew around', an observation which demonstrates the potential issue with this reading.[113] While 'sculon' can be read as meaning an obligation in this context, Cavill argues that 'a salient feature of [gnomes and maxims] is ambiguity', and they therefore cannot be used to evidence what was accepted as typical

[109] 'Beowulf', ll. 2274b-2276. It is its nature to seek out a hoard in the earth where, old and wise in winters, it guards heathen gold; it is none the better for that.
[110] 'sculan' in *Bosworth-Toller Anglo Saxon Dictionary Online* <https://bosworthtoller.com/> [accessed July 2021].
[111] 'Maxims II', *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ll. 26b-27a. The dragon must have a barrow, old and wise, proud in ornaments.
[112] For more on Maxims see: Marie Nelson, '"Is" and "Ought" in the Exeter Book Maxims', *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 45 (1981), 109-121; Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1999).
[113] Paul Cavill, p.47.

dragon behaviour.[114] Indeed, much like the ambiguity which surrounds the classification of creatures in this thesis, the use of 'sceal' to describe the dragon's behaviour is 'intended to be ambiguous, precisely because experience suggests that generalisations about nature and habits so often come unstuck.'[115]

Regardless of what causes the dragon to hoard, the 'Beowulf' dragon and the 'Maxims II' dragon share further similarities as they are described as being 'wintrum frod' and 'frod' respectively; 'frod' can be translated as 'wise, prudent, sage, skilful; advanced in years, aged, old, ancient'.[116]The use of 'frod' to describe the dragon suggests a level of respect for the creature, as 'frod' is also used to describe characters in the text which command high levels of respect such as Hroðgar and Beowulf who are both described as 'frod cyning' (old and wise king).[117] In the context of the characters described as 'wintrum frod' it is certainly possible that early medieval audiences regarded dragons as being guardians of wisdom or of knowledge as well as of treasure. The apparent instinctual behaviour and the wisdom which the dragon exhibits exonerate it from being regarded as a figure of evil in 'Beowulf'; it is classified as 'natural' in the 'primary role' field because while the dragon is certainly intended to condemned, it is recognised as a dangerous and problematic natural creature which is both feared and respected.

Conclusion

As Rosch correctly identifies, the categorisation and understanding of the natural world is influenced by the context of the society which produces the categories; as such, the categorisation of *wyrmas* in early medieval England must be approached with the cultural and

[114] Ibid, p.59.
[115] Ibid.
[116] 'frod' in *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* <https://bosworthtoller.com/> [accessed July 2021].
[117] Hroðgar is described as 'frod cyning', *Beowulf* (l. 1306b); Beowulf is described as 'frod cyning', *Beowulf,* (l. 2209b).

temporal distance between their viewpoint and our own firmly in mind. By understanding our own methods of taxonomical classification, it is possible to begin to acknowledge how these methods are unsuitable for understanding the classification of *wyrmas* in early medieval England. Instead, this chapter has demonstrated that we must consider *wyrmas* as a fuzzy set which views *wyrmas* as a grouping without defined boundaries, focusing as much on the interpretation of the role of particular creatures as the physical traits, behaviours or genetic similarities which define Linnean classification.

The data collected within the database which accompanies this thesis allows me to identify trends in the traits present or absent in depictions of *wyrmas,* such as the prevalence of aggressive behaviour or the lack of consistency in their physiology. Due to the incomplete nature of the Old English corpus, and our cultural and temporal distance from the time period, it is not possible to say with absolute certainty that the texts which survive represent the *wyrmas par excellence*; however, the consistency of trends associated with certain traits, such as the aggressive behaviour, allow us to surmise that *wyrmas* in early medieval England were generally assumed to display these traits. Similarly, the lack of trends in the physical features of *wyrmas* and the variation in the translations of creatures referred to as *wyrmas* provides evidence for the use of the fuzzy set concept because this variation demonstrates how diverse creatures were all viewed as members of the one category by scribes and authors in early medieval England.

Indeed, the understanding of *wyrmas* as a fuzzy set is central to the symbolic importance of *wyrmas,* as Cohen states, an aspect of monstrosity is the inability of a creature to be classified into a particular group. In the following chapter, I will examine how the undefined boundaries of the *wyrm* fuzzy set are central to their symbolic role as monstrous corrupters and should be viewed alongside the condemnation of creatures which would be called *wyrmas* in Old English as corrupting creatures in Leviticus.

Chapter Two: *Wyrmas* and Life in Early Medieval England

People living in early medieval England would likely have interacted with *wyrmas* on a regular basis during their day-to-day lives. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Old English texts portray interactions with *wyrmas* in life and show that these interactions contribute more broadly to the perception of *wyrmas* as a problematic and potentially dangerous force for both body and spirit.

As is the case for many of the *wyrmas* which will be discussed in this thesis, texts make little, if any, effort to distinguish between creatures which would have been observed during daily life, those which existed but would have been rarely, if ever, encountered by people living in England, and those which are entirely fictional. Clearly, many of the creatures which we now recognise as fictional, most notably dragons, were viewed as a real – if rare – creature for which there was reported evidence in the Bible and in texts which presented as accounts of true events such as 'The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle', 'Maxims II' and hagiographical accounts.[118] Similarly, while creatures such as scorpions are entirely real, they would have been absent from the first-hand experiences of the vast majority of people and, as such, written reports of them mean they were likely viewed as being as 'real' as dragons to a contemporary audience. To avoid falling into modern perceptions of how *wyrmas* may have been perceived by people living in early medieval England, I will make little distinction between creatures which we now recognise as real and those which have been proven to be fictional. It is certainly the case that regardless of whether *wyrmas* were real, imagined, or inhabited a space in between these two binaries due to their absence from early medieval England, people appear to have felt that they were under siege, or at risk of attack from *wyrmas* throughout their lives.

[118] For more on dragons in hagiography, see: Rauer, 2000.

As discussed in Chapter One, *wyrmas* form a fuzzy set which fails to conform clearly into any specific grouping. In her book *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas identifies that creatures which would be referred to as *wyrmas* in Old English are viewed as unclean by food penitentials largely as a result of their unclear position in the order of society.[119] If we consider the difficulty in categorising *wyrmas* and the disruption this causes to the ordered nature of things, we can see how they might be understood as causing a disruption to the order of the world; as such, interaction with them might be viewed as having a potentially disrupting influence on those who came into contact with them. The disrupting nature of creatures called *wyrmas* in Old English are described in Leviticus 11 which states that 'All that creepeth upon the earth shall be abominable, neither shall it be taken for meat. Whatsoever goeth upon the breast on four feet, or hath many feet, or traileth on the earth, you shall not eat, because it is abominable.'[120] The focus that Leviticus 11.41-2 places on the 'creeping' movement of creatures via the Latin verb 'reptare' reflects descriptions of *wyrmas* in Old English texts using the verb 'creopan'; indeed, some texts refer to *wyrmas* collectively as 'creopende', demonstrating that their movement is instrumental to their definition.[121] That the movement of *wyrmas* is central not only establishes an aspect of characterisation for the fuzzy set in Chapter One but also demonstrates that early medieval English people likely viewed all *wyrmas* in a similar way due to their shared methods of movement. Notably, Leviticus would also seemingly group spiders within this 'abominable' group as creatures with 'many feet'. Although the categorisation of creatures as physically different to one another within the *wyrm* fuzzy set may initially appear unusual, this verse in

[119] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 56-58.
[120] All that creepeth upon the earth shall be abominable, neither shall it be taken for meat. [42] Whatsoever goeth upon the breast on four feet, or hath many feet, or traileth on the earth, you shall not eat, because it is abominable.
[121] Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge (ed), 'Byrhtferth's Manual', in *Byrhferth's Enchiridion,* Early English Texts Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.2- 236. 'On þam fiftan dæge […] he gescop eall wyrmcynn and creopende'. On the fifth day […] he made all wyrm-kind and creeping things'.

Leviticus suggests that characteristics of creatures classified as *wyrmas* were recognised more widely as being similar.

While the Old Testament may have influenced views of the world, it is unclear to what extent people in early medieval England would have been influenced by the laws described in Leviticus 11. Attitudes differed between scholars regarding whether the Old Testament should be interpreted literally or spiritually and 'the combination of texts favouring a literal interpretation of biblical purity rules with those that prefer a spiritual interpretation of these rules seems to be symptomatic of early medieval religious attitudes.'[122] As such the information conveyed to early medieval Christians about the extent to which creatures described as *wyrmas* were capable of being corrupting may have differed. While knowingly consuming *wyrmas* themselves may not have been common practice anyway, if people were interpreting Leviticus 11 in a literal way the presence of *wyrmas* and their potential to disrupt balance merely by coming into contact with individuals must have been a concern considering how emphatic it is in stating that they should be avoided.[123] The choice of the term 'abominable' leaves the audience in no doubt of the potentially corrupting influence of consuming creatures within this category, not least because the verse repeats the condemnation of the creatures as 'abominable' twice. Furthermore, the following two verses serve to exacerbate this anxiety further; 'do not defile your souls, nor touch aught thereof, lest you be unclean. […] Defile not your souls by any creeping thing, that moveth upon the earth'.[124] Leviticus not only commands that creatures categorised as *wyrmas* should not be consumed, but also suggests that touching them is tantamount to the defilement of the soul.

[122] Rob Meens, 'The Uses of the Old Testament in Early Medieval Canon Law: the *Collectio Vetus Gallica* and the *Collectio Hibernensis*', in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.67-77 (p. 76).
[123] Eels are included on a list of unclean foods, but it seems likely that they would have formed some part of people's diets. There is no surviving evidence of eels being expressly referred to as *wyrmas*, despite their physical features suggesting possible membership of the set, so I do not consider them to be *wyrmas* in this thesis.
[124] Leviticus, 11.43-44.

Considering the prevalence of *wyrmas* in the environment and the high frequency of parasitic infection which will be discussed later in this chapter, the fact that the Old Testament is so overt in its condemnation of interaction with *wyrmas* when it was unavoidable must have been terrifying for people living in early medieval England who understood the teachings of Leviticus to be relevant. This chapter will focus on *wyrmas* as a polluting and disrupting influence, to demonstrate that encountering *wyrmas* during life, and finding them inhabiting one's own body, would have been an anxiety-inducing and unpleasant experience for people in early medieval England.

This chapter will begin by addressing the *wyrmas* which cause the most notable disruption when they appear in the lives of early medieval English people – the dragons – and their connections both with the order of the world and with biblical imagery. I will then examine the *wyrmas* which are recognisable as snakes, as the imagery and association around these creatures evident in literature informs the attitude that individuals appear to have had towards other *wyrmas.* This discussion will primarily focus upon the significance of venom in association with snakes and how this ability permeates into the character of other *wyrmas* and contributes significantly to the fear of the group as a whole, despite many of them being unable to produce venom of any type. Furthermore, the religious and spiritual associations with snakes must have influenced the attitudes of early medieval English people, with biblical references potentially having built upon existing pre-Christian Germanic beliefs and anxieties which persisted despite the spread of Christianity.

I will then go on to discuss those *wyrmas* which are specified by medical texts as residing in or on the body; this is a particularly significant area of discussion for this thesis as my data records that the most common context for *wyrmas* to be discussed is medical texts. The archaeological studies and extant leechbooks which I will discuss make clear that bodily *wyrmas* were a real problem for early medieval people throughout their lives. Indeed, given

the range of internal and external *wyrmas* which are described, it is understandable that people would have felt that *wyrmas* threatened their bodies during their lives as well as after it. While the threat of parasitic *wyrmas* was certainly very real and must have caused significant health problems, the anxiety around the presence of *wyrmas* within the body likely had spiritual as well as physical associations. Considering the attitudes towards the consumption of unclean creatures, including *wyrmas,* and the associations with venom and pollution caused by the association with snakes, the uncontrollable presence of *wyrmas* within the body must have been alarming for early medieval English Christians due to their damaging effect on the body and soul.

Dragons

Much has been written on the significance of dragons in Old English literature due to the appearance of the dragon in 'Beowulf, hagiographical and homiletic texts, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and wisdom texts including 'Maxims II'. [125] 'Maxims II' specifies that 'Draca sceal on hlæwe, frod, frætwum wlanc';[126] the 'Maxims', which present 'observations on the order of the Anglo-Saxon universe […with] focus on the anatomy and physiology of nature and on the code for correct heroic behaviour' clearly indicate that dragons were viewed as a real and present part of the natural world.[127] Clearly, the presence of dragons was unlikely to cause difficulties in the everyday lives of early medieval English people; however,

[125] For more on Old English dragons see: A Bonjour, 'Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant: Or the *Beowulf* Dragon Debated', *PLMA,* 68.1 (1953), 304-12, A K Brown, 'The Firedrake in "Beowulf"', *Neophilologus,* 64.3 (1980), 439-461; Joyce Tally Lionarons, 'Beowulf: Myth and Monsters', *English Studies,* 77.1 (1996), 1-14; Joyce Tally Lionarons 'Sometimes the Dragon Wins': Unsuccessful Dragon Fighters in Medieval Literature', in *Essays on Old, Middle, Modern English and Old Icelandic in Honor of Raymond P. Tripp, Jr*, ed by L.C Gruber, M.C. Gruber, G.K Jember (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 2000), pp. 301-16; T Klein, 'Stonc æfter stane (Beowulf, 1.2288a): Philology, Narrative Context, and the Waking Dragon', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 106.1 (2007), 22-44; Shilton, H, 'The Nature of Beowulf's Dragon', Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 79.3 (1997), 67-78; Thomas Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019).

[126] 'Maxims II', *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poem*s, ll. 26b-27a. 'a dragon must have a barrow, old and wise, proud in ornaments'.

[127] P.B. Taylor, 'Heroic Ritual in the Old English Maxims', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 70. 3 (1969), 387-407, p. 387.

they were perceived as having a real and significant place within the order of the world and having the potential to destroy that order. It is the case, however, that much of the literature which refers to dragons describes them existing outside of those parameters which Taylor notes 'signals, and often contributes to, a succession of unfortunate events.'[128] Certainly, it seems that dragons are regarded as *wyrmas* which can exist relatively safely in the world within certain spaces away from humans, such as the barrow, but are to be feared if they move beyond being 'on hlæwe'.

In the heroic context of 'Beowulf', the dragon certainly appears to adhere to the idea that dragons are safe when remaining within their own space, as the dragon resides 'on heaum hofe […] stanbeorh steapne',[129] a perfect reflection of the correct place for dragons stipulated in 'Maxims II'. While the text does not specify the origin of the dragon, only that it is an 'eald uhtsceaða' which found the hoard 'opene standan'[130] after the mysterious 'lone survivor' dies, the poet does state that it has guarded the hoard for 'þreo hund wintra' (three hundred winters)[131] suggesting that it caused little disruption prior to being disturbed; however, it is when the dragon leaves this space it becomes problematic. As previously stated, the 'Beowulf' dragon is never specified as being evil and, like the 'Maxims II' dragon, is described as 'frod', a term meaning old and wise most often used to describe heroic characters such as Beowulf and Hroðgar, suggesting that as long as it remains within the safe confines of the barrow, the dragon may be regarded with a level of respect and admiration usually afforded to heroes.[132]

In the 'Beowulf' story, it is apparently interaction with humanity which triggers the disruption caused by the dragon. When the dragon does begin to attack the Geats, the

[128] Taylor, p. 394.
[129] 'Beowulf', Ll. 2212-2213a. 'in a high hall[..], a high stone barrow.'
[130] 'Beowulf', Ll.2274b-2275a. 'old pre-dawn scourge […] standing open'.
[131] 'Beowulf', Ll. 2210-11; ll. 2278b.
[132] 'frod', *Dictionary of Old English* <https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [January 2021].

disruption which it causes is undeniable, as not only does it kill people but also as a result of its attacks 'bolda selest, brynewylmum mealt,/ gifstol Geata', destroying the physical and symbolic centre of the community.[133] The destruction of the hall indicates the ultimate breakdown in the order of heroic society and that this is performed by a *wyrm* demonstrates the significance of the creatures as a disrupter of order when coming into contact with humans. As a result of the apparent acceptance of the dragon as a creature which exists in a hidden context, early medieval English people must have specifically hoped not to encounter one due to the implications for themselves and their community more widely.

This is certainly the case for the dragon which appears in the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'[134] entry for the year 793: Her wæron reðe forebecna cumene ofer Norðanhymbra land. Þæt folc earmlice bregdon; þæt wæron ormete lig ræscas. Wæron geseowene fyrene draca on þam lyfte fleogende. Þam tacnum sona fyligde mycel hunger.'[135] While it is not impossible that some audiences would have taken this entry at face-value since the existence of dragons was accepted as fact, the reference to the 'fyrene draca on æam lyfe fleogende' has been interpreted by scholars as being a reference to celestial phenomenon; Marilina Cesario concludes that this event ought to be read as a portrayal of the aurora borealis rather than a comet as has previously been suggested.[136] Aside from the scientific context which provides evidence for the 793 reference being the aurora, Cesario draws attention to the fact

[133] 'Beowulf', Ll. 2326-2327a. 'the finest of buildings, the gift-stool of the Geats, had melted away in the whelm of burning.'
[134] All citations of the Anglo Saxon Chronicle are taken from the relevant volumes in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, gen. eds. David Dumville and Simon Keynes: vol. 3, ASC MS A, ed. Janet M. Bately (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986); vol. 5, ASC MS C, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); vol. 6, ASC MS D, ed. G. P. Cubbin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996); vol. 7, ASC MS E, ed. Susan Irvine (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004); and vol. 8, ASC MS F, ed. Peter S. Baker (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000)
[135] 'In this year terrible fore-warnings appeared over Northumbria, and miserably frightened the inhabitants: these were exceptional flashes of lightning and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine soon followed these signs.'
[136] Marilina Cesario, 'Fyrenne Dracan in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *Textiles, Text, Intertext: Essays in Honour of Gale R. Owen-Crocker,* ed. by Maren Clegg Hyer and Jill Frederick (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), pp. 153-170.

that ‘red aurorae […] resemble burning flames in the sky’.[137] Considering the associations between dragons and fire which are made in texts including ‘Beowulf,’ with the dragon being described as ‘fyre befangen’ (encircled in fire),[138] the portrayal of red aurora as a dragon is not surprising. Cesario comments that fear of the phenomenon was largely a result of what it was supposed to portend, or, with hindsight, a confirmation of that chain of natural cause and effect linking the phenomenon to known consequences’ such as the beginning of ‘mycel hunger’ and the sacking of Lindisfarne by Viking raiders in the case of the 793 entry.[139] Furthermore, Cesario links fear of these phenomena with the fact that ‘for both Augustine and Isidore ‘monstra’ were visual manifestations of divine judgement, which would frequently foretell dreadful consequences for mankind.’[140] Considering the associations between *wyrmas* and corruption, the incarnation of Satan as a dragon and the relationship between *wyrmas* and the inevitability of death which I will discuss in future chapters,[141] the portrayal of a phenomenon associated with the prediction of disaster as a dragon specifically is entirely logical and contributes to the fear which surrounded *wyrmas.*

Much as the appearance of the ‘dragon’ in the ‘Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ foreshadows the disruption of life for the Northumbrian, the appearance of the ‘Beowulf’ dragon portends the end of Beowulf and the Geats; considering Cearioʼs assertion that references to weather phenomena and *monstra* were understood to be omens, it is likely that ‘Beowulf’ audiences would understand that the dragonʼs appearance marked a change in Beowulfʼs fortunes. The same associations with phenomena in the sky, dragons, and the omen of a terrible event are referred to in ‘The Battle of Finnsburh’: ‘Ne ðis ne dagað eastan, ne her draca ne fleogeð,/ ne

[137] Cesario, p. 161.
[138] ‘Beowulf’, L. 2274a.
[139] Cesario, p. 168.
[140] Ibid, p. 169.
[141] See Chapter Four, p. 195-208.

her ðisse healle fornas ne byrnað.'[142] While 'Finnsburh' is a fragment, and therefore the full content of the poem cannot be accessed, the recounting of the Finn Saga in 'Beowulf' leaves us in little doubt of the tragic circumstances to come.[143] While the 'Finnsburh' fragment does not communicate what Hnaef sees, from the comparison with the dawn, the dragon and the burning hall, we can assume it is a reference to reddening of the sky; while the text clearly states that what is seen is 'ne' any of these things, that Hnaef mentions the possibility of a dragon or a burning hall creates associations with these images. Indeed, as discussed previously, the burning of a hall is a disastrous physical and symbolic destruction of the social centre; similarly, the appearance of a 'draca fleogeð' would likely be associated with a coming disaster. As a result, Hnaef's belief that what he sees could be either of these things, regardless of his conclusion that it is not, indicates that terrible events of the type predicated by a 'dragon' are going to occur. In both the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' entry of 793 and 'The Battle of Finnsburh', the appearance of, or allusion to, dragons act as an omen prior to an event which results in the disruption of a community; as such, *wyrmas* continue to act as a disrupting force within the context of Old English texts.

Considering the disruption caused by dragons, it is unsurprising that heroic characters are expected to restore order by ridding the community of the disruptive force. 'Beowulf' exemplifies this when the dragon disrupts the Geatish community through its attacks and it is Beowulf's role to dispose of the cause of such disruption to restore order. Ultimately, Beowulf fails to fulfil this role because, while he successfully kills the dragon, his one-on-one combat with the dragon leads to his own death. Regardless of whether the fight between Beowulf and the dragon is evidence of heroic valour or a selfish desire for renown, the death

[142] 'The Battle of Finnesburh', in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poem*s (London: Routledge, 1942), pp. 3-4 (ll.3-4). It is not dawn in the east, nor is a dragon flying here, nor are the gables of this hall on fire.
[143] Finn episode in 'Beowulf', ll. 1063- 1159a.

of Beowulf results in the loss of leadership and eventual destruction of the Geats.[144] This role of the hero as dragon-slayer and restorer of order can be identified in a number of Old English sources, religious content and analogous works from Old Norse written records.[145]

The story of Sigurd and Fafnir was clearly known to early medieval English audiences since it appears in 'Beowulf',[146] although the dragon-slayer is identified as Sigurd's father, Sigemund. By killing Fafnir, who hoards gold gained from the murder of his father, Sigurd brings to an end an isolating feud between Fafnir and his brother, Regin, allowing him to unify the family with that of Brynhild, and so he can be seen to restore order through his killing of Fafnir. In addition to disrupting order by hoarding treasure which ought to be the property of both brothers, Fafnir creates disorder within the local community through fear as he 'blows poison in all directions' and 'every one fears [him]', suggesting that the community are unable to comfortably go about their business without risk from Fafnir.[147]

The prowess of a hero is clearly due to their power and dangerousness; Tolkien's judgement that the dragon is a suitable final foe, and the continuation of dragon slaying as a heroic act throughout literary history attests to the significance of slaying dragons. The appearance of dragons on objects such as the Sutton Hoo helmet may aim to draw upon the understanding of this association between heroes and dragon slaying, but also on the apparent awe which dragons evoke in audiences. The Sutton Hoo helmet, found as part of the assemblage interred alongside a high-status ship burial excavated in 1939 includes the depiction of two *wyrmas*; the first is a double-headed *wyrm* which forms the crest of the

[144] Margaret E. Goldsmith, 'The Christian Perspective in Beowulf', *Comparative Literature*, 14.1 (1962), 71-90; Raymond P. Tripp, 'Beowulf 3182b: Lofgeornost, "Most Eager to Praise"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 106.4 (2005), 425-442; Joseph E. Marshall, 'Goldgyfan or Goldwlance: A Christian Apology for Beowulf and Treasure, *Studies in Philology*, 107.1 (2010),1-24.
[145] For a full exploration of the analogous works linked to 'Beowulf', see Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon.*
[146] 'Beowulf', ll. 884b-897.
[147] Jesse L. Byock (ed and trans), *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1990), p.62.

helmet, the second is an aerial view of a dragon in flight which is formed by the facial features of the helmet.[148]

Sutton Hoo helmet[149] (2014)

The level of intricate detail included in the Sutton Hoo helmet indicates that it was an important status symbol. While it is possible that the decoration was chosen at random, or that the crest was made in the form of a *wyrm* simply due to its shape, the detail afforded to the dragons including the inclusion of garnet eyes, and 'scaly pattern[s]' indicates not only he care taken in the construction of the helmet but also possibly the significance of its symbolic elements.[150] It seems likely that the smith considered the symbolic importance of the creatures depicted; indeed, above each eye of the helmet there are two profile views of wild

[148] Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial, Volume 2: Arms, Armour and Regalia,* with contributions by M. Bimson, D.F Cutler, K. East, S.E Ellis, A. Care Evans, C. Hicks, M. Hughes, W.A Oddy, M.S Tite, S.M Youngs and A.E.A Werner (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), pp.152,169.
[149] Steven Zucker, *The Sutton-Hoo Helmet,* digital photograph, Flikr, 1 January 2014, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/82032880@N00/46784552364> [accessed 16 June 2022]. Photograph licensed under CC BY-NC-SA.
[150] Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial, Volume 2: Arms, Armour and Regalia,* pp. 154, 160.

boar, a creature understood to be a symbol of ferocity which is also described on a helmet in 'Beowulf'.[151] It may be the case that the choice of animals served an amuletic role, as such, the choice of the *wyrm* crest may have been intended to imbue the helmet with the strength of the dragon. Certainly, the association between dragons and the protection of hoards would be a fitting considering the functional purpose of the crest to defend the top of the head which was the 'main target of enemy blows.'[152] In a similar way, the dragon image across the face of the helmet may have been desirable as the image of a dragon was intended to evoke some of the associations of dragon-slaying heroes through its presence in such a prominent position. To those viewing the helmet the symbolism would indicate that the warrior possessed the power of the dragon, or the power of the heroes who defeat dragons.

Associations between dragon-slaying and warrior prowess cannot only be observed in texts with pre-Christian influences, hagiographical depictions of dragon-slaying represent the triumph of the Christian faith over sources of disruption which, as a result of the dragon's association with the devil, symbolise evil in some form.[153] The 'Vita II S. Samsonis' tells the story of the victory of Saint Samson against a dragon which terrorises a community; Samson defeats the dragon through his faith in God in order to demonstrate to his companions that 'quod qui Deum timuerit, nullam creaturam timere debet.'[154] By destroying the dragon, St. Samson acts as a hero; however, due to the means by which he kills the creature, the strength of the hero becomes the faith which Samson maintains in God. Ultimately, the fact that St. Samson uses his faith to destroy the dragon results in both the restoration of order to the

[151] 'Beowulf', l.1286b 'swin ofer helme', 'a swine over the helmet' (ie: a boar crest).
[152] Richard Underwood, *Anglo-Saxon Weapons and Warfare* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 1999), p. 105.
[153] Christine Rauer has composed a list of the hagiographical texts which depict dragon fights in the appendices to *Beowulf and the Dragon*, pp. 174-193.
[154] Rauer (ed and trans), p.153. Whoever fears God should not fear any creature.

community in terms of their ability to live normal lives and further order through their strengthened faith in God and their commitment to building a monastery.[155]

The same imagery of the overcoming of a dragon, and the restoration of order through the Christian God, is visible in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. Satan takes the form of 'a great red dragon' which persecutes the woman clothed with the sun and awaits the birth of her child which it will consume.[156] Clearly, the depiction of Satan as a dragon, a creature which would be placed within the *wyrm* category in Old English, in proximity to a woman and to motherhood creates a clear connection to the serpent in Genesis 3. As a result of the association between Satan and dragons, audiences are warned that dragons pose a danger to humans on both a spiritual and physical level; they are not only a threat when disturbed in the environment, but also represent part of the unseen battle between God and Satan for the soul. The negative dragon and serpent imagery in the Bible which culminates with the battle between the 'great red dragon' and the angels cements the dragon as 'one of the commonest Christian symbols of evil'.[157] Order is restored when 'he [Michael] laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.'[158] The containment of the dragon – Satan – by the angels allows some order to be restored as God is once again able to exert some control over Satan; however, as I will discuss further in Chapter Four, the association between *wyrmas,* Judgement Day and Hell all create the sense that *wyrmas* are connected with the conflict for the human soul.[159]

What these examples demonstrate is the disruptive force of the *wyrm,* in the form of the dragon, within human communities. While dragons cannot have been a regular danger to early medieval individuals, they act as a hidden threat to the order of society and to the fate of

[155] Rauer, pp.150-155.
[156] Revelation 12: 3-4.
[157] Rauer, p.52.
[158] Revelation. 20: 2.
[159] See Chapter Four, pp. 190-208.

the soul; the possible proximity of dragons in the world may not have been something which caused inordinate anxiety, but the level of threat if one *were* to appear would have been well understood. Furthermore, their classification as *wyrmas,* and the features that they shared with more common types of *wyrm* may have meant that encountering or hearing stories of smaller *wyrmas* reminded individuals of the potential threat posed to them by the largest *wyrmas.*

Snakes

Unlike dragons, some *wyrmas* were native to early medieval England and were likely more commonly encountered than in modern England; this is particularly relevant when considering the role of snakes in the lives of early medieval English people as interactions with these creatures must have provided some understanding of their abilities and the possible threat posed by them. There are two key vernacular terms used to refer to snakes, *wyrm* and *næd[d]re* and they are often used interchangeably; due to the limitations of this project, I will primarily discuss *wyrmas.* However, I will refer to examples of *næd[d]re* in some instances if relevant as both terms are often used in relation to the same individual creature in the texts discussed.[160]

While references to snakes are common, there is no distinction made between native snakes and other species which are described in vernacular translations of foreign language texts. Due to the more favourable conditions of undeveloped natural environments compared to the impact of habitat loss on the numbers of native snakes in Britain today, snakes must have been a far more frequent sight for people in early medieval England than in the modern day. There are three native British species of snake; two of these species, the smooth snake

[160] Alternative spellings of *næd[d]ran* include 'neddran', 'nædran' and næddran', and related compound include terms such as 'nædercyn'. A full record of these terms has not been included in this thesis due to time and length restrictions. A record can be found via *Dictionary of Old English Online: Corpus.*

and the grass snake do not produce venom and although capable of biting, are harmless to humans.[161] The grass snake is the largest native British snake and is also a proficient swimmer; the observation of behaviours such as swimming may have contributed towards the imagery of the 'sædraca' which we find in 'Beowulf'.[162] While the third native snake species, the adder, produces venom, it lacks potency and the bite most often causes swelling and pain with bites only rarely causing death in those who are already vulnerable such as the very young or old.[163] Bites to animals such as dogs occur more commonly and, although still rare, have a greater likelihood of being fatal, an observation which may have served to exacerbate fears of adders.[164] While the majority of adder bites do not require anti-venom or specialist treatment to aid recovery, they may have led to secondary infections. Medicine in early medieval England was effective to an extent, as attested to by the number of remedies containing antibacterial ingredients including onion and garlic, and the introduction of copper salts, a known antibacterial ingredient, to remedies through the preparation of acidic ingredients in a copper vessel.[165] However, the poor sanitation available to early medieval people, and poorer health generally, may have led to higher mortality through infection following a snake bite, resulting in an exaggerated sense of the severity of the venom.[166] Unfortunately, due to the lack of identifying detail in descriptions of snakes, it is not possible to determine whether attitudes towards commonly encountered native species differed to those of snakes described in texts as having terrifying abilities. The descriptions of snakes which survive demonstrate two distinct and opposing attitudes, one which suggests that they were seen as creatures to be feared both as a result of their ability to attack people and their

[161] Emily Osterloff, 'Should we be Scared of British Snakes?' <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/should-we-be-scared-of-british-snakes.html> [accessed 15 June 2022]
[162] Ibid.
[163] H. Alistair Reid, 'Adder Bites in Britain', *The British Medical Journal*, 2.6028 (1976), 153-156.
[164] N.M Sutton, N. Bates, A. Campbell, 'Canine Adder Bites in the UK: a Retrospective Study of Cases Reported to the Veterinary Poisons Information Service', *The Veterinary Record*, 169.23 (2011), 607-615.
[165] M.L Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England vol. 7, ed. by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), (p.119).
[166] Ibid, pp. 5-10.

association with corruption, and the other which – as referred to in Chapter One – aligns them with imagery of resurrection, wisdom and healing. In this section I will discuss the complex context surrounding snakes which exemplifies the blurring of imagery surrounding *wyrmas* and demonstrate how the association between venom and pollution associated with these *wyrmas* contributes towards the overall fear of the category.

Latin texts such as 'Alexander's Letter to Aristotle'[167] and 'Wonders of the East', both of which were translated from Latin into Old English, demonstrate that some early medieval English scholars had access to descriptions of the existence of highly poisonous snakes in foreign lands.[168] The physical features of the serpents described in the 'Letter' are fantastic and terrifying; some snakes 'hæfdon tu heafdo, eac sume hæfdon þreo', some are 'swa greate swa columnan' and their movement is highlighted: 'þa wyrmas scluncon wunderlice, wæron him þa breost upggewende on ðæm hricge wodon, a swa hie hit geforan gelice mid þæm scillum gelice mid ðe muþe ða eorþan sliton tæron'.[169] The descriptions of these *wyrmas* must have isolated them from native snakes which could be observed as not sharing any of these characteristics; however, that these creatures were presented as existing in the world at all must have contributed towards an overall anxiety regarding what *wyrmas* were and their capabilities. Most significantly, the 'Letter' highlights the ability of snakes to kill using venom, a feature central to the fear of snakes which is also visible in Old English medical texts. The 'Letter' describes a fatal attack by *wyrmas*: 'wæs þæra wyrma oroð eþung swiðe deaðberende æterne for hiora þæm wolbeorendan oroðe monige men swulton'.[170] Clearly the *wyrmas* are presented as having venom which can kill 'monige men'; moreover, the danger posed by *wyrmas* in this passage is magnified by the fact that it is the 'wyrma

[167] Orchard, pp. 224-254.
[168] Orchard, pp. 183-203.
[169] Orchard (ed. and trans), p. 237. '[some snakes] had two heads, and some even had three; [they are] as big as columns; The serpents came and slithered in an extraordinary fashion, with their bellies turned up and travelling on their backs, and as they advanced they ripped and tore the ground with their scales as well as their mouths.'
[170] Orchard (ed and trans), p. 237.The breath and exhalation of the serpents was very deadly and poisonous, and many men died because of their pestilential breath.

oroð' (the breath of the *wyrmas*), rather than the bite which is 'deaðberende' (death-bearing) and so the danger posed by these *wyrmas* is far greater because they do not have to come into contact with people in order to kill them. That *wyrmas* have poisonous breath is also observed in 'Beowulf', where Beowulf states 'ic ðær heaðufyres hates wene, / oreðes ond attres' when he encounters the dragon.[171] The shared abilities of the poisonous snakes described in the 'Letter' and the dragon in 'Beowulf', both of which would have been perceived as real – if uncommon – creatures, demonstrates a belief in the ability of snakes and other *wyrmas* to poison humans even without direct contact.

While medical texts do not indicate that early medieval English people believed that *wyrmas* they might encounter daily had poisonous breath, the anxiety surrounding the possession of potent venom indicated that *wyrmas* were believed to have a significant sickening and corrupting influence. This is exemplified by references to 'onflyge', or 'flying venom' which has been suggested to be a basic understanding of infectious disease as it refers to the spreading of infection of illness through the air; certainly, the reference to *wyrmas* with poisonous breath, and the observable venomous nature of adders suggest a clear association between *wyrmas* and disease more broadly.[172] The association between a producer of venom and the concept of 'onflyge' is taken further when considered alongside Isidore's description of the 'iaculi' flying snakes which 'spring up into trees, and whenever some animal happens by they throw themselves on it and kill it'.[173] While it is not necessarily the case that the people in early medieval England associated the 'iaculus' with 'onflyge', the idea that venomous snakes could attack from a variety of unexpected places may well have led to an exaggerated sense of the threat posed by *wyrmas*. The potential for corruption or venom to be transmitted without physical contact must have resulted in a far greater fear

[171] 'Beowulf', ll.2522-2523a. 'Here I expect hot battle-fire and breath and poison'.
[172] Meany, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness', p.17.
[173] Isidore, *Etymologiae,* p. 257.

response when encountering *wyrmas*, since merely coming into proximity with one could prove dangerous.

Meaney notes that in the 'Old English Herbarium' 'the number of remedies for snakebite […] seems excessive: 28 plants (out of 185), and parts of 3 animals (out of 14) are prescribed against snakes.'[174] The continued frequency of remedies for snake bite can be understood as demonstrating the anxiety that surrounded injury from snakes and the impact that their venom could have both on an individual and their community. The 'Nine Herbs Charm'[175] includes references to *wyrmas*,[176] *næddran*,[177]and venom,[178] and also references to Woden fighting against a serpent.[179] While these references do not necessarily prove that the charm reflects the pre-Christian attitudes of early medieval English people towards snakes due to the Christian context in which the text was written down, they do suggest that local beliefs around *wyrmas* and venom were maintained and coexisted with Christianity to enough of an extent that these references were included in the 'Lacnunga'. While I do not intend to investigate the wider meaning of the 'Nine Herbs Charm' and its potential pre-Christian connections any further here, the attitudes conveyed by it towards *wyrmas* cannot be overlooked.[180] One section of the poem focuses on the herb called 'Stune':

> Stune hætte þeos wyrt, heo on stane geweox;
> stond heo wið attre, stunað heo wærce.

[174] Meaney, Notes to 'The Anglo-Saxon view of the causes of Illness', p.26.
[175] Elliot van Kirk Dobbie ed., 'Nine Herbs Charm', *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poem*s (London: Routledge, 1942), pp.119-20.
[176]'Nine Herbs Charm', *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ll. 18b, 31a, 52a.
[177] Ibid, l.33a,
[178] Ibid. Attre (venom) appears twenty times: ll. 5a; 12b; 15a; 16b; 17b; 19a; 29a; 30b; 41b; 46a; 47a, b; 48a, b; 49a, b; 50a, b; 51a, b.
[179] Ibid, ll.32a-33b.
[180] For more on the 'Nine Herbs Charm', see: Howard Meroney, 'The Nine Herbs', *Modern Language Notes,* 59.3 (1944), 157-160; A.L. Meaney, 'Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence,' *Folklore,* 77.2 (1966), 105-115; L.M.C Weston, 'The Language of Magic in Two Old English Metrical Charms', *Neuphilogische Mitteilungen,* 86.2 (1985), 176-186; Karin Olsen, 'The Lacnunga and its Sources: The Nine Herbs Charm and Wið Færstice Reconsidered', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses,* 55.26 (2007), 23-31; Debby Banham, 'The Old English Nine Herbs Charm', in *Medieval Christianity in Practice,* ed. by Miri Rubin, Princeton Readings in Religions 36 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 189-193.

Stiðe heo hatte, wiðstunað heo attre,

wreceð heo wraðan, weorpeð ut attor.

Þis is seo wyrt seo wiþ wyrm gefeaht,

þeos mæg wið attre, heo mæg wið onflyge,

heo mæg wið ðam laþan ðe geond lond fereþ.[181]

The 'Nine Herbs Charm' is challenging to interpret, and the herbs included within this passage have not been identified with any certainty as they appear nowhere else in the surviving Old English corpus.[182] Regardless of the identity of the herbs within the charm however, what is clear is the overt relationship between the *wyrm,* venom and disease more broadly. The initial descriptions of the 'stiðe which 'weorpeð ut attor' can be interpreted to relate logically to treatment of a venomous bite, particularly with the use of the verb 'weorpan' which often appears in remedies. Considering the emphasis of the 'Nine Herbs Charm' on poison, it is clear that there is not only an association between illness caused by literal poisons from venomous creatures, but that poison, and the pollution of the body by it, is viewed as a cause of disease in general. It is significant, therefore, that the *wyrm* and its semantically related term *næd[d]re* appear four times within the charm and each time it is depicted as something dangerous or being fought against; clearly the poet views these creatures as having an intrinsic relationship with the poisons he describes. The thought is exemplified by the line 'Þis is seo wyrt seo wið wyrm gefeaht' which makes clear the association between the 'attor' which has been described throughout the section and the *wyrm,* since the herb 'stiðe' is said to destroy both things. The singular form of 'wyrm' in the line provides a character identity for the *wyrm* which goes beyond a simple category of

[181] Elliot van Kirk Dobbie ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poem*s, pp.119-20. ''Stune' is the name of this herb, it grows upon the stone, it stands against poison, it crashes against pain. 'Strong' it is called, it withstands poison, it avenges wrath, casts out poison. This is the herb which fought with the *wyrm,* this is power against poison, it is power against flying venom, it is power against evil things which travel over the land.'
[182] Howard Meroney, 'The Nine Herbs', *Modern Language Notes,* 59.3 (1944), 157-160 (p.159).

creatures and depicts the *wyrm* as a single, identifiable, and apparently evil creature which can be fought. In this regard it is interesting that the poet has chosen to use *wyrm* to describe the creature rather than a more specific term such as *næd[d]re* as the use of the broader term enables the individual *wyrm* in this line to be interpreted as any singular creature within the grouping as described in Chapter One. The section goes on to state that the herb 'heo mæg wið ðam laþan/ ðe geond lond fereþ' with the use of 'laþan' drawing association between poison and evil. Furthermore, the reference to the spread of the poison 'geond lond fereþ' demonstrates the belief in the ability of corruption, in this case poison, to spread beyond an individual location or person; that corruption can spread in this way is central to the anxiety surrounding infection with parasitic *wyrmas* which I will discuss further later in this chapter.

In addition to 'stiðe' fighting against the *wyrm* and its venom, the 'Nine Herbs Charm' explains that: [183]

Ðas VIIII magon wið nygon attrum.

Wyrm com snican, toslat he man;

ða genam Woden VIIII wuldortanas,

sloh ða þa næddran, þæt heo on VIIII tofleah.

Þær geændade æppel and attor,

þæt heo næfre ne wolde on hus bugan.[184]

The *wyrm* which appears at the beginning of this passage clearly has associations with those which appear in the grave as there is similar consuming imagery and the use of the verb

[183] 'Nine Herbs Charm, *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems,* ll. 30-35.

[184] 'LXXVI' ed. and trans. by Edward Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library Ms Harley 585: The Lacnunga,* Volume 1 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), pp.60- 69 (pp.63-4). These nine (?)shoots [or (?) stings, or (?) fight, or (?) have power] against nine poisons. A snake came crawling, it bit [or tore apart, killed] no-one, because Woden took nine glorious twigs, (and) then struck the snake so that it flew apart into nine. There Apple and (its) bitterness destroyed it [or brought matters to an end], such that it [i.e. the snake] never wanted to enter [or would never enter] a house.

'toslittan' which appears a number of times in reference to *wyrmas* in the grave and in Hell.[185] This reference to the *wyrm* in the grave creates a cohesion between those *wyrmas* which cause disease and assault the body, and those which destroy the body in the grave. In addition, this section describes how after the serpent is killed, 'Þær geændade æppel and attor,/ þæt heo næfre ne wolde on hus bugan.' While the description of Woden killing the serpent in lines 31-32 is clearly not Christian in origin, the proximity to the discussion of the Christian God who defeats disease in lines 37- 40 suggests that an older or invented story may have been included to 'discredit Woden's former role as healer' in order to demonstrate how the medicine approved by the Church is the only true way to cure disease.[186] The later reference to 'nygon nædran'[187] may suggest that by cutting the serpent into nine pieces, Woden spreads disease because 'the nine parts of the adder transform into the nine poisons that then have to be fought by the nine herbs and the *real* (i.e. Christian) healer'; indeed, if this is the case it presents *wyrmas/næd[d]ran* as the origin of all diseases because the killing of the snake by Woden results in the release of 'personified, hostile poisons' across the world.[188] Considering the list of poisons included in 'The Nine Herbs Charm'[189] and the attribution of the presence of these poisons to an original snake killed by Woden, it is clear that the poet is making connections not only between snakes and poison, but with snakes, poison and disease more widely. Therefore, in addition to receiving a message about the futility of pagan healing compared to that approved by the Church, the audience of this charm would likely have been left with no doubt that snakes, and perhaps other *wyrmas* which were believed to produce venom, were a threat to their health.

[185] See Chapter Three, p. 206.
[186] Karin Olsen, 'The Lacnunga and its sources: the Nine Herbs Charm and Wið Færstice reconsidered', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses,* 55 (2007), 23-31 (p.25).
[187] 'Nine Herbs Charm', *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems,* l.60.
[188] Olsen, p. 25.
[189] 'Nine Herbs Charm', *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems,* Ll.45-57.

Clearly, it is not possible to consider early medieval attitudes to the snake-*wyrmas* which they encountered during their lives without considering the impact of the Old Testament, in which, 'with the one notable exception of the brazen serpent made by Moses and recounted in Numbers 21:4-9[190], the serpent consistently represents hostility and threat to man.'[191] This is particularly significant when considering the influence of Genesis 3 and the relationship between the serpent and Satan. While the level of blame attributed to the snake is debatable due to the implied involvement of the devil, the serpent is cursed by God in Genesis 3: 14: 'Because thou hast done this thing, thou art cursed among all cattle, and beasts of the earth: upon thy breast shalt thou go, and earth shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.' The statement here 'thou hast done' leaves little question that at least part of the blame for the deception of Eve is placed on the serpent itself. Furthermore, Genesis 3 begins with the statement that 'the serpent was more subtle than any of the beasts of the earth which the Lord God had made', providing a characterisation of the serpent as a deceitful creature and therefore suggesting that it should be treated with suspicion due to its crafty nature, even before the Fall has occurred.[192] As a result of its portrayal in Genesis 3, those familiar with this key biblical story must have been conditioned to treat serpents with suspicion and distain as both deceitful creatures and ones which had been damned by God.

The reference to the serpent as 'more subtle than any of the beasts of the earth' also alludes to the imagery of wisdom which surrounds *wyrmas;* this appears again in the gospel

[190] Numbers 21: 4-9. And the people began to be weary of their journey and labour: [5] And speaking against God and Moses, they said: why didst thou bring us out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness? There is no bread, nor have we any waters: our soul now loatheth this very light food. [6] Wherefore the Lord sent among the people fiery serpents, which bit them, and killed many of them.[7] Upon which they came to Moses, and said: We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and thee: pray that he may take away these serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people: [8] And the Lord said to him: Make a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign: whosoever being struck shall look on it, shall live. [9] Moses therefore made a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign: which when they were bitten looked upon, they were healed.

[191] See, for example, Gen 49: 17; Exod. 4 : 3; Isa. 14 29; 27: 1; Jer 8: 17; Amos 9 :3. R. W. L. Moberly, 'Did the Serpent Get it Right?', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 39: 1 (1988), 1–27 (p.13). For further discussion of the significance of the brazen serpent, see Chapter Four, pp. 210-212.

[192] Gen. 3:1.

of Matthew, when Christ commands his disciples to be 'wise as serpents and simple as doves'.[193] The wisdom associated with *wyrmas* can be seen in both the biblical context and, to some extent, in the context of both early medieval English medicine and wider written culture as suggested earlier by the description of the 'Beowulf' dragon as 'frod'. Indeed, much as Moses uses the brazen serpent in Numbers 21:4-9 to provide the Israelites with a cure for the bites of poisonous snakes, sympathetic medicine employs the use of *wyrmas* parts in remedies.[194] The majority of the *wyrmas* which appear in a curative role are 'renwyrmas' (earthworms) but 'angeltwicce' (a bait-worm) and the umbrella term *wyrmas* also appear. Furthermore, a number of remedies describe the use of 'wyrm melu', dried and powdered worms which are mixed into a liquid ingredient. In addition to these ingredients genuinely created using *wyrmas,* BL, MS Cotton Vitellius C III includes an illustration of 'nædderwort' which depicts serpents gathered around or forming the roots of the plant.[195] The remedy associated with the illustration describes how the herb 'cenned on ðam stowum þær seo nædre byþ' and that 'gyf hwa þas wyrte mid him hafað þonne ne mæg him nan ðyssa næddercynna derian.'[196] The most unusual *wyrmas* used as an ingredient are those described in a remedy against the bite of a mad dog; the remedy instructs the reader to 'nim þa wyrmas þe beoð under wedehundes tungan, snið onweg'.[197]

If we regard early medieval medicine as adhering to the concept of sympathetic medicine and sympathetic magic in the case of charm remedies, the inclusion of *wyrmas* in some remedies is logical. Certainly, the inclusion of the 'wyrmas þe beoð under wedehundes tungan' in the remedy for a dog bite is the early medieval equivalent of including 'the hair of

[193] Matthew 10:16.
[194] [8] And the Lord said to him: Make a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign: whosoever being struck shall look on it, shall live. [9] Moses therefore made a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign: which when they were bitten looked upon, they were healed.
[195] British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius C III, folio 57r.
[196] 'CXXXI', 'Herbarium', De Vriend (ed), p. 168. 'produced in a place where there are snakes… if someone has this herb with him then no næddercyn might do any harm to him'.
[197] 'X.11', 'Medicina de quadrupedibus', De Vriend (ed), p.264. 'Take the worms that are under the mad dog's tongue, cut away.'

the dog that bit you'. The same may be said for including 'renwyrmas' in remedies against parasitic *wyrmas;* considering the lack of clarity conveyed by the term *wyrmas,* the use of one variety of *wyrm* in a remedy against another is unlikely to have been considered problematic. The use of 'nædderwort' contributes further to the use of *wyrmas* imagery for sympathetic magic; while in the other two remedies listed, the sympathetic ingredient is only a part of a remedy, with other herbs potentially having some benefit, the 'nædderwort' is used as an amulet against *wyrmas* to prevent injury rather than to cure it. It is certainly interesting that the use of 'nædderwort' not only repels snakes but the entire grouping of 'næddercyn' which may have included creatures as diverse as those indicated by *wyrmcyn.*

The inclusion of *wyrmas* as ingredients within remedies not only further demonstrates the blurring of the boundaries between the creatures classed as *wyrmas* as illustrated in Chapter One but demonstrates that there was a complex interaction between the view of *wyrmas* both as dangerous and as wise. Indeed, for individuals afflicted by snake bites or diseases attributed to *wyrmas,* the inclusion of *wyrmas* within a remedy must have increased its potency as it demonstrated an ability to enact control over one of a group of creatures which were seen as dangerous and uncontrollable. This harnessing of the power of *wyrmas* is also evident in the amuletic use of the 'nædderwort' as the anxiety about an inability to control the 'næddercyn' is somewhat alleviated through the ability to use a plant which resembles *wyrmas* in some way. This use of amulets against *wyrmas* in an attempt to control them will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter as the practice is similarly observed in death through the use of burial practices such as grave-lining and *wyrm* illustrations on cinerary urns.[198]

The existence of the belief that *wyrmas* were wise and had the ability to heal or to be used as part of a healing or protecting process demonstrates the complexity of the imagery

[198] See Chapter Three, pp. 155-157, 162-164.

surrounding them. Clearly, much of the literature which surrounds *wyrmas* portrays them as dangerous physically and spiritually; however, that there are clear examples of their more positive associations is testament to the fact that attitudes towards this group were not as simple as may be initially thought by modern audiences. It is the case that serpent imagery has been used in other periods and cultures to symbolise healing and wisdom, and it is likely that both positive and negative associations with *wyrmas* were able to coexist without being seen to contradict one another.[199]

Insects and Arachnids

Another category of creatures within the *wyrmas* set – the insects – have an element of contradiction within their roles as disrupters and their roles as positive symbols. Insects are referred to as *wyrmas* or defined as part of the *wyrmcyn* across several sources including the *Letter* and Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*. While many insects such as scorpions and poisonous spiders are unlikely to have impacted the daily lives of early medieval English people, common native insects such as the caterpillar must have had a significant impact on crops. Without access to pesticides and with limited access to agricultural technology, the destruction of crops by insects such as the caterpillar could have resulted in deaths through starvation, making insects a significant disrupter of life in early medieval England.

The majority of references to caterpillars appear in translations of Latin Christian material where *wyrm* or its compound and spelling variants are given as translations of the Latin 'eruca' and 'gurgulio'.[200] While the root term *wyrm* is used on occasion, most translations provide a more specific compound term such as 'cawelwyrm', 'treowyrm' or 'leafwyrm'. There are multiple surviving translations of Psalm 78:46, 'Et dedit erugini

[199] For discussion of the significance of *wyrmas* as a healing symbol in other cultures, see: [199] James H. Charlesworth, 2010, pp. 125-187.
[200] See Appendix VII.

fructus eorum et labores eorum lucustae', for which 'erugini' is translated as both 'treowyrm' and 'leafwyrm'. Interestingly, in the translation of Psalm 77 in the Paris Psalter, the translator provides the Latin 'erucan' as an alternative for 'erugini': 'Sealde erucan, yfelan wyrme, let hiora wyrta wæstme forslitan, and hiora gram gewinn hæfdan gærshoppan.'[201] Instead of providing a direct gloss for 'eruca', which was perhaps a more recognisable term, the translator uses *wyrm* as an umbrella term to clarify the 'eruca's' relationship to the group of insects more broadly and to condemn the 'eruca' as 'yfel'. While this may be a simple use of a group term, by using *wyrm* specifically to collocate with 'yfel' the translator immediately creates an association between the 'eruca' and the rest of the community of *wyrmas.* Indeed, the caterpillar is then not only evil, but evil amongst *wyrmas*; considering the associations between *wyrmas* and corruption labelling the caterpillar as evil even when compared to other *wyrmas* is a clear statement about the level of disruption it is capable of causing. That the caterpillar is able to cause devastating disorder is further demonstrated by its appearance alongside the locust. The locust is the epitome of a destructive insect, and while it is described using the specific terms 'locuste', 'gærsteppan' or 'gærshoppen', locusts often appear alongside caterpillars, such as in Paris Psalter,[202] Psalm 77 and Psalm 78.46 'he sealde leafwyrme wæstm heora & geswinc heora gærstapan'.[203] The inclusion of the caterpillar alongside the locust pairs them as creatures with a shared destructive ability, as they are both as complicit in the destruction of livelihoods described in Psalm 78. While people living in early medieval England may well have understood that locusts were not native, their role

[201] George Philip Krapp (ed), *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (London: Routledge, 1932). He gave their plants to the caterpillar, to the caterpillar, an evil worm, allowed [it] to devour them, and gave their labour to the troublesome grasshopper to have.
[202] George Philip Krapp (ed), 1932.
[203] 'And he sold their crops to the caterpillar and their toils to the locust.

within Exodus 10.12 as a divine punishment suggests that their arrival would have been thought possible if it were the will of God.[204]

As with some illnesses that result in holes or tunnels which I will discuss later in this chapter, holes in plant leaves or fruits may have been attributed to *wyrmas* regardless of their true cause. While there is no direct evidence for this in Old English texts, it seems likely that other plant-destroying insects as well as caterpillars were classed amongst *wyrmas.* The term 'slug' to refer to a shell-less gastropod does not appear until the eighteenth century, with the term prior to this being used to refer to a slow-moving or slothly individual; 'slug-worm' also appears from the eighteenth century, seemingly to provide context for the use of 'slug' to refer to a particular creature.[205] The collocation of 'slug' and 'worm' suggests that there is still some association between unpleasant creatures and the term 'worm'; it is not inconceivable, therefore, that the term *wyrm* would also have been used in reference to slugs in the Old English language also as slugs would certainly have been present. Both caterpillars and slugs create bite damage to leaves and while they do not have observable teeth, they have mandibles and mouthparts which actively 'chew' vegetation. Certainly, considering the association between *wyrmas* and the act of biting and chewing, the damage to vegetation by the mouthparts of insects such as the caterpillar and slug would have created a connection with other *wyrmas* which are defined by their ability to 'slitan' things. In less extreme cases, while unlikely to have caused starvation, the damage of plants by *wyrmas* would have negatively impacted individuals and the wider community, and contributed further to the association between *wyrmas* and direct or indirect attacks on the balance of human society.

Much like snakes and locusts, other non-native *wyrmas* appear in Old English texts as a result of translation and must have contributed in part to the perception of the dangers posed

[204] 'And the Lord said to Moses: Stretch forth thy hand upon the land of Egypt unto the locust, that it may come upon it, and devour every herb that is left after the hail.'
[205] 'slug', *Oxford English Dictionary* <www-oed-com> [accessed 19 June 2022].

by the *wyrmas* as a group. The 'Herbarium' includes references to 'spalangio',[206] a variant of 'phalangium' which the *DLMBS* defines as a 'kind of venomous spider, esp. tarantula',[207] which is translated into the vernacular twice as *wyrm* and also as *næd[d]re* or *næd[d]ercyn*.[208] While texts describing poisonous snakes retain some reference point when translated into the vernacular due to the native adder, Britain has no recorded native poisonous spider species. A number of British spiders can administer a bite which can break the skin, but these bites commonly cause only brief pain and swelling, so it is unclear which spiders people would attribute the term 'spalangio' to in a native context.[209] However, the poor sanitation available to early medieval people may have resulted in a greater number of people becoming ill following a spider bite as they, much like snake bites, 'are more dangerous for the bacteria they introduce into the wound than for any venom injected.'[210] Like many *wyrmas;* however, spiders are heavily associated with the ability to produce venom, with one of the terms referring to them – 'attorcoppe' – specifically referring to their venomous quality.[211] As Cavell notes, spiders have associations with both the positive imagery of beauty and productivity, and also negative imagery which focuses on the futility of their webs, their fragility and compares their hunting methods to entrapment by sin.[212] While spiders were likely less consistently associated with *wyrmas* due to the variety of terms used to describe them, and their rarity in text when compared to other *wyrmas,* they provide a further example of a creature which was presented as having associations with sin and venom which was likely present in the lives of the majority of early medieval people. Due to their

[206] 'XC', 'Herbarium', De Vriend (ed), p. 132. 'Wyð þæra wyrma slite þe man spalangiones hateþ genim'. For when a *wyrm* that is called 'spalangio' has bitten a man.
[207] 'Phalangium', *Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British Sources* <http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/Default.aspx> [accessed July 2021].
[208] See Appendix VIII.
[209] Michael John Roberts, *The Spiders of Great Britain and Ireland,* vol 1 (Colchester: Harley Books, 1985), p.23.
[210] M. L. Cameron, 'Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Magic', *Anglo-Saxon England 17* (1988), pp. 191–215 (p.207).
[211] For a full exploration of the significance of spiders in early and high medieval England see: Megan Cavell, 'Arachnophobia in Early English Literature', *New Medieval Literatures,* 18 (2018), 1-43.
[212] Cavell, pp. 12-22.

physical similarities as arachnids, it is also possible that features of scorpions were incorrectly attributed to spiders. Cavell notes that Isidore's references to scorpions as venomous tormentor are reflected in the Old English 'Handbook for the Use of a Confessor' and that this may be due to the ambiguous semantic ranges and relationship between 'lobbe' and 'loppe'. [213] This example of spiders and scorpions similarly being depicted as tormentors along with the description of both spiders and scorpions within the class of *wyrmcyn* suggests that the two creatures were viewed together in some cases. The 'Letter of Alexander to Aristotle' describes how 'ða toforan monan upgonge þa cwomon þær Scorpiones þæt wyrmcyn swa hie ær gewunelice wæron toweard þæs wætersciepes.'[214] The description of the scorpions as 'wyrmcyn' groups them firmly together with the venomous snakes which Alexander also describes in the 'Letter', and with other venomous and apparently aggressive types of *wyrmas* such as 'spalangio.' Indeed, given the range of predatory *wyrmas* which are depicted as attacking people both physically with venom and spiritually with their links to sin and bodily pollution, it seems likely that other creatures categorised as *wyrmas* would gain some of the connotations held by these predators.

Wyrmas in Medical Texts

While the first section of this chapter has considered the material in some medical texts in relation to larger *wyrmas*, the remainder of the chapter will engage with those *wyrmas* which are depicted as attacking the body predominantly in a medical context, such as parasites. The majority of surviving medical material from early medieval England is preserved in four texts: a series of remedies which I will refer to collectively as the 'Leechbook' in the tenth-century London, British Library MS Royal 12 D XVII; the 'Lacnunga', in London, British Library Harley 585; and the Old English versions of the 'Herbarium' and the 'Medicina de

[213] Cavell, pp. 34-6.
[214] Orchard (ed), p.236. ;Then before the moon rise there came a type of *wyrm*-kin called a scorpion, just as they usually did, towards the water'.

Quadrupedibus', which are translations of fourth- and fifth-century Latin compilations found together in MSS V: London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius C III; MS B: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 76; MS H: London, British Library, Harley 585; MS O: London, British Library, Harley 6258 B and MS Ca: Montecassino, Archivio della Badia, v.97.[215] The remedies in BL MS Royal 12 D XVII are divided into three distinct parts, the first two referred to as 'Bald's Leechbook one and two', as a result of the inclusion of 'a colophon in poor Latin verse, which names Bald as the owner and Cild as the scribe or compiler of the work.'[216] Book one of the Leechbook deals with ailments of the body from the head down, while the second book concentrates on abdominal troubles.[217] The third book of the Leechbook seems unlikely to have been produced at the same centre as the first two; it includes remedies which address the head down but in a less orderly way with the duplication of remedies suggesting that this book was devised entirely separately from books one and two.[218]

The nature of the *wyrmas* described as inhabiting the body in the leechbooks is often difficult to ascertain, although some judgements can be made about the creatures based on the language used to describe them. As previously stated, the binary opposition of 'real' and 'imagined' creatures is far less relevant in this period, and interpretations of the *wyrmas* within the body are no exception to this. It is possible to understand what early medieval English leeches understood *wyrmas* to be from the terms they used to describe them; however, the variation in these terms demonstrates that there was a lack of clarity for those who read and copied remedies also. There are three main compound terms represented in my data set which are used to describe an intestinal parasite: 'inwyrm' which appears only once;

[215] Preface to *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina De Quadrupedibus,* ed by de Vriend.
[216] Audrey L. Meaney, 'Variant versions of Old English medical remedies and the compilation of Bald's Leechbook', *Anglo Saxon England,* 13 (1984), 235-268 (p. 236).
[217] Meaney, p.236.
[218] Meaney, p.237.

‘rengwyrm’ which appears eight times and ‘anawyrm’ which appears three times. Clearly, compound terms are useful in order to understand the nature of the *wyrm* being treated. ‘Anawyrm’ appears only in ‘Bald’s Leechbook 1’, perhaps suggesting that this was a term for intestinal parasites which was unique to a particular scribe, author or leech; similarly, the isolated appearance of ‘inwyrm’ suggests it was not a common term for intestinal parasites. In these cases, therefore, the use of compound terms may not have provided clarification on the type of *wyrmas* described except for within a specific region or readership.

‘Rengwyrm’ is more common and appears predominantly in the various manuscripts of the Old English ‘Herbarium.’ The spelling ‘rengwyrm’ appears four times in MS V and is always used in conjunction with a locating phrase about the *wyrmas* being ‘ymb þæne nafolan’ (around the navel). The fifth appearance of ‘rengwyrm’ in MS V is an alternative form ‘rængcwyrm’. Given that folios 12-82 of MS V are written by a single hand, the single appearance of this alternative spelling may reflect the exemplar used and possible regional differences between the variant spellings of the compound.[219] MS O is written by a single hand and also uses the alternative spelling ‘rengcwyrm’; however, the scribe here is less consistent than the one responsible for MS V as there is greater variation in the spelling: ‘rengwyrm’, ‘rencgwirm’ and ‘rengcwyrm’. This final instance of ‘rengcwyrm’ in the ‘Herbarium’ is a correction where the ‘n’ is added above the word to correct a copying error. That the scribe is inconsistent in spelling ‘rengwyrm’ and makes an error in this way may demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the compound.[220] The clarification of where the ‘rengwyrm’ is located is somewhat unusual since the compound term is usually translated as intestinal worm; it may be the case that the scribe exchanged a less specific term in these remedies for the compound term. Certainly, the Latin term given in MS Ca is ‘lumbricus’ for each remedy where the scribe of MS V uses ‘rengwyrm’. ‘Lumbricus’ is in itself a somewhat

[219] De Vriend, p.xv.
[220] Folio 36r, Harley MS 6258 B, < http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Default.aspx> [accessed 16 June 2022].

ambiguous term as the *DMLBS* defines it as 'a. earthworm; b. intestinal worm; c. tadpole'; clearly, translating 'lumbricos' was potentially problematic for translators and providing the more specific 'rengwyrm' would eliminate any confusion caused by the original term.[221] In addition to its appearance in MS Ca, 'rengwyrm' is given as a gloss for 'lumbricus' in both MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III and another Latin-Old English gloss; however, in addition to translating 'lumbricus' as 'rengwyrm' the Cotton Cleopatra translator provides 'renwyrm'. The similarity of 'rengwyrm' to 'renwyrm' has clearly caused problems for the glossator since 'renwyrm' is usually translated as earthworm rather than a parasite; however, while this may have been a result of error, translating 'lumbricus' as either an earthworm or parasitic worm is correct. The closeness of these two terms both in Latin and in Old English suggests that confusion and the blurring of the boundaries between the features of these creatures was inevitable in the minds of readers and translators.

The variance of terms across the surviving medical manuscripts, and the infrequency of specific compound terms suggests that there were perhaps regional or individual ways of describing parasites which were more commonly recognised and understood in relation to their placement on the body. In the majority of cases, texts refer to intestinal *wyrmas* using the general umbrella term of *wyrm* alongside an identifying location, such as *wyrmas* which 'ymb nafolan dergen' (injure around the navel)[222] or 'neoþan to gewriþen' (bind up below).[223] In some cases, although more rarely, texts are less clear regarding where the *wyrmas* are located, and instead identify the *wyrmas* by how they accessed the body, as in the case of two remedies which address the resulting problems when a man 'wyrm gedrince'(drinks a *wyrm*).[224] The conceptualisation of *wyrmas* as specifically related to a particular body part rather than any other feature may be due to the fact that individuals would more commonly

[221] 'Lumbricus', *DMLBS* <http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/Default.aspx> [accessed June 2021].
[222] XXXVI.6, *Herbarium*, ed. De Vriend, p.82
[223] V.3, *Medicina De Quadrupedibus*, ed. De Vriend, p.248.
[224] 'Lacnunga', ed. Grattan and Singer.

feel the effects of intestinal parasites rather than observe them; creatures were thus more usefully defined in relation to where pain or discomfort occurred as a result of their activity, rather than by an observation of their physical features. Clearly, it is not possible to interpret what early medieval English audiences imagined when they thought of parasitic *wyrmas*, or to determine whether they understood the differences between parasites of varying types; however, they evidently classified groups of *wyrmas* relating to where their effects were felt. It is likely that there was little differentiation between the different types of *wyrm* which are represented in the archaeological evidence, and that all *wyrmas* which were found 'ymb nafolan' were regarded as much the same, but perhaps differed from those which inhabited other areas of the body.

While it may not be possible to establish with any certainty how early medieval audiences viewed parasitic infection, an anthropological study of medicine by Nigel Barley which assesses the ways in which societies may react to disease can help us to consider the role of *wyrmas* in early medieval English medical thought:

> Disease can be seen as caused by the invasion of the body by alien matter or force from without. Treatment then consists in removing it. It can be viewed as the loss, by a man, of something normally inherent to him. In this case, treatment consists in returning it to him. A third possible view would be to see disease as caused by a disruption of the natural order within the body. Here, treatment would entail reestablishing [sic] that order.[225]

People in early medieval England were exposed to *wyrmas* in the form of parasites within the body; indeed, these *wyrmas* are the epitome of Barley's first 'mechanism of

[225] Nigel Barley, 'Anglo-Saxon Magico-Medicine', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford,* 3.2 (1972), 67-76 (p.68).

causation' as they are genuine 'aliens' which invade the body.[226] Parasites are by their nature invaders of the body since they enter through the inadvertent consumption of their eggs or by exposure to infected matter. It is clear that early medieval English people interpreted *wyrmas* in this way not only from the description of parasites inhabiting the body but also through the leechdoms which often refer to the 'casting out' or 'drawing out' of *wyrmas.* Due to a combination of factors such as poor sanitation, proximity to animals, cooking practices and the use of human faeces as fertiliser for crops, parasites were endemic in medieval communities. While evidence of parasitic infection is often destroyed, indicators of the prevalence of parasites can be obtained from cesspools, latrines, coprolites and by sampling soil from the sacrum area of the grave.[227] This archaeological evidence shows that many individuals were sufficiently infected with parasites that *wyrmas* were likely visible in their excrement which would have enabled individuals to observe them to some extent. The type of *wyrmas* that individuals were infected with would have resulted in different visible parts in stools; for example, while whole threadworms are often observable as small 'cotton-like threads' within the stool, tapeworms are far larger and are often passed in pieces.[228] The variance in form that the term *wyrmas* allows would have enabled early medieval individuals to refer to *wyrm* 'ymb nafolan' regardless of what they were able to observe. While the prevalence of intestinal parasites must have made their presence a normality, the number of remedies against *wyrmas* in 'ymb nafolan' suggests that individuals rarely accepted invasion by these outside forces as an inconvenient inevitability. In addition to the sometimes painful and harmful symptoms of worm infestation such as stomach pains and diarrhoea, the

[226] Barley, p.68.
[227] 'beef and/or pork tapeworm (taenia sp.), bilharzia (Schistosoma haematobium and Schistosoma mansoni), dog tapeworm calcified cysts (E. granulosus), dysentery protozoa, fish tapeworm (Diphyllobothrium latum), lancet liver fluke (Dicrocoelium dendriticum), pinworm (E. vermicularis), roundworm (A. lumbricoides), trichinosis (Trichinella spiralis), [and] whipworm (T. trichiura). Piers D. Mitchell, Human Parasites in Medieval Europe: Lifestyle, Sanitation and medical Treatment, in *Fossil Parasites*, ed. by Kenneth de Baets and D. Timothy J. Littlewood, Advances in Parasitology, vol. 90 (London; Oxford; Waltham; San Diego: Academic Press, 2015), pp. 389-420 (p. 398).
[228] NHS, 'Worms in Humans' <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/worms-in-humans/> [accessed 16 June 2022].

association of fear between other *wyrmas* and worms which inhabited the body and destroyed it internally in the way that parasites do would have emphasised the importance of ridding the body of them.

In addition to being an example of the first method of causation, it is possible to view *wyrmas* as part of Barley's third category – disrupting the natural order of the body. While early medieval English medicine did not yet fully engage with the concept of the four humours, which was derived from Graeco-Roman medicine and common in England in the later medieval period, the presence of *wyrmas* and their venom in the body could have been viewed as causing an imbalance in bodily order.

That parasitic *wyrmas* are a disrupter of the body's natural order is central to their relationship with the other creatures discussed in this chapter as they too can be considered alongside the classification of animals discussed by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger.*[229] Much as all *wyrmas* disrupt the natural order of the world by their inability to conform to a class, parasitic *wyrmas* then take this further by disrupting the order of the body by their uninvited presence. While Old English food penitentials do not specifically outlaw the consumption of *wyrmas* such as snakes, a penitential from the 'Scrift boc' does condemn to the consumption of some *wyrmas*, 'Se ðe ete his lichaman hreofel oððe wyrmas, oððe micgan drince, oðþe his scearn, gyf hit cild sy oððe cniht, swinge hine man, gyf hit geweaxan man sy, fæste an gearæs.'[230] The context of this penitential indicates that the *wyrmas* described are parasitic or represent infection more broadly.[231] The comparison of the consumption of faeces with the consumption of *wyrmas* indicates the extent to which *wyrmas* were viewed as a polluting presence.

[229] Douglas, p. 46-48.
[230] Scrift boc, Chapter 23, verse 4. R. Spindler, *Das altenglische Bussbuch, sog. Confessionale Pseudo-Egberti. Ein Beitrag zu den kirchlichen Gesetzen der Angelsachsen. Kritische Textausgabe nebst Nachweis der mittellateinischen Quellen, sprachlicher Untersuchung und Glossar* (Leipzig, 1934).
[231] While this may refer to either a creature or infection, it is notable that the spelling used is *wyrmas* rather than *wyrms.* For further discussion of this distinction, see pp. 126 – 131.

The links between sickness and sin are well understood in the history of Christianity and 'affirmation of a connection between sickness and sin lies at the root of Christian healing.'[232] The association between sickness, *wyrmas* and sin is twofold because the creatures not only have potential to inhabit the body as a result of sinful behaviour and provide visible punishment but also have a corrupting effect on the body. Considering the significance of *wyrmas* in the grave (which I will discuss in the following chapter) and the associations between *wyrmas* and Satan which are established in Genesis 3 and Revelation, the associations these had in relation to spiritual damnation must have permeated into the attitude towards parasites.

The central concern when considering how *wyrmas* may disrupt the order within the body relates to the potential pollution of the body since 'persons [and] animals […] felt to be unclean, are considered highly contagious' and, therefore, the presence of *wyrmas* in the body was a threat to the individual and community both in a physical and spiritual sense.[233] A remedy in the *Lacnunga* refers directly to the ingestion of *wyrmas:*

> Wið ðon þe mon oððe nyten wyrm gedrince, gyt hyt sy wæpnedcynnes sing ðis leoð in þæt swiðre eare þe her æfter awriten is, gif hit sy wifcynnes sing in þæt wynstre eare, Gonomil orgomil marbumil marbsai ramum tofeð tengo docuillo biran cuiðær cæfmiil scuiht cuillo scuiht cuib duill marbsiramum.[234]

That the remedy addresses infection of 'mon oððe nyten' demonstrates the anxiety surrounding contagion highlighted by Meens; considering that 'niten' can be translated as beast/animal or more specifically as cattle, there is clearly a problem posed by the infection of a food animal with *wyrmas.* Indeed, when we consider this fear of contagion by *wyrmas*

[232] Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.5.
[233] Rob Meens, 'Pollution in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of the Food Regulations in Penitentials', *Early Medieval Europe*, 4.1 (1995), 3-19 (p.15).
[234] For if a man or a beast has drunk a worm: if it is a male, sing this song written hereafter into the right ear, if it is a female, sing it into the left ear: (nonsense). *Lacnunga,* ed. Grattan and Singer.

alongside food regulations which bar the consumption of *wyrmas* directly, the consumption of meat or dairy from a cow made unclean by an infection with *wyrmas* likely would have been seen as polluting to the human body, and so the necessity to rid cattle or other food animals of polluting *wyrmas* is understandable. Furthermore, while the potential spiritual impact of being host to *wyrmas* is not damaging for animals, the implication of the creatures classed as *wyrmas* mean that the result of hosting *wyrmas* is damaging to the spirit. That food regulations required those who consumed unclean foods to perform penance demonstrates that this consumption was considered sinful; considering the association between the ability of the *wyrmas* to corrupt individuals – as it does to Eve in Genesis – the cleansing of *wyrmas* from the body would similarly have been viewed as a spiritual, rather than merely a physical, problem. While it is unclear how much influence food regulations would have had on the behaviour of laypeople, the appearance of remedies against the direct or indirect consumption of *wyrmas* in the 'Lacnunga' suggests that the thinking conveyed by Leviticus XI had some impact on attitudes towards unclean animals. The 'Lacnunga' is written in the vernacular and while it is 'the most disorganised [and] least selective of its type' its broad content 'allows discussion not only of the range of treatments available to the millennial Anglo-Saxons, but also the kinds of maladies which preoccupied them', demonstrating that anxiety around unclean animals and their consumption was considered important enough to be committed to a written medical text.[235] When viewed in this way, the frequent references to *wyrmas* in leechbooks not only provide evidence of how common parasitic infection was, but also that the common nature of parasitic *wyrmas* had not resulted in an acceptance of their presence due to the wider implications for physical and spiritual health.

In addition to the anxieties caused by the association between parasitic *wyrmas,* unclean foods and bodily pollution, where parasites were observed by individuals the

[235] Audrey Meany, 'The Practice of Medicine in England about the Year 1000', *Social History of Medicine,* 13.2 (2000), 221-237 (p.229).

similarity of their body shape to creatures such as snakes must have contributed towards their association with bodily and spiritual damage. As I have previously discussed in this chapter, due to the threat of venom and the association created with the devil and divine punishment in the Bible, snakes were viewed with a great degree of fear. Remedies in leechbooks often use violent terminology which might be more easily attributed to snakes to describe the role of the *wyrmas* within the body; these include descriptions of *wyrmas* said to 'eglan' and 'derian' around the navel. The *Dictionary* of *Old English* defines 'eglan' as 'to torment, afflict; injure, harm' and 'derian' as 'to hurt, harm, injure (someone); to damage, hurt (something)';[236] what is clear from the use of these two verbs is that they both provide the parasite with a sense of agency in the attack on the body. In addition to a sense of agency to attack a host body, a charm against *wyrmas* in the ears in the 'Herbarium' specifies that after using the remedy 'þeah ðær beon wyrmas on acennede hi þurh ðis sceolon beon acwealde.'[237] In addition to providing another example of the attribution of illness to *wyrmas* in a particular body part, the fact that the remedy specifies that the *wyrmas* must be killed reveals that *wyrmas* were considered a danger when expelled and that killing them would prevent them from infecting further victims. This demonstrates the strength of the belief that *wyrmas* were both the sole cause of many diseases and that they actively desired to cause corruption or attack the body since they remained an immediate and present danger to the health of the wider community even after being removed from the host body. The agency attributed to the *wyrmas* creates a sense of parasites as cruel and suggests that people regarded them as an active agent in the attacks on the body rather than an inconsequential or passive element of common disease.

[236] 'Eglan', *Dictionary of Old English Online* <https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [accessed July 2021].
[237] XCII, *Herbarium,* ed. De Vriend, p.134.'If *wyrmas* are brought forth, then they must be killed.'

Similarly, this agency draws further comparison with other *wyrmas,* particularly the grave-dwelling *wyrmas* which I will discuss in greater length in the following chapter, these *wyrmas* are described in a similar way to those in the leechbooks, as active and willing participants in the destruction of the body. Both the parasitic *wyrmas* and those that dwell in the grave are depicted as consuming the body with similar placement of *wyrmas* in association with particular body parts; for example, compare the 'toðwyrm' (toothwyrm) in 'Leechbook II' with the *wyrmas* which 'þa teð þurhsmyhð' (bore into the teeth) in 'Soul and Body I'.[238] While the association with parasitic *wyrmas* consuming the body is perhaps logical, particularly in terms of symptoms such as holes in the teeth or in the skin which look like worm holes, the focus on consumption links to the wider cultural association between *wyrmas,* decay and the act of consuming. 'Bald's Leechbook' includes a remedy 'Wiþ wyrmætum lice & cweldehtum' (for a worm-eaten and mortified body), where 'wyrmæte' is not only a process or symptom but an entire state of being that a body exists within. The term 'wyrmæte' translates as 'worm-eaten'[239] and is listed alongside 'cwyldihte' which the *Dictionary of Old English* defines as 'mortified, corrupted, gangrenous';[240] clearly, the body which was 'wyrmæte' was intended to be understood as one in a very poor state. That the remedy makes a differentiation between 'wyrmæte' and 'cwyldihte', however, suggests perhaps that there was a difference between these two states which requires this remedy to include both terms. Certainly, considering the grotesque imagery which accompanies literary images of the 'wyrmæte' body in the grave, that a body can be 'wyrmætum' in life immediately demonstrates a sense of mortal illness and a state of decay better associated with a corpse: a description which remains highly impactful. Considering the significance of consumption by *wyrmas* in the destruction of the body after death and the cultural anxiety

[238] L.119b
[239] 'wyrmæte', *Bosworth Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* < https://bosworthtoller.com/> [accessed July 2021]
[240] 'cwyldihte', *Dictionary of Old English* <https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [accessed July 2021].

relating to this process, it is possible that the 'wyrmæte' body was regarded as having some moral damage that the 'cwyrldihte' body did not. It is useful to compare the depiction of the punishment of Herod – 'Wæterseocnys hine ofereode beneoþon ðam gyrdle. to þam swiðe þæt his gesceapu maðan weollon'[241] – with the description of the destruction of the sinful body in the 'Soul and Body' poems, where the consumption of the body amounts to part of the interim punishment prior to Judgement Day.[242] From this it is clear that the *wyrmas* and similar creatures are presented as taking an active role in the sickness which forms part of the punishment before death for Herod's sinful behaviour. Certainly, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the group of creatures called *wyrm,* in part as a result of their association with snakes are connected with the biblical Fall of Man and with punishment by God as seen in Numbers 21:4-9.[243] It may be the case, therefore, that *wyrmas* which were believed to cause disease also held such associations as either punishments by God for immoral behaviour or the interference of the devil in the lives of men. As such, the body described as 'wyrmæte' may have been intended to imply that the individual is experiencing consumption by *wyrmas* before death, perhaps as a result of sin or immorality.

It is possible that the 'Wiþ wyrmætum lice & cweldehtum' refers to leprosy as the descriptions of the skin may indicate the presence of physical sores and skin lesions associated with advanced leprosy.[244] Certainly, other medical texts demonstrate that there was an association between diseases which cause visible damage to the skin and *wyrmas.*

[241] 'Homily V: Natale Innocentium Infantum', Clemoes (ed). 'Dropsy attacked him [Herod] beneath the girdle, so much that his member welled with maggots.'
[242] The consumption of the body by *wyrmas* as an aspect of post-mortem purgation will be discussed in Chapter Four, pp. 214 – 240.
[243] And the people began to be weary of their journey and labour: [5] And speaking against God and Moses, they said: why didst thou bring us out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness? There is no bread, nor have we any waters: our soul now loatheth this very light food. [6] Wherefore the Lord sent among the people fiery serpents, which bit them, and killed many of them.
[244] While I acknowledge the disease previously referred to as 'leprosy' is more appropriately called Hansen's Disease, I will use the term 'leprosy' and 'leper' to acknowledge both the moral and physical associations of leprosy which are not associated with Hansen's Disease, and to incorporate those illnesses referred to as leprosy in the medieval context but which would not now be diagnosed as Hansen's Disease.

Latin glosses, including those from Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus MS 32, London, British Library MS Additional 32246 and London, British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III use the common compound term ‘hondwyrm’ to translate a variety of Latin terms and descriptions:

> 'Surio et briensis et sirincus' handwyrm’[245]
>
> 'Ladasca piae briensis id est' hondwyrm.[246]
>
> 'uerme, i briensis' hondweorm

The *DMLBS* defines the common term in these Latin glosses ‘briensis’ as ‘skin disease’, suggesting that the term ‘hondwyrm’ was used more broadly for any visible ailment of the skin where the cause was unknown or that had characteristics which could be associated with the behaviour of *wyrmas* as with ‘wyrmæte’.[247] The association between a disease where there is observable damage to skin and the consumption of the body by *wyrmas* indicates that it was not necessarily assumed that *wyrmas* would be observable on the skin of a person afflicted with a disease that is caused by *wyrmas*. While it is possible that the terms ‘wyrmæte’ and ‘hondwyrm’ refer to the observable presence of maggots or other creatures, the overt references to ‘maðan’ such as those attacking Herod suggests that writers may be more specific about the type of creatures responsible for an attack when possible.

While it may appear unlikely that leprosy and other skin ailments could be attributed to *wyrmas* without any creatures being observable, illnesses associated with an invisible cause were not uncommon in early medieval medical culture. The most prominent example of this is the belief that ‘ælfe could cause a variety of ailments […] which could afflict both

[245] Lowell Kindschi, 'The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS 32 and British Museum Additional 32246' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1955).
[246] Jan Hendrik Hessels, *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of the Leiden University* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906).
[247] ‘briensis’, *Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British Sources* <http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/Default.aspx> [accessed June 2020].

livestock and people.'[248] This belief is represented in a variety of charms against 'ælfadl' (elf-sickness), 'elfsogoþa' (elf hiccup),[249] and most notably in the charm 'Wið færstice' (against a sudden stitch).[250] Clearly, neither those carrying out the charms against 'ælfadl' or those having the charms performed upon them would have seen the elves which they regarded as the probable cause of their disease but that does not appear to have prevented attribution to the interference of elves. Therefore, it is very possible that similar descriptions of disease caused by *wyrmas* were attributed to the creatures without the observation of any *wyrmas* in or around the body. Hall notes that the association between elves and pains with an unknown cause may have also served to 're-narrat[e] the situation of the patient as part of a heroic struggle in which he or she represents the in-group in opposition to external forces', a reading which could also be applied to a fight against *wyrmas* within the wider tradition of heroic battles between men and *wyrmas.*[251] It may also have been the case that *wyrmas* became a term associated with an unknown cause. The modern idiom of 'gremlins' causing problems within a computer is well understood in English and American culture; the speaker and the audience share mutual understanding that the 'gremlins' are a figurative representation of a problem with an unknown cause. Indeed, *wyrmas* being blamed for illnesses such as skin conditions where there is no visible cause may be an example of a similar idiomatic use. It is certainly the case that, due to their association with disruption and attacks on the body, *wyrmas* would be a suitable candidate for metaphorical blame for unknown illness.

Some illnesses, such as that which afflicts Herod, have associations with sin and immoral behaviour in a medieval Christian context. Leprosy in particular can be included within this group with Leviticus 13 stating that those infected with leprosy are unclean and

[248] Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity,* Anglo-Saxon Studies 8 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), p.115.
[249] 'Elf-hiccup' suggested by Cockayne, (1865), p.405.
[250] For the significance of elves as causes of illness see: Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England* and Alaric Hall, 'Calling the Shots: The Old English Remedy "Gif Hors Ofscoten Sie" and Anglo-Saxon 'Elf-Shot'', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 106.2 (2005), 195-209.
[251] Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England,* p.115.

should be assessed by a priest.[252] While lepers were not necessarily excluded from society in early medieval England to the extent that they were in the later medieval period, it seems likely that there was some societal suspicion around the disease. The seclusion of lepers from communities also suggests the anxiety surrounding the spread of the infection, or its polluting influence around the wider community; as discussed earlier in this chapter, the polluting influence of venom from *wyrmas* was seen as able to spread around communities. Clearly, the infectious nature of leprosy would have made it likely for the disease to spread amongst communities and this would have contributed to the wider anxiety around the spread of *wyrmas* diseases. Roy Porter notes that leprosy was portrayed as a 'living death' and that 'the victims of leprosy were secluded in life, but also in some cases excluded from community burial grounds.[253] Considering that the term 'wyrmæte' infers an appearance of decaying or dead skin, it further suggests that leprosy had some associations with the actions of *wyrmas* due to its association with death. The spiritual implications of leprosy and other such diseases may have been similarly associated with the 'wyrmæte' body described in Bald's Leechbook due to the associations that *wyrmas* have with damnation as well as with death and decay.

While the majority of *wyrmas* depicted in the charms discussed so far appear to have been predominantly regarded by early medieval English readers as real creatures regardless of whether they were visible or not, other descriptions of illnesses use the similar term 'wyrms' to describe general infection or purulence. Ælfric's *Grammar* glosses three Latin words as 'wyrms' which the *DMLBS* translates as:

- Tabes: '1. Wasting or fading away, (act of) growing weaker'; '2. Corrupt, decaying, or putrefying matter, pus.'

[252] Leviticus 13.
[253] Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to Present* (London: Fontana Press, 1999), p.59.

- Lues: ‘1. Contagion, infection, plague; b. canker, ulcer’; ‘2. Destructive force, scourge, disaster’; ‘3. Putrid or filthy liquid, corrupt discharge.’
- Uirus: ‘1. poison, venom’; ‘2. morbid or noxious bodily discharge, pus or sim.’; ‘3. Semen.’[254]

Furthermore, Latin-Old English glosses in other manuscripts translate further terms as ‘wyrms’*:*

- Purulentus: ‘1. That contains, consists of, or resembles pus, (also in general sense) rotten or putrid. B. (transF. of moral or spiritual rottenness)’; ‘2. Filthy, dirty’
- Colera uentris inflation [or] solutio’: Inflation or loosening of the stomach by bile

For all of these Latin terms, the gloss provides the Old English term ‘wyrms’, or a spelling variant such as ‘worms’ or ‘wurms’. Unlike *wyrm* which is a strong masculine noun, ‘wyrms’ is classified as a strong neuter noun and as a result, the two words appear differently when written down due to the different forms that each type of word takes in a particular case. Furthermore, the -s ending of ‘wyrms’ would be retained when endings were added for different cases; for example:

Wyrm [creature]: strong masculine noun

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	wyrm	wyrm*as*
Accusative	wyrm	wyrm*as*
Genitive	wyrm*es*	wyrm*a*
Dative	wyrm*e*	wyrm*um*

[254] All Latin definitions from: *DMLBS* <http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/Default.aspx> [accessed June 2020].

Wyrms [purulence/infection]*:* strong neuter noun

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	wyrms	wyrms
Accusative	wyrms	wyrms
Genitive	wyrms*es*	wyrms*a*
Dative	wyrms*e*	wyrms*um*

There are multiple complexities to the interpretation of 'wyrms', since while the Bosworth-Toller Dictionary categorises it as a neuter noun, there are very few neuter nouns that end in -s in the nominative singular. Those which do, such as 'hus', retain the -s when case endings are added. Similarly, feminine nouns ending in -s in the nominative singular also retain the suffix when adding case endings such as 'mus', 'muse', suggesting that the dropping of an -s ending is uncommon when adding case endings regardless of the gender of the noun. It seems unlikely that 'wyrms' would have commonly dropped the -s suffix when adding case endings; however, the lack of case endings for neuter nouns in the nominative and accusative cases makes this difficult to establish as it limits the number of examples available for study.

The lack of endings for the nominative and accusative cases in both the plural and singular forms mean that establishing the true meaning of 'wyrms' is entirely reliant on the context provided by surrounding text. While the use of 'wyrms' rather than *wyrm* or *wyrmas* should help to clarify whether the symptoms described by a remedy relates to pus or to the genuine or perceived presence of a creature, the lack of clarity regarding inflection prevents this in other more complex contexts. Bald's Leechbook I includes the following remedy:

> Wiþ þeorwyrme on fet nim þa readan netlan, gecnua, do wæter to, lege on hatne stan, læt afreoþan, bind on þone fot neahterne.[255]

[255] Cockayne (ed), p. 118. 'Against a worm/pus in a boil in the foot take red nettle, beat, add to water, lay it on a hot stone, let it froth, bind on the foot for the night time.'

The term ‘þeorwyrme’ could be perceived in a number of ways. ‘Þeorwyrm’ could conceivably be understood as either *wyrmas* in a boil or ‘wyrms’ in a boil; if reliant entirely on context, one may reach the conclusion that a more likely meaning for the remedy is the treatment of pus or infection within a boil rather than a physical worm. While, as we have discussed, it is certainly not impossible that a boil had become infested with a parasite or that the scribe had chosen to use ‘þeorwyrm’ rather than ‘maða’ to describe a maggot-like parasite, one would assume that a boil usually contains pus. Furthermore, Meaney notes that ‘squeezed out blackheads and boils have the form if not the substance of worms’, and this worm-like appearance may have contributed towards the confusion around whether ‘wyrms’ or *wyrmas* were the cause of an illness.[256] Grammatical details do not offer further insight into the meaning intended by the ‘Leechbook’s’ scribe or author. The preposition ‘wiþ’ must be followed by a dative noun; however, the ending -e is universally applied to dative singular nouns whether masculine, feminine, or neuter, so it is not necessarily possible to use case endings to define the gender of the term. Regardless of the case, however, if the intended meaning were pus or purulence, it would be expected that ‘wyrms’ would retain the -s when adding case endings; therefore, the remedy would be ‘Wiþ þeorwyrmse’. It is, of course, not impossible that ‘wyrms’ is such an irregular noun that the -s is dropped when adding case endings; if this is the case, then both audiences and scribes would be unable to define whether the remedy referred to a creature or pus.

In addition to the possibility of ‘wyrms’ being a highly irregular noun, it is possible that scribal error or misunderstanding, or the oral transmission of remedies resulted in confusion between ‘wyrms’ and *wyrm.* ‘Wyrms’ is a less common term than *wyrmas*, only returning forty-five results in the Old English Corpus compared to the near 500 results for

[256] Audrey L. Meaney, ‘The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness’, in *Health Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture,* ed. By Campbell, Hall and Klausner, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto (Toronto: Macmillan Academic, 1992) pp. 12-33 (p.14).

wyrm; certainly, scribes were far more accustomed to writing *wyrm* than 'wyrms' in the context of a leechbook, so the likelihood of miscopying seems high.[257] Furthermore, the term 'worsm', also a neuter noun, is used interchangeably with 'wyrms', creating further possibility for error with inflection. For example, the Old English 'Herbarium' contents includes a listing for a remedy 'Wiþ þa gerynnincge þæs wormses ym þa breost', while the remedy in full begins 'wiþ þa gerynnincge þæs worsmes ym ða breaost.'[258] While the meaning here is the same, the scribal error in the transposition of the 's' may indicate the scribe's lack of familiarity when copying, although transcription errors of this type are not uncommon. In addition to the initial appearance of the error, it may be significant that later readers or other scribes have not corrected the error, while this may be as a result of a general lack of editing in the manuscript, considering the care clearly taken over the manuscript as indicated by the inclusion of later glosses and colour illustrations,[259] it may also indicate a lack of familiarity with the term.

If it were indeed the case that *wyrm* and 'wyrms' became indistinguishable from one another in many cases, this must have acted to strengthen the association between *wyrmas* and disease as observable ailments such as infected wounds or boils would seemingly be attributed to *wyrmas*. Considering the association between sin and disease and between *wyrmas* and damnation discussed in this thesis, it is perhaps unsurprising that *wyrmas* would be interpreted as causing visible purulence on the body as they do in the cases of Herod or Job. In addition to the belief in the genuine contribution of *wyrmas* towards illness, the confusion with 'wyrms' would likely have resulted in the deepening of idiomatic association

[257] The 45 instances of wyrms include the spelling variants 'wurms' and 'worms'. For *wyrm* I have removed the 45 instances represented by 'wyrms' but I have not removed the verb wyrm. I have not removed the compound terms. As a basic comparison it was unnecessary to make this distinction.
[258] De Vriend, p. 27, p. 206.
[259] For a detailed description of London, British Library MS Cotton Vitellius C. III see: De Vriend, pp.xi -xx.

between *wyrmas* and illness, as a description of the symptoms of an ailment instead became its cause.

Conclusion

Ultimately, people living in early medieval England would have been far better acquainted with *wyrmas* than we are today due to the high rates of parasitic infection and the greater levels of interaction with the natural environment. Regardless of whether they were physically present in early medieval England, predatory *wyrmas* such as venomous snakes and poisonous spiders were seemingly sufficient cause for anxiety that remedies for their bites were included in vernacular copies of leechbooks. Furthermore, stories of marauding dragons causing disruption to whole communities provided a warning of what would happen if rare types of *wyrmas* were to appear, contributing to the fear of the impact of *wyrmas* even when not immediately observable.

The relationship between *wyrmas* and illness is difficult to deny considering the large number of appearances of the term within medical texts. It is certainly the case that many of the remedies found in medical texts refer to illnesses which were likely to have been caused by *wyrmas,* such as those referencing 'nafela' (the navel) due to the endemic nature of parasitic infection. However, while it is not possible to access the beliefs that early medieval people had about the causes of disease, remedies such as those against 'elf-shot' suggest that *wyrmas* could have been viewed as a cause of illness without being observed. The anxieties surrounding *wyrmas* as a corruptive influence discussed by Douglas and Meens likely contributed to the associations between *wyrmas* and disease as spiritual corruption became connected with visible corruption. The relationship between *wyrmas* and putrification that must have been observed in some contexts likely also led to a blurring of the boundaries between *wyrmas* and 'wyrms'; indeed, matter afflicted by 'wyrms' likely also had the

presence of *wyrmas* such as maggots of larvae due to the attraction of the infected or decaying item. The false link created between *wyrmas* and 'wyrms' as both a symptom and a cause of illness would have contributed towards a wider fear of the influence of *wyrmas* on the body, and influence which may also have had continued implications after death, as will be discussed in the following two chapters.

Despite their association will illness and corruption, and the fear that this caused, *wyrmas* do appear to have commanded a level of respect in the culture of early medieval England. Indeed, the decoration of the Sutton Hoo helmet reflects that the characteristics of *wyrmas*, or of those capable of fighting a *wyrm*, were desirable enough to warriors for them to be featured as part of high-status items. This respect is also reflected in the language of wisdom surrounding *wyrmas* both as part of the natural world, but also from a biblical perspective. It may be the case, that the respect afforded to *wyrmas* was in part due to their perceived power and ability to impact the lives of communities should they come into conflict.

The following chapter will consider how *wyrmas* featured in the belief systems of early medieval people in England when faced with death and discussions about mortality; these discussions, as I will demonstrate, link closely to discussions in this chapter of the anxieties surrounding *wyrmas* as a corrupting influence, but also acknowledgement of their role within the natural world.

Chapter Three: Wyrmas and Death in Early Medieval England

In this chapter I will argue that *wyrmas* are a dominant feature of the literary and cultural landscape surrounding death in early medieval England when it occurs in a normative way. I regard normative death as that which applies to any human or non-human individual who dies by any cause, including capital punishment or sacrifice, and whose body is subject to processes associated with death such as any mortuary practice, including deviant burial, pre-Christian ritual, consumption by wild animals and decay. The primary group excluded from 'normative death' are those saints and religious figures who remain incorrupt after death or who are assumed directly into heaven; these 'non-normative' deaths will be discussed in Chapter Four.

As discussed in Chapter One, earth-dwelling *wyrmas* represent the most common type of *wyrm* in the poetic corpus and a high frequency of these *wyrmas* appear in the grave. Rather than being merely a product of observation, this chapter will demonstrate that Old English texts depict a cultural understanding of a symbolic relationship between *wyrmas* and the landscape of death. The role which they play in the culture of death in early medieval England can only be fully interpreted if viewed alongside the mortuary practices which provide context for the presence of *wyrmas*. In order to provide this necessary context, this chapter will begin with an examination of some of the surviving archaeological material which will inform my analysis of literature depicting mortuary practices. This examination will focus particularly on the funerals depicted in 'Beowulf' and consider how these depictions serve to demonstrate the heavily symbolic practices which surround death and allude to anxieties that people had about the salvation of the soul and the persistence of their memory after death. As with much of the material in this thesis, the growing influence of the Church on the lives of the laity impacts the content of this chapter; the gradual process of

change from cremation to lightly furnished burials in community churchyards was a significant cultural shift and must be seen as having an impact on communities.

Following my consideration of how people in early medieval England cared for their dead, I will demonstrate how the anxieties around *wyrmas* as both a physical and spiritual corruptor discussed in Chapter Two extended into beliefs around death. Themes such as the 'beasts of battle' and 'sleeping after the feast' address the troubling possibility of the consumption of the body by outside forces; I suggest that these should be viewed alongside the imagery of *wyrmas* to reflect prevalent anxieties about the implications of this consumption for the preservation of an individual's memory, and for the body and soul in a Christian context. The content of this chapter provides the grounding for the next chapter, in which I will go on to demonstrate how knowledge of the role of *wyrmas* in death fed into anxieties surrounding *wyrmas* as a presence in Hell, but also had associations with hope of resurrection and cleansing of sin in order to access Heaven. I will also examine how examples of atypical death such as incorrupt saints stand in contradiction with the normative deaths discussed in this chapter and can be more thoroughly understood when considered alongside *wyrmas* in the earthly grave.

The spread of Christianity across the kingdoms of England must be taken into account when analysing mortuary practice, since it marked the beginning of a cultural transition, the effects of which are evident through the literature and archaeology which survives. Changes in mortuary rites and written references to the disposal of the dead are indicative of the transitional nature of the period. These changes were catalysed by the arrival of Christianity and developed as the Church took greater interest in the lives and deaths of the laity, bringing about a shift towards Christian methods of inhumation; however, despite the Church's growing influence, 'the variation within and between cemeteries suggests that [...] there was still opportunity for localised and individual traditions and beliefs to be expressed through the

medium of burial'.[260] A contribution to the debate surrounding the extent to which the Church were involved with the daily lives of the majority of people in early medieval England is beyond the remit of this thesis; however, it is necessary to be mindful of how the Church may have impacted the choices made by mourners by the end of the period.

Martin Carver comments that 'like poetry, [mortuary practice] is a palimpsest of allusions, constructed in a certain time and place'; for this reason, pre-Christian cemeteries cannot be interpreted with any certainty as the lack of contemporary written records deprives archaeology of any information on belief or societal structure in which to contextualise them.[261] What is clear from archaeological evidence, however, is that both cremation and inhumation were carried out with a good degree of care and ceremony, as early remains are often accompanied by items of monetary or societal value such as knives, bowls and animal remains.[262] What is more difficult to establish is any symbolic significance to the choices made surrounding grave-goods or the preparation and disposal of the body itself. Carver draws attention to the fact that 'the dead do not bury themselves, the grave assemblage has to be chosen by someone else; and if chosen, it is constructed, and if constructed, it becomes a creative or an active assemblage intended to have meaning.'[263] Carver's statement is helpful in its identification of the living as the beneficiaries of the funeral ceremony and it seems logical to conclude that the constructed nature of funeral assemblages is intended to communicate something about the lives and deaths of the individual and the community in which they lived. Howard Williams, like Carver, concludes that the funeral ceremony was predominantly constructed for the benefit of mourners who assembled 'a tableau composed

[260] Dawn M. Hadley and Jo Buckberry, 'Caring for the Dead in Late Anglo-Saxon England' in, *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Tinti (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), pp.121-147 (p.140).
[261] Martin Carver, 'Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves', in *Treasure in the Medieval West*, ed. By E. Tyler (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp.25-48 (p.37).
[262] See: Audrey L Meaney, 'Anglo-Saxon Pagan and Early Christian Attitudes to the Dead', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. By M. Carver (York: York Medieval Press, 2003), pp. 229-241.
[263] Martin Carver, 'Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves', in *Treasure in the Medieval West*, ed. By E Tyler (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp.25-48 (p.34).

using the dead body and artefacts. This symbolic text was intended to be read […] as part of a ritual performance and display'. [264] While a funeral assemblage may not have represented the reality of the personality or role of an individual in life, it can be used as evidence of the hopes and anxieties of the surviving relations as to the deceased person's fate and the destination of their soul after death. Certainly, as I will show in the remainder of this chapter, the care with which mortuary rituals appear to have been carried out in many cases indicates processes which aim not only to preserve memories of the deceased but also reflect on the fate of the remains and of the destination of the soul.[265]

Mortuary Practices

In order to recognise the significance of *wyrmas* within the context of mortuary ritual, it is necessary to understand the mortuary practices of early medieval England and the changes which occurred during the early medieval period. To gain as complete picture as possible, it is essential to examine both surviving archaeological evidence from cemeteries and references to mortuary practices made in literature. The pre-Christian people living in England practiced both cremation and inhumation to dispose of their dead and the preservations of certain practices such as the inclusion of small numbers of grave goods or the ritual exposure of the corpse provide insight into what was important to communities when dealing with the deceased.[266] While there are no written accounts of the exposure of bodies which survive, most likely because of the production of text in a strongly Christian

[264] Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain,* p. 59.
[265] In cases of so-called 'deviant burial' care for the body and soul appear not to have been taken. These deviant burials can offer some evidence about 'normal' burial by demonstrating what deviation from normal is. They are further discussed in: A Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs.*
[266] Ritual exposure is suggested by the appearance of insect larvae on corpses as described by Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 124-5. Though furnished burial became less elaborate, according to Crawford the presence of grave-goods was 'neither 'pagan' nor 'Christian' because it was such a fundamental aspect of burial'. See Crawford, 'Votive Deposition, Religion and the Anglo-Saxon Furnished Burial Ritual', *World Archaeology,* 36.1 (2004), 87-102 (p.98).

environment throughout the period, Marilyn Dunn notes that many pagan cultures associate the loss of flesh from the corpse with the separation of the soul from the earthly body and thus the exposure and observation of decay assures mourners of the soul's successful departure.[267] While we cannot be certain that this applied to the pre-Christian beliefs of early medieval English people, it is possible that they too had an association between the decay of flesh and the departure of the soul into an afterlife. Evidence such as fly pupae and post-holes of potential grave structures at cemeteries including Morning Thorpe, Saint Peter's Broadstairs and Apple Down suggest that early medieval English people exposed their dead prior to burial, a practice which likely occurred in some capacity both before and after conversion.[268] In addition to archaeological evidence, 'The Old English penitential labelled Pseudo-Egbert […] instructs that according to Roman law […] the grave should be closed as soon as the body is in it, suggesting that this was not always the case' and indicating that the Church may have been anxious to discourage this behaviour from persisting in communities due to its incompatibility with the Christian belief concerning the immediate separation of body and soul at death.[269] Regardless of Church influence, the exposure of bodies and the provision of some opportunity to observe their decay indicates that pre-Christian people in early medieval England may have believed that there was a connection between the decay and the separation of body and soul. Furthermore, evidence of the persistence of beliefs which were not entirely in agreement with doctrine can also be found in the 'Soul and Body' poems where the soul visits the deceased body to chastise it for its actions during life; clearly,

[267] Dunn, pp. 8-12, 88-89.
[268] Dunn, pp. 88-89.
[269] Christina Lee, *Feasting the Dead: Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon Burial Rituals* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), p.105.

despite the poem's production in a monastic environment, the belief of some connection between the decaying body and the soul was still present in early medieval England.[270]

If we accept the possibility of a relationship between the loss of flesh from a corpse and the separation of the soul, both the role of *wyrmas* and the use of cremation as a mortuary rite become more significant; for other cremating cultures, burning a body speeds up the period of transition between an earthly state, which persists for as long as the body is decomposing, and a spiritual one.[271] *Wyrmas* play a central role in breaking down the body, and if bodies were exposed to observe the decay process, this would have been understood by mourners; as a result, in mortuary tradition, *wyrmas* may be seen as performing a grotesque role in the freeing of the soul from the earthly body. Cremation, like *wyrmas* breaks down the body; however, by accelerating this process the body is quickly transformed from 'a decomposing and potentially physically and spiritually harmful set of substances' into a stable state which could be disposed of easily.[272] While it is regarded as a typically 'pagan' process, the decline in cremation began in some areas in the late fifth and sixth century and therefore, did not appear to happen as a direct result of the spread of Christianity.[273] Regardless of why cremation fell out of favour as a mortuary rite, the evidence surviving from cremation cemeteries provides information about the culture surrounding death in early medieval England. While little information about how cremations were carried out can be accessed, the colouration of remains and the appearance of glass and metal items fused onto bone found in cinerary urns at Spong Hill implies that the pyres were efficient in their

[270] 'Soul and Body I', *VB*; and 'Soul and Body II', *EB*, ll.9-11a: Sceal se gæst cuman gehþum hremig/ symle ymb seofon niht sawle findan/þone lichoman. The soul must come, full of cares, always finding its body-home every seventh night.
[271] Marilyn Dunn, p. 11.
[272] Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.83.
[273] Howard Williams, 'A Well-Urned Rest: Cremation and Inhumation in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in *Transformation by Fire: The Archaeology of Cremation in Cultural Context*, ed. by I. Kuijt, C.P. Quinn and G. Cooney (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), pp. 93-118 (p.6).

disposal of the body, burning at between 400 and 1200 degrees centigrade.[274] The charred items such as combs and the mixture of cremated human and animal bone found within urns at the Spong Hill site also confirms that any objects and animal remains which were inhumed alongside the human remains may have been placed onto the pyre also.[275]

Howard Williams argues that for cremating communities 'instead of monuments and grave-goods, it was the process of transformation by fire, and the repeated use and growing significance of place, that in combination sustained links between communities and the dead.'[276] No contemporary factual accounts survive describing cremation in early medieval England; however, cremations depicted within literary texts can provide some insight into the ceremony. While the cremations depicted in 'Beowulf' are fictional reimagining of a past that the writer would not have witnessed, it can be used to provide some insight into the significance of the 'transformation by fire' identified by Williams.

Him ða gegiredan Geata leode
ad on eorðan unwaclícne
helmum behongen hildebordum
beorhtum byrnum swa he bena wæs·
alegdon ða tomiddes maerne þeoden
hæleð híofende hlaford leofne·
ongunnon þá on beorge baelfyra maest
wígend weccan· wudurec astah
sweart ofer swioðole swogende leg
wope bewunden --windblond gelæg--
oð þæt he ða banhus gebrocen hæfde
hat on hreðre· higum unrote
modceare maendon mondryhtnes cwealm·

[274] Jacqueline McKinley, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham: Pt.8 The Cremations*, East Anglian Archaeology 69 (Dereham: Norfolk Archaeological Unit: 1994), p. 82.
[275] Ibid, p.90.
[276] Howard Williams, 'Remains of Pagan Saxondom? - The Study of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites' in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (Leeds: The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), pp. 47-71 (p.70).

swylce giomorgyd Geatisc anmeowle
Biowulfe brægd bundenheorde
sang sorgcearig· saelðe geneahhe
þæt hio hyre hearmdagas hearde ondréde
wælfylla worn werudes egesan
hyðo ond hæftnyd. Heofon rece swealg·
geworhton ða Wedra leode
hlaeo on hoe se wæs heah ond brad
waegliðendum wide gesyne
ond betimbredon on tyn dagum
beadurofes becn· bronda lafe
wealle beworhton swá hyt weorðlicost
foresnotre men findan mihton·
hi on beorg dydon beg ond siglu
eall swylce hyrsta swylce on horde aer
niðhedige men genumen hæfdon·
forleton eorla gestreon eorðan healdan
gold on greote þaer hit nu gen lifað
eldum swa unnyt swa hyt aerer wæs.[277]

On an initial reading of this passage, the 'Beowulf' poet provides an insight into the basic construction of the pyre, with it being laid directly 'on eorðan' with Beowulf's body in the centre. It is unclear how long the pyre is allowed to burn for or its location in relation to

[277] 'Beowulf', Ll.3137-3167. Then the people of the Geats prepared a pyre for him on the earth, unstinted, hung with helmets, battle-boards and bright mailcoats, as his request was. In the middle the lamenting heroes then laid down the renowned prince, beloved lord. Then on the barrow the fighting men began to waken the greatest funeral fires; wood-smoke climbed up, black over the blaze, roaring flame mingled with weeping – the swirling wind fell still – until it had broken the bone-house, hot at the heart. With cheerless spirits they bewailed their soul's sorrow, the death of their leader. Likewise, a Geatish woman, sorrowful, her hair bound up, sang a mournful lay, chanted clamorously again and again that she sorely feared days of lamentation for herself, a multitude of slaughters, the terror of an army, humiliation and captivity. Heaven swallowed up the smoke. Then the people of the Weders constructed on the shore a mound which was high and broad, to be seen far and near by those voyaging across the waves, and in ten days they had built up a monument to the man renowned in battle; they surrounded the remains of the fire with a wall, the finest that the most skilful men could devise. In the barrow they placed rings and brooches, all such trappings as men disposed to strife had earlier taken from the hoard; then they let the earth keep the warriors' treasure, gold in the dust, where it still remains now, as useless to men as it was before.

the Geat settlement; however, it is interesting that they construct the barrow on the site of the pyre, with the ashes 'wealle beworhton' (covered by a wall). While we cannot be certain that this was common practice, for Beowulf's cremation, this description contests Williams's assertion that the repeated use of a single location for cremations contributed to community remembrance cannot be applied as the barrow is built directly over the pyre remains.[278] The construction of the pyre itself appears to be intended to indicate Beowulf's status as it is described as 'baelyra maest' (greatest of funeral fires)[279] suggesting that it is not built to a standard model purely for efficiency of process but also adapted for the imposing appearance to reflect of the status of the deceased. That the pyre is 'helmum behongen, hildebordum, beorhtum byrnum'[280] is clearly intended to have both symbolic and visual impact, alluding to Beowulf's power and status through the placing of high value items on the pyre to be melted along with the body.[281] Both the physical construction of the pyre using greater amounts of timber and other resources, and the placing of valuable items on it are declarations of wealth as we can assume that the man power required to collect resources for the construction of such a large pyre was costly and reserved only for the most important figures. The text also suggests that burial rites were discussed by individuals prior to their death as Beowulf requested the decoration of his pyre, that one might request a certain appearance for their pyre indicates the importance that funeral rites had as a visual declaration of status and the anxiety of individuals that mortuary ritual be carried out in a suitably way to assure the fate of their body and their spiritual wellbeing.

Further to the construction of the pyre, the apparently public show of grief by the warriors and the audience of the cremation who 'modceare mændon' (bemoaned their

[278] Howard Williams, 'Remains of Pagan Saxondom? - The Study of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites', p.70.
[279] 'Beowulf', L.3143b.
[280] 'Beowulf', Ll.3139-3140a. Hung with helmets, battle-boards, bright mailcoats'.
[281] Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.97.

grief)[282] around the pyre furthers the image of cremation as a community event intended to be observed and remembered. The role of the warriors themselves in the cremation ceremony cements Beowulf's high status as they 'weccan' (wake/light) the flames themselves, taking an active role in the mortuary rites and serving him in death as they did in life; certainly, for Beowulf's cremation, the role of the warriors has additional significance as they serve a final act to their lord having failed to do so in his fight with the dragon. The active role taken by the warriors indicates a relationship between mortuary ritual and the strengthening of bonds, particularly as the placing of 'beg ond siglu' (rings and brooches)[283] in the barrow mirrors the giving of gifts usually expected of a lord to retainers during life. Regardless of the identity of the 'Geatisc anmeowle' (Geatish woman),[284] her presence at the cremation indicates that this was not only an event witnessed and participated in by men, but also that women played an important role; considering the few references to women in 'Beowulf' the poet's choice to refer to the 'Geatisc anmeowle' (Geatish woman)[285] suggests that he viewed her as a significant presence.

Beowulf's cremation also suggests some of the spiritual significance of the destruction of the body by fire as the poet describes how 'windlbond gelæg' (swirling wind fell still),[286] an elemental response to the elemental mortuary ritual. Certainly, if we consider it likely that early medieval English people believed that the connection between body and soul was severed by cremation, observers of a cremation must have regarded themselves as watching the departure of the soul which is reflected as 'Heofon rece swealg' (Heaven swallowed up the smoke)[287] rising from the pyre. For the Christian poet, cremation would

[282] 'Beowulf', L. 3149a.
[283] 'Beowulf', L. 3163b.
[284] John C. Pope, 'Beowulf 3150-3151: Queen Hygd and the Word "Geomeowle"', *Modern Language Notes,* 70.2 (1955), 77-87; Tauno F. Mastanoja, 'The UnnamedWoman's Song of Mourning Over Beowulf and the Tradition of Ritual Lamentation, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 68.1 (1967), 1-27.
[285] 'Beowulf', l.3150b.
[286] 'Beowulf', l.3146b.
[287] 'Beowulf', l.3155b.

have been ‘considered a pagan custom in Christian times’, but the poet recognises its ritual importance in the pre-Christian past which the poem’s characters inhabit.[288] The reference to the Christian ‘Heofon’ may arguably appear to remind audiences that God is a presence in the heroic past in the poem; however, the swallowing of the smoke from Beowulf’s pyre by Heaven may also serve as a reminder of the exclusion of the pagan characters from the joys of Heaven as there while the smoke reaches Heaven, there is no suggestion that Beowulf does also.[289]

The accounts of the breakdown of the body in ‘Beowulf’ also support Williams’s suggestion that the burning process was central to the lasting memory of the deceased. While Beowulf’s cremation is relatively measured in its description of the destruction of the body which is described only as ‘gebrocen […] hát on hreðre’ (broken, hot in the heart), the description of other bodies being cremated in the text is far more graphic. The Finn episode describes the cremation of Hildeburh’s son and Hnæf and is clearly meant to be compared to that of Beowulf later in the text:

> Ad wæs geæfned on incge gold
> Ahæfen of horde. Here-Scyldinga
> Betst beadorinca wæs on bael gearu
> Æt þaem ade wæs eþgesyne
> Swatfah syrce swyn ealgylden
> Eofer irenheard æþeling manig
> Wundum awyrded. Sume on wæle crungon.
> Het ða Hildeburh æt Hnæfes ade
> Hire selfre sunu sweoloðe befæstan,
> Banfatu bærnan ond on bael doon
> Earme on eaxle ides gnornode.

[288] Edward B. Irving Jr., ‘The Nature of Christianity in Beowulf’, *Anglo-Saxon England,* 13 (1984), 7-21; Frederick Klaeber, trans by Paul Battles, The Christian Elements in Beowulf, *Old English Newsletter,* 24 (1996).
[289] J.R.R Tolkien, ‘The Monsters and the Critics’, in *The Monsters and the Critics: and Other Essays,* ed by Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).

Geomrode giddum. Guðrinc astah.
Wand to wolcnum wælfyra maest
Hlynode for hlawe hafelan multon.
Benheato burston ðonne blod ætsoranc,
Laðbite lices. Lig ealle forswealg
Gaesta gifrost, þara ðe þaer guð fornam
Bega folces wæs hira blaed scaen.[290]

The amount of detail used by the 'Beowulf' poet here appropriately serves to emphasise the spectacle of the double cremation and the significance of the deaths in the political narrative of the Finn episode. As with Beowulf's pyre, the wealth and prowess of the deceased are clear through the inclusion of their belongings: '*Æ*t þaem ade wæs eþgesyne/ Swatfah syrce swyn ealgylden/ Eofer irenheard' (upon the pyre was easily seen, the bloodstained mailshirt, the golden swine, the iron-hard boar).[291] That the crest is depicted as 'eofer' (boar) and 'swyn' (swine) alongside the mail shirt provides a clear illustration of the characters of the deceased as 'betst beadorinca' (the best of warriors)[292] as the boar has associations with power and strength. This image of power is contrasted by 'swatfah' (bloodstained) nature of the mailcoat and the objects presence on the pyre as there is an uncomfortable disparity between the images of warrior strength and the blood and pyre of defeat. The permanence of these strong items is also contrasted with the breakable bodies of

[290] 'Beowulf', ll. 1107a - 1124b A pyre was made, gold was brought from the hoard. The best warrior of the war-Scyldings was bold on the fire. Upon the pyre was easily seen, the bloodstained mailshirt, the golden swine, the iron-hard boar, many a lord destroyed by wounds, many perished in the slaughter. Then Hildeburh commanded her own son to be placed in the heat of Hnæf's pyre, the body burned and to be placed on the fire arm to shoulder with his uncle. The woman mourned, sang a song. The warrior ascended, the greatest of funeral fires wound to the clouds, roared before the burial mound. Heads melted, cut-wounds burst open, then blood sprang out from hateful bites of the body. Fire, the greedy spirit, swallowed both of the people whom war had carried off, their glory was passed away.
[291] 'Beowulf', ll. 1110-1112a.
[292] 'Beowulf', l.1109a.

Hildeburh's son and Hnæf which 'burston […and] multon' (burst open […and] melt),[293] terms which could easily be applied to metal armour.

In addition to similarities between the appearance of the pyre, the description of the Finn episode cremation also emphasises the significance of the funeral in regards to the making and breaking of bonds. Hnæf and Hildeburh's son are described as lying 'Earme on eaxle' (arm to shoulder), a display of closeness in death reflective of the familial bond in life; however, the placement of the two warriors together in death also contradicts their separation by factional loyalty which is the ultimate cause of their deaths. The pyre in the Finn episode, therefore, acts not only as a display of wealth and warrior strength but also as a political statement regarding the levelling of differences in death and the greater significance of familial ties over factional bond. Much like the 'Geatisc anmeowle' (Geatish woman) at Beowulf's pyre later in the text, Hildeburh is a central figure in the description of the cremation of Hnæf and her son. Hildeburh is clearly directing aspects of the ceremony as the poet states that 'Het ða Hildeburh' (then Hildeburh commanded)[294] that her son's body be placed upon the pyre, this is interesting considering her husband, Finn, is still alive at this point in the text and also has familial bonds with the deceased. Considering the political and social roles clearly played by women such as Wealhtheow in the communities described in 'Beowulf', it is possible that female relatives of deceased individuals played a central role in the organisation and ceremony of cremation; however, with the limited information available it is not possible to come to any conclusions about this suggestion.

Along with the more elaborate descriptions of the pyre itself, the harrowing nature of images such as 'blod ætspranc' (blood sprang out) and 'hafelan multon' (heads melted) during the process of the body breaking down into its parts is clearly important as it is

[293] 'Beowulf', ll. 1120b-1121a.
[294] 'Beowulf', l. 1114a.

intended to be pictured in detail by the audience rather than being romanticised or concealed. Williams's suggestion that the cremation process and tableau created on the pyre 'evoked memories of earlier funerals and the biographies and identities of the deceased and his or her kin' would certainly be relevant when considering the 'Beowulf' pyres as an audience hearing a description of the cremation evokes memories of and reflection upon other pyres within the text.[295] The graphic nature of the Finn episode would likely have been meant to be recalled later in the text when Beowulf's own funeral is described. Furthermore, while there is not a pyre in the description of the funeral of Scyld, the collection of items around the body which features in each funeral depiction would also have created a connection between each of the funerals depicted in the poem.[296]

In addition to the high value items on the pyre, in Scyld's ship, and buried with cremated remains as described in 'Beowulf', there is archaeological evidence for the cremation of animals alongside humans. The remains of both domestic and wild animals appear mixed together with human remains within cinerary urns or within a separate vessel accompanying a deposit of cremated human remains; most commonly these remains are those of livestock, but parts of foxes and deer have also been recorded.[297] Including animals on the pyre, particularly high value animals such as horses, was clearly a display of wealth similar to the inclusion of other pyre goods.[298] Whether these animals were intended to play a symbolic role as food offerings or amulets is impossible to know; however, Bond suggests that 'the deposition of animals, on a cremation pyre and then in the urn, appears to be a ritual act, holding information about aspects of past human-animal relationships'.[299] Considering the

[295] Howard Williams, 'Remembering and Forgetting the Medieval Dead', in *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003), pp.227-254 (p.231).
[296] The funeral of Scyld: ll. 26-53.
[297] J M Bond, 'Burnt Offerings: Animal Bone in Anglo-Saxon Cremations', *World Archaeology*, 28.1 (1996), 76- 88 (p.85).
[298] Jaqueline I McKinley, p. 92.
[299] Bond, p.79.

personal and cultural importance that inevitably surrounds all mortuary practice, it seems likely that the animals cremated alongside human remains were carefully chosen, perhaps because they reflected qualities desired by or possessed by the individual in life.[300] Indeed, the significance of animal bodies was retained even after the move away from cremation as demonstrated by the burial excavated at Sutton Hoo of a warrior accompanied by the full skeleton of a horse; considering the levels of effort and the loss of value associated with the burial of a horse and its harness, the obvious symbolic significance of the animal accompanying human remains cannot be overlooked.[301] While the boar in the Finn episode cremation is represented in the form of a helmet crest, the symbolic significance of an animal presence on the pyre was likely retained and reflects the power of the warriors during life. When we consider Carver's comments regarding the significance of the elements including in the composition of funerary items alongside Bond's, the inclusion of animal symbolism in the form of imagery or physical bodies either in graves or added to the pyre further reinforces the fact that the constructions made for the purpose of mortuary ritual had meaning for mourners, even if this meaning was not consistent over geographical or temporal distance.

The 'Beowulf' text does not make any reference to whether the remains are collected or processed and placed into an urn after the cremation is completed; however, as I will discuss, the survival of symbolically important cinerary urns suggests that this element of the cremation had an important role.[302] The poet does describe the building of a barrow in which to inter Beowulf's remains and grave goods; this very visual monument is clearly intended to preserve the memory of Beowulf and his funeral in the community consciousness long after those who witnessed the cremation have passed away.

Hatað heaðomæare hlæw gewyrcean,

[300] Kristopher Poole, 'Engendering Debate: Animals and identity in Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Archaeology*, 57.1 (2013), 61-82.
[301] Carver, p.34.
[302] See page 163 onwards.

Beorhtne æfter bæle æt brimes nostan;

Se scel to gemyndum minum leodum

Heah hlifian on Hronesnæsse,

Þæt hit sæliðend syððan hatan

Biowulfes biorh, ða ðe brentingas

Ofer floda genipu feorran drifað. [303]

The grave mound here, like the tableau created on the pyre by the body and personal or symbolic offerings, acts as a carefully contrived image of Beowulf which has the intention of preserving his name and reputation as a powerful warrior and leader, and therefore ensuring his immortality in a pre-Christian sense. 'Biowulfes biorh' (Beowulf's barrow) epitomises the process of mourners 'selectively remembering and forgetting the identity of the deceased and his or her social relationships'.[304] The poet himself appears to acknowledge the role of the 'biorh' in the remembering and forgetting of Beowulf in his final statement that 'cwaedon þæt he waere wyruldcyning / manna mildust ond monðwaerust / leodum líðost ond lofgeornost.'[305] This phrase serves to cement the desired image of Beowulf a prosperous leader and successful warrior. However, the meaning of this final line has been much debated as 'lofgeornost' can be read as a criticism of Beowulf's vanity and desire for praise, or instead as a positive reference to his desire to give praise to others.[306]

The depiction of 'Biowulfes biorh' being at the centre of mortuary ritual and remembrance after the body has been destroyed by the pyre is demonstrated as 'ymbe hlaew

[303] 'Beowulf', ll. 2802-2818. Tell those famous for war to build a fine byre after the pyre on the headland by the sea; it shall tower high on the whale's cape as a remembrance to my people, so that seafarers when they drive their tall ships from afar across the mists of the flood will thereafter call it Beowulf's barrow'.
[304] Howard Williams, *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies*, p.231.
[305] 'Beowulf', ll. 3180-3182. They said that among the world's kings he was the gentlest of men and the most courteous, the most kindly to his people and the most eager for renown.
[306] Margaret E. Goldsmith, 'The Christian Perspective in Beowulf', *Comparative Literature,* 14.1 (1962), 71-90; Raymond P. Tripp, 'Beowulf 3182b: Lofgeornost, "Most Eager to Praise"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 106.4 (2005), 425-442; Joseph E. Marshall, 'Goldgyfan or Goldwlance: A Christian Apology for Beowulf and Treasure, *Studies in Philology,* 107.1 (2010),1-24.

riodan, hildedeore æþelinga bearn ealra twelfa'.[307] In 'Beowulf', the 'biorh' is constructed on the location of the pyre and remains a focus for the community around the deceased, with the intention of being associated with them into the future. Unlike the dragon's 'eorðsele' which has stood long enough for its entrance to be 'elde uncuð' (old, forgotten), 'Biowulfes biorh' is newly constructed; however, it is clearly intended to act as a mirror to the dragon's barrow as the treasure is in a grave 'eldum swa unnyt swa hit æror wæs' (as useless to men as it was before),[308] perhaps a comment on the futility of grave goods. While the details of the identity of those associated with a barrow were likely forgotten over time, as with the 'last survivor', there is significant evidence for the reuse of early burial mounds both as locations for high status burials and later for the burial of deviant individuals who had been prevented from burial in consecrated ground alongside the rest of their communities. The reasons for the reuse of previous burial structures cannot be accessed with any great certainty; however, 'For elite groups in the seventh century this exclusive reuse may have been a deliberate symbol of status and power with reference to the past'.[309] This connection with ancestry may provide some insight into the reason for the shift from the reuse of barrows by the elite to the deviant, as the spread of Christianity meant that the association of Christian individuals with their pagan past became less appealing. The deviant burials at Sutton Hoo may provide an example of this, as the earliest execution burials are close enough in date to the high-status burials that it is likely that the community still retained some memory of the former purpose of the site. This raises the question of whether these remembered associations with ancestral kings provided further significance for the execution graves, perhaps following a change in dynasty or religious conversion, 'certain royal tombs [… became] regarded as ostentatious

[307] 'Beowulf', ll. 3169-3170. Then those brave in battle, the children of princes, twelve in all, rode around the mound.
[308] 'Beowulf', l.3167.
[309] Howard Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead: The Reuse of Prehistoric and Roman Monuments as Early Anglo Saxon Burial Sites, *Medieval Archaeology*, 41:1 (1997), 1-32 (p.19).

monuments of paganism and therefore were to be neutralized'.[310] As I will discuss further in Chapter Four, the association between barrow monuments and Hell or Purgatory may also provide a reason for locating execution sites on early burial grounds. Sarah Semple's assertion that there was a 'distinctly Anglo-Saxon version of hell and damnation, […] often within a hollow beneath a hill or mount' would mean that the placement of those excluded from burial in consecrated ground would be placed somewhere which reflected the belief that they were damned.[311] Alternatively, the presence of the high-status graves may have served as a reminder of the longstanding power of the ruling dynasty, with the display of lineage serving to validate the sentences passed down by lawmakers.[312] Descriptions of the use of monuments to an individual such as those at Sutton Hoo, and the reuse of ancient burial sites for reasons of status or deviancy, contradicts Williams's belief that physical memorials were unimportant to mourners in early medieval England; while over time the identity of an individual buried in a location may have been forgotten, or the attitudes towards the monument and the religious beliefs behind its creation, it is clear that the structures themselves were still viewed with a certain level of anxiety and reverence even after the popularity of churchyard burial became greater.

There is little surviving archaeological evidence to inform the critic about how bodies were prepared for cremation or how pyres were constructed, but it should not be assumed that this indicates that the ritual surrounding cremation had less ritual importance to mourners as other mortuary practices discussed so far. Cinerary urns in which remains of some individuals were inhumed after the cremation was completed do survive, and the decoration of these urns

[310] Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.238.
[311] Sarah Semple, 'Illustration of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 32 (2003), 231-245 (p. 240).
[312] Andrew Reynolds, p.238.

implies that their form was not merely functional, but highly symbolic.[313] As with burial monuments, Williams disregards the significance of cinerary urns as he suggests that 'the individuality of specific urns and their contents would soon be forgotten'.[314] While Williams is correct that urns were inevitably be forgotten over generations, the symbolic significant decoration on cinerary urns was likely intended to be observed by mourners and then remembered and connected to the deceased once the grave was closed, much like the tableaus which Williams describes with the deceased body itself. Richards identifies a that a number of purpose-made cinerary urns are decorated with symbolic stamps including S-shaped 'wyrm stamps'. [315] The presence of *wyrm* stamps on urns is significant since it infers that the anxieties about animal interference with the body described in detail by later written sources such as the 'Soul and Body' poems were also relevant to the early 'Anglo-Saxons'. Indeed, similar use of *wyrmas* imagery placed in proximity to human remains is discussed by Victoria Thompson in relation to grave markers which depict *wyrmas* which 'physically and spiritually protect[ed] the Christian body […] against the literal attacks of the worms in the soil and the damnation which that attack represents.'[316] *Wyrmas* imagery on cinerary urns likely did not serve the same purpose entirely as those on grave markers as the reduction of the body to ash by the cremation process would have allayed fears about the consumption of the body by *wyrmas* and other animals. However, spiritual protection against the corrupting influence of *wyrmas* was likely still a relevant and as such, the presence of *wyrm* stamps on cinerary urns can also be seen as having an amuletic or protective role against the hostility of the earth in which the cinerary urn was buried. As I will explore further in the next chapter, there is a clear relationship between *wyrmas*, the fear of damnation and the hope of

[313] J.D. Richards, 'The Significance of Form and Decoration of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Urns', *BAR British Series*, 166 (1987), 219-228.
[314] Howard Williams, 'Remains of Pagan Saxondom? - The Study of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites', p.70.
[315] Richards, p.209.
[316] Victoria Thompson, 'Memory, Salvation and Ambiguity: A Consideration of Some Anglo-Scandinavian Grave-Stones from York', in *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies*, ed. by Howard Williams (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2003), pp. 215-226 (p.222).

resurrection in a Christian context. While there was not necessarily a link between the *wyrmas* on cinerary urns and the Christian afterlife due to the move away from cremation as a mortuary rite prior to conversion, the Christianisation of cultural ideas may mean that the *wyrmas* on cinerary urns had some protective role in a pre-Christian context which is no longer accessible.

Anthropophagy - The Fear of Being Eaten

The desire to protect the body from the interference of *wyrmas* using imagery on cinerary urns or grave markers reflects a wider anxiety surrounding the improper disposal of bodies and the consumption of them by animals. A well-known motif reflecting the anxieties around the consumption of the body by animals after death is that of the 'beasts of battle'. The 'beasts of battle' are generally considered to be the raven, eagle and wolf and appear as part of the poetic depictions of every 'proper battle' in the surviving corpus, and are also referred to regularly in reference to the threat of battle, even when it fails to materialise. While critics have dismissed the 'beasts' as a decorative element of poetry, M.S. Griffith defines the 'beasts of battle' as a type scene[317] which is 'a compulsory element of battle narration [... that] cannot be eliminated without destroying its poetic coherence' despite the animals having no direct influence on the action described.[318] While *wyrmas* do not fit firmly into the grouping of 'beast of battle', as they are not consistently described as being present in the context of battles, Victoria Thompson regards *wyrmas* as 'hover[ing] on the edge of the group of animals and birds frequently characterized as 'the beasts of battle'' due to their similar role as carrion animals.[319] The consideration of *wyrmas* as a 'beast of battle',

[317] I understand a typescene to be a 'recurring stereotyped presentation of conventional details used to describe a certain event, requiring neither verbatim repetition nor a specific formula content.' D.K. Fry, 'Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-scenes, *Neophilogus*, 53 (1968), 48-54 (p.53).
[318] M.S. Griffith, 'Convention and originality in the Old English 'beasts of battle' typescene', *Anglo Saxon England*, 22 (1993), 179-199 (p.183).
[319] Thompson, p.137.

therefore, entirely relies on whether the defining feature of this group is the taste for carrion, or the specific location at battle sites. While it is logical that the beasts appear in depictions of battle sites, this may be largely due to the abundance of carrion present after a period of fighting. Considering the desire to provide proper mortuary rites for their dead which are evident from the archaeological and literary material discussed so far in this chapter, it seems likely that much of the horror which surrounds the image of the 'beasts' stems from their consumption of the human body, and the implications of this for the deceased. 'Fortunes of Men' includes two images of consumption by animals, the wolf who 'sceal hine […] etan, har hæðstapa' (must eat him, the hoary heath-stepper)[320] and the raven which attacks the man on the gallows, a situation which is clearly not related to battle:

> Þær him hrefn nimeþ heafodsyne,
> sliteð salwigpad sawelleasne;
> noþer he þy facne mæg folmum biwergan,
> laþum lyftsceaþan, biþ his lif scæcen,
> ond he feleleas, feores orwena,
> blac on beame bideð wyrde,
> bewegen wælmiste. Bið him werig noma![321]

Both the man consumed by wolves and the man on the gallows in 'Fortunes of Men' are victims of ill fate and their unfortunate lives are reflected in the unfortunate fate of their corpses and ultimately the unfortunate destination of their souls. *Wyrmas* are not described in 'Fortunes of Men', however, they can be seen as an unspoken presence in the image of the man on the gallows, as an exposed body would inevitably be subject to infestation by maggots and other *wyrmas.* 'Fortunes of Men' also shows an association between animal consumption and deviant lifestyle for which part of the punishment is the shame associated

[320] 'Fortunes of Men', *EB,* ll. 12b-13a.
[321] Ibid, ll. 36-42. There the raven takes his eyes, the dusky-feathered one slits the lifeless one; neither may he defend himself with his hands against that evil, against the hateful air-robber, his life is fled and he is devoid of feeling, despairing of life, he waits for fate, pallid upon the beam, shrouded by mist. His name is weary.

with the improper treatment of their corpses and the resultant consumption by animals, indeed, the poem 'features persons whose fate is not simply to die, but to be literally and figuratively consumed' by animals, suggesting that it is the act of consumption which is central to the imagery.[322]

In contradiction to the narrative told by 'Fortunes of Men' and by the 'beasts of battle' more widely, in 'City of God Against the Pagans' St. Augustine emphasises that the faithful who are not given suitable burial will not suffer as a result: 'tenens praedictum nec absumentes bestias resurrecturis corporibus obfuturas'.[323] There is a disparity here between the statements made by religious text and the actions of people attempting to protect the deceased from animal interference which are evidenced in surviving artefacts and texts. Indeed, Augustine's efforts to assure audiences of the security of unburied believers' souls demonstrates that there was a general anxiety in the population which needed addressing. In this sense, *wyrmas* are arguably the most terrifying of the 'beasts' as they too are predatory or scavenger animals which feed on carrion, but they are the most difficult to defend against due to their presence in the earth, a fact which must have evoked anxieties in those concerned about the implications of such consumption. A further example of the relationship between the 'beasts', *wyrmas* and the implications of animal consumption appears in Vercelli Homily IV when the *wyrmas* and 'beasts' appear together as the soul chastises its deceased body which has led a sinful life; 'eala, ðu wyrma gecow, wulfes geslit, fugles geter'.[324] Much like the hanging victim in 'Fortunes of Men', the deceased individual in Vercelli Homily IV is not specified as having been killed within the context of a battle and the homilist makes no effort to separate the *wyrmas* from the two 'beasts' in this phrase; rather, the creatures are used as a

[322] Stefan Jurasinski, 'Caring for the Dead in The Fortunes of Men', *Philological Quarterly*, 86.4 (2007), 343-363 (p. 347).
[323] Saint Augustine, Book I, 12, *The City of God Against the Pagans: Books 1-3*, ed. and trans. by George E. McCracken, vol.1 (London: Heinemann, 1957), p.58. 'holding to the promise that not even devouring beasts will be prejudicial to bodies that are to rise again.'
[324] D.G. Scragg ed., 'Homily IV', *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.100. Alas, the worms' chewing and the wolf's slicing and the bird's tearing.

group to communicate the shameful consumption of the body as retribution for its actions in life. The three creatures are all described performing aggressive actions on the body, 'geslit' (slit), 'gecow' (chew), 'geter' (tear); the use of similar verbs which emphasise the power and ability of the creatures to destroy the body again draws attention to the similarities between them rather than separating the *wyrmas* into another category. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter One, the physical attributes of the *wyrmas* in this phrase are clearly more like those of the wolf and carrion birds than with a typical imagining of an earthworm or maggot which may feed on the body.

Wyrmas also share with the 'beasts of battle' the unsettling trait of appearing to enjoy the consumption of their victims; in 'The Battle of Maldon' the ravens and eagles are 'æses georn' (eager for carrion)[325] and pre-empt feasting on the warriors as they are killed in battle, with the *wyrmas* in the grave 'gifre ond grædig' (eager and greedy) for the corpse in the 'Soul and Body' poems.[326] As I will continue to demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, considering the prevalence of the imagery of *wyrmas* as a destroyer and consumer of the body, it seems logical to compare *wyrmas* and the 'beasts of battle' to an extent. I suggest that the *wyrmas* and 'beasts' can be seen less as one group but more as two separate but related themes which likely evoked each other. If we consider the fuzzy set theory surrounding *wyrmas* discussed in chapter one, it is possible to view the *wyrmas* fuzzy set as overlapping at the edges with the 'beasts of battle' set due to the common prototypical feature of the creatures as predators or scavengers which consume the body. Griffith's assertion that the 'beasts of battle' are a compulsory element of battle narration cannot be applied to *wyrmas;* however, I suggest that Victoria Thompson's view of the 'beasts' as carrion animals is easily reframed to suggest that *wyrmas* are a crucial element of imagery of bodily

[325] 'The Battle of Maldon', *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems,* L. 107a,
[326] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* L.69a.

consumption which cannot be eliminated without destroying its poetic coherence'.[327] What *wyrmas* and the 'beasts of battle' also share is their provocation of anxieties which surround consumption of the body by animals, and the potential impact of this on a Christian afterlife.

While the proper burial of a body would likely have protected it against the interference of the 'beasts of battle', the presence of charcoal burials in early medieval cemeteries attests to the anxieties surrounding the interference of *wyrmas* with bodies in the grave, as the *wyrm* is the only creature which can retain access to the body regardless of mortuary rites being carried out. Charcoal burial is observed in numerous graves and at several cemeteries from the early medieval period including 'York Minster, Barrow-upon-Humber, Hereford, Exeter and at both Old Minster and Staple Gardens in Winchester'.[328] The use of charcoal in graves varies, with some only including a small scattering of charcoal, while others fully encase the grave in charcoal mixed with clay.[329] Raunds Furnells differs from other sites as while it does not include graves lined with charcoal, charred logs are included along the side of grave cuts.[330] While the reasoning behind it is not immediately clear, and cannot be assessed conclusively, there are a number of likely reasons for lining a grave with charcoal, many of which relate directly to anxieties surrounding *wyrmas.*

The use of charcoal to line the grave would have served as a purification of an unfriendly space, with the charcoal giving 'the floor of the grave a clean, dry appearance' in order to receive the body.[331] Furthermore, where graves were fully encased with charcoal, there may have been a practical application in the prevention of inter-cutting when digging later graves, ensuring that those already buried were not disturbed. The idea of maintaining

---

[327] M.S. Griffith, p.183.
[328] Hadley, Dawn M. and Buckberry, Jo, 'Caring for the Dead in Late Anglo-Saxon England' in, *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed by Tinti (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), pp.121-147 (p.136).
[329] James Holloway, 'Material Symbolism and Death: Charcoal Burial in Later Anglo-Saxon England, in *Burial in Later AS England c.650-1100 AD*, ed. Jo Buckberry and Annia Cherryson, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), pp 83-92.
[330] Boddington, *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo-Saxon Church and Churchyard* (London: English Heritage, Archaeological Report 7, 1996), p.37.
[331] Holloway, p.88.

the purity of the grave in terms of its physical cleanliness through the addition of charcoal in order to absorb moisture is somewhat problematic as it seems unlikely that the addition of charcoal to a grave cut would sufficiently dry earth out to be considered successful. The attempts to dry the earth, however, would certainly reflect anxieties surrounding becoming 'wyrma gewiste' (food for wyrmas) as the visual presence of worms within the grave would essentially remind mourners of the fate of the body during burial, perhaps resulting in a sense of knowingly presenting a loved one to *wyrmas*. By removing any clear presence of *wyrmas*, mourners would be able to observe the grave tableau without the reminder of the inevitable fate of the body once the grave was closed. It seems more likely that the addition of charcoal to the grave cut provided a visible physical barrier against *wyrmas* which, regardless of its effectiveness, could be seen to defend the body from their influence. The addition of this charcoal barrier would provide assurance that mourners had made some effort to protect the body from *wyrmas* and the possible implications of consumption in relation to the fate of the soul.

There is correlation between the presence of charcoal in burials with the status of the individual, as there was inevitably a cost implication in its inclusion and graves containing charcoal must have been constructed with additional care. In addition to the use of charcoal, wealthy individuals may have been buried within a coffin made of wood or metal, with pillow stones or in a grave cut fully lined with rocks.[332] Regardless of the method used to enclose the body, like charcoal burial, these techniques place emphasis upon the separation of the body from the earth which surrounded it in the grave and, by extension, the creatures within that earth which would corrupt the body.

In addition to any physical and spiritual purpose served by charcoal, its use in graves within Christian burials must be seen to have a significant association with ideas of purity

[332] Ibid.

and penance. There are clear links in Christian theology between ash and spiritual cleansing as demonstrated by the use of ashes at an element of penance in the Biblical books of Job, Judith and Kings, amongst others.'[333] The association between ashes and penance may have served to provide a final display of humility by the deceased which, by demonstrating their faith, may protect their body against damnation associated with the consumption of the body. On this basis, the inclusion of charcoal in the grave serves a two-fold purpose, offering both a physical barrier against the visible *wyrmas* within the grave and a spiritual barrier from the perceived judgement enacted by the *wyrmas* prior to the eventual judgement by God. The use of ashes in the grave also links with the biblical account in Genesis where, after the Fall, God says to Adam, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return'.[334] The placing of charcoal within the grave could be seen as a reference to this verse and to the human fate of returning to dust as a result of original sin. 'Homily XXI' from collection of homilies found in the Vercelli Book clearly draws upon Genesis 3:19 when it states that 'we syndon deadlice men & to duste sceolon on worulde wyrðan, wyrmum to æte, & of eorðan sceolon eft arisan on domes dæge, & dryhtne sylfum eall ætywan þæt we ær dydon.'[335]The homilist is clearly attempting to demonstrate the inevitability of death and the consumption of the earthly body by *wyrmas* as the language of the homily is clear, repeatedly using 'sceolon' (must) to emphasise that man's fate and eventual judgement is inescapable. Furthermore, there is a gnomic sense to this phrase with the reflection on the mortality of one's own body which clearly aims to inspire moralising in the audience as they reflect on their own mortality. The inclusion of *wyrmas* in this is significant as, much like the 'beasts of battle' trope, it is a detail

[333] Job, 42:6; Judith, 4:15, 7:4, 9:1; 2 Kings, 13:5, Esther 4:1-3, 14:2; Jeremias, 6:26, 25:34; Ezechiel, 27:30; Daniel, 9:3, Jonas, 3:6; 1 Maccabees, 3:47, 4:39; Matthew, 11:21; Luke, 10:13.
[334] Genesis, 3:19.
[335] Homily XXI, Scragg (ed), p. 356. We are mortal men and to dust we must go in this world, as food for worms, and from the earth we must arise again on Doomsday, and reveal all that we have done previously to the Lord himself.

which is unnecessary to convey the meaning of the text; however, it is highly emotive and its inclusion in the homily contributes to the poetic coherence of the passage. It is possible to view *wyrmas* within the grave within the framework of Griffith's definition of the role of the 'beasts of battle'; the *wyrmas* appearance in many grave settings including those depicted in the 'Soul and Body' poems, Vercelli Homilies II, IX, IV and XXI and many other texts suggests that the presence of *wyrmas* in the grave was a well-understood trope which played a key role in the literary depiction of the grave.[336] Considering the survival of the single Vercelli Book manuscript in Vercelli, Italy, we can surmise that the manuscript was deemed an example of high quality English vernacular to have been chosen for taking over one thousand miles to Rome by a pilgrim or gifted to Vercelli by a Bishop.[337] As such, the literature contained within the Vercelli Book is likely to have exemplified the popular themes and style of the period and literary culture in which it was made; therefore, we can propose that the inclusion of *wyrmas* within the descriptions of the grave in the Vercelli Book was typical of wider literary culture within early medieval England.

While the majority of the reasons behind including charcoal in graves involve protecting the body from *wyrmas*, the significance of *wyrmas* in depictions of the grave it could also be suggested that charcoal was representative of an acceptance and surrendering of the body to the earth and to the fate of man due to their inherently imperfect state.[338] As I will further outline in Chapter Four, the burial of the body and acceptance of decay may have come to reflect the necessity for post-mortem purgation to cleanse venial sin and allow the

[336] M.S. Griffith, (p.183). My database records 49 explicit references to *wyrmas* within the grave. These appearances are: 'Fates of the Apostles'; 'Soul and Body I' [8 times]; 'Christ II'; 'The Pheonix'; 'Juliana'; 'Vainglory'; 'Soul and Body II' [6 times]; 'The Soul's Address to the Body' [fragment B; Fragment C 3 times; Fragment D 2 times]; 'Riming Poem'; 'Vercelli Homily IX'; 'Vercelli Homily II'; 'Vercelli Homily IV' [4 times]; 'Vercelli Homily XXI' [2 times]; 'Unnamed Homilies' [6 times]; 'Homilies attributed to Wulfstan' [4 times]; 'The Grave'; 'Dialogues of Gregory the Great' [2 times].

[337] The assessment of distance is based on evidence that the Vercelli Book was originally produced in Kent. The British Library, 'Vercelli Book' [accessed 16 June 2022].

[338] In the following chapter on the 'Afterlife' I will further consider how the role of *wyrmas* in the grave space can be regarded as performing a similar functioning to purgatory prior to the clarification of Purgatory as doctrine by the Church.

deceased to enter heaven. If this was the case, the charcoal lining in some graves may have served to acknowledge the statement of Genesis 3: 19 and surrender the individual to the necessary cleansing and judgement of God.

The suggestion that charcoal burial could be read as two entirely opposing ideas, either an attempt to prevent or, conversely, to embrace the interference of *wyrmas* may appear to unlikely. However, a lack of surviving information about the practice of charcoal burial means that the reasons for it cannot be agreed upon conclusively. If it is agreed that there is a symbolic reason for the inclusion of charcoal in grave-cuts, it may reasonably concluded that this may relate to *wyrmas* due to the evidence for anxieties around the placing of a body into the hostile grave environment. Ultimately however, the wide-ranging symbolism surrounding *wyrmas* mean that the interpretation of charcoal either as protection against *wyrmas* or as a symbolic acceptance of their role in the destruction of the body is possible and without further accessible information about the symbolic importance of charcoal burial, they can be considered equally likely.

The Corruption of 'Seledreamas'

'Soul and Body I' and 'II', religious didactic poems which are extant in the Vercelli Book and Exeter Book respectively, provide a far more complete insight into the complexity of the roles of *wyrmas* highlighted by the Vercelli Homilies. The two poems share common subject matter and likely an exemplar but differ in their content slightly: 'Soul and Body I' presents a more complete picture of death with the fate of body and soul for both the saved and the damned individuals while 'Soul and Body II', although broadly similar ends before the saved body passage. Both texts, like the Vercelli Homilies, reflect the anxieties surrounding the landscape of the grave and the relationship between the decay of the physical body and the unclear fate of the soul.

A significant theme of both of the 'Soul and Body' poems is that of the powerlessness of humanity in the face of death, a theme which is clearly relevant to mourners as attested to by their attempts to protect the bodies of the deceased from the interference of *wyrmas.* Powerlessness is depicted in the graves of both the damned and the saved individuals, although it is emphasised more explicitly in the damned grave: 'Eart þu dumb ond deaf, ne sindan þine dreamas wiht'.[339] This reference to deafness and dumbness clearly denotes the body's inability to respond to the soul's chastisement - the poet never describes the body having any reactions - and also its inability to escape from the fate befalling it within the grave. The significance of the body's deafness and dumbness become more significant when read alongside law codes such as the one issued by Alfred which states that 'Gif mon sie dumb oððe dead geboren, þæt he ne mæg synna onsecggan ne geandettan, bete se fæder his misdæda'.[340] As with the individual described in the law code, the deafness and dumbness of the corpse in the grave means that the deceased 'ne mæg synna onsecggan ne geandettan'; however, the inability to confess or defend oneself is before God rather than earthly judges and so has far greater implications. Throughout the poem, *wyrmas* and imagery surrounding their role as consumers are used by the soul to humiliate the body. Furthermore, the consumption of the body by the earth-dwelling *wyrmas* is linked directly to the removal of agency: 'Bið seo tunge totogen on tyn healfe hungrum to hroþor'.[341] The physical pulling apart of the tongue is obviously linked to the dumbness of the corpse since it is incapable of speech in two ways: primarily by being dead, and because it has had the part of the body most associated with speech destroyed; furthermore, the tearing in ten directions reduces the

[339] L. 60. Soul and Body II, *The Exeter Book,* Krapp and Dobbie (ed). You are dumb and deaf, your joys are nothing at all.'
[340] F.L. Attenborough (ed and trans) *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings,* new edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 86-7. 'If anyone is born dumb or deaf, so that he can neither deny nor confess his wrongdoings, his father shall pay compensation for his misdeeds.'
[340] Attenborough, pp. 70-71.
[341] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* l. 108-109a. 'That tongue has been torn in ten directions, a comfort to the hungry ones'.

possibility for it being reunited, as it has been separated as much as possible, a considerable point of anxiety in regards to the need for full bodily reunification on Judgement Day. Considering the significance of boasting as a method of forming bonds and ensuring the preservation of name, the destruction of the tongue has wide-reaching implications for the deceased.[342] The focus on loss of the use of speech and the tongue as performers of agency is further described with the soul's description of the body while within the meadhall, where the majority of boasting likely took place:

> Wære þu þe wiste wlonc ond wines sæd,
> þrymful þunedest, ond ic ofþyrsted wæs
> godes lichoman, gæstes drinces. [343]

There is a contrast here between the thirsty soul and the wine-soaked body, with the 'wlonc' of the body representing the possession of speech and also the choice of the body to commit sinful behaviour through the sin of pride. The contrasting descriptions of the body within the grave and within the hall demonstrate the body's lack of agency and reflects the power shift which has taken place after death, from a powerful body and a soul unable to influence its fate, to a powerless body and verbally powerful soul (although clearly, the damned soul still has no power over itself as it is at the mercy of God.) This is significant in a religious setting because there is an implication of the longevity of spiritual deeds and ultimately of eternal life promised by Christianity. Considering the significance of boasts and other verbal declarations in early medieval English society, as demonstrated in texts such as *Beowulf* and discussed later in this chapter, the subsequent removal of the ability to speak after death becomes an indicator not only of death itself but also of the futility of worldly things and

[342] Dwight Conquergood, 'Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England: Performance and the Heroic Ethos', *Literature in Performance*, 1.2 (1981), 24-35.
[343] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* Ll.36-38, You were proud at the feast, soaked with wine, glorious, puffed up, and I was thirsty for God's body, the drink of the spirit.'

behaviours in comparison to the ethereal. While the body is moved from a position of power to one of powerlessness, the soul gains some agency after death, though it is damned, through its chastisement of the body and the body's inability to answer. There is a cruel irony in the containment of the body in the grave, since it is essentially imprisoned in the grave in the same way as the soul is previously imprisoned by the body; this alongside the inability of the body to influence its fate, as the soul experienced during life, represents a full reversal of roles between the body and soul.

The term *wyrm* appears in 'Soul and Body I' nine times, and in 'Soul and Body II' seven times. Each one of these instances is in direct association with the destruction of the body and this destruction is clearly intended to be harrowing in its presentation, aiding the moralising intentions of the author.

> Biþ þæt heafod tohliden, honda tohleoþode,
> geaflas toginene, goman toslitene,
> seonwe beoð asogene, sweora bicowen;
> rib reafiað reþe wyrmas,
> drincað hloþum hra, heolfres þurstge.
> Bið seo tunge totogen on tyn healfe
> hungrum to hroþor. Forþon heo ne mæg horsclice
> wordum wrixlan wið þone wergan gæst.
>
> Gifer hatte se wyrm, þam þa geaflas beoð
>
> nædle scearpran. Se geneþeð to
>
> ærest ealra on þam eorðscræfe;
>
> he þa tungan totyhð ond þa toþas þurhsmyhð,

ond to ætwelan oþrum gerymeð,

ond þa eagan þurhiteð ufon on þæt heafod

wyrmum to wiste, þonne biþ þæt werge

lic acolad þæt he longe ær

werede mid wædum. [344]

The author of 'Soul and Body I' clearly intended to cause disgust and distress to his audience through the fate of the body and focuses on the human senses in order to do this. I have already discussed the significance of the removal of the tongue, and its significance is highlighted by the repetition of the loss of the tongue, first in line 107a and then a second time in line 113a. The removal of the eyes, depicted in line 116a has a similarly profound impact in its effect on agency as the destruction of the tongue. The law codes decreed by Alfred reference the costs associated with causing injury, including to the eyes in law 47: 'Gif mon men eage ofaselea, geselle him mon LX scill' 7 VI scill' 7 VI pæningas 7 æriddan dæl pæninges to bote. ⁋ 1. Gif it in æam heafde sie, 7 he noht geseon ne mæge mid, stande ðriddan dæl þære bote inne.'[345] Clearly, although the loss of the eye entirely was deemed of great severity, likely due to its impact on a person's ability to enact their role in society; indeed, the compensation for other serious injuries is far lower, such as piercing of the throat for which the compensation is 12 shillings.[346] Sally Crawford suggests that blindness would not only have been detrimental to an individual's independence but would prevent them from

[344] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* Ll. 103-119. The head is broken open, the hands fall apart, jaws gape open, throat torn apart, sinews sucked, neck gnawed up, fingers chewed, cruel *wyrmas* ravage ribs; in troops, they drink the body, thirsty for gore. The tongue has been torn in ten directions, comfort to the hungry ones, therefore it cannot so quickly exchange words with the accursed spirit. 'Gifer' is the name of that *wyrm,* the one who has jaws sharper than a needle. The one that ventures first of all into that earth-grave. He tears the tongue and bores into the teeth, to make room for the other ones to feast, and they eat through the eyes at the top of the head, a feast for *wyrmas.* That accursed body, once clothed in garments, cooled.

[345] F.L. Attenborough (ed and trans), pp. 86-7. 'If anyone knocks out a man's eye, he shall give him 66 shillings, 6 pence and the third part of a penny as compensation. ⁋ 1. If it remains in the head, but he can see nothing with it, one-third of the compensation shall be withheld.'

[346] Attenborough, p. 87.

participating fully in society as a result of their inability to act within the law as a witness.[347] Again, there is a sense of irony in the imagery surrounding the destruction of the eyes since the body's symbolic blindness to the sinful life it led, and the inability of the individual to 'see' that they were acting outside the laws of God, ultimately results in the physical destruction of the eyes after death. This ironic juxtaposition of spiritual blindness and physical blindness works alongside the fact that blindness was also sometimes associated with sinful behaviour and punishment from God.[348] The hands and sinews are also consumed by *wyrmas* in lines 103b and 105a; there is obviously association between the hands and agency as the inability to manipulate tools and objects would have been seriously detrimental. The destruction of the sinews furthers the imagery of powerlessness because loss of sinew would leave the body incapable of movement, rendering it unable to respond and also unable to escape from the graphically horrible fate within the grave. As with the loss of speech, the loss of agency depicted within the grave is twofold for the body; agency is removed by the state of death but emphasised by the consumption of parts of the body associated with movement and societal status.

Both versions of the poem also depict the character of 'Gifer', who is depicted with 'geaflas beoð nædle scearpran' in line 111a. As discussed in Chapter One, many of the features associated with the *wyrmas* I have categorised in my database do not reflect the anatomy of the typical earthworm which one might encounter when digging a grave. The 'nædle scearpran' teeth of 'Gifer' exemplifies the physical variation possible within the fuzzy set of *wyrmas* and demonstrates how the imagery of *wyrmas* could be shaped by poets to perform a predator of the physical body following death. [349] This is further emphasised by the emphatic language used by the poet surrounding how the body becomes 'wyrmum to

[347] Crawford, p.
[348] Darrel W. Amundsen, 'Medieval Faith in Early Christianity', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* 56.3 (1982), 326 – 350.
[349]See Chapter One, p. 77- 80.

wiste'; whilst reducing the status of the body to food for base creatures, this description of the body as food also corrupts the traditional notion of feasting within the hall as a positive and centrally important concept.[350]

The corruption of the imagery of feasting in relation to grave-dwelling *wyrmas* is visible not only in the 'Soul and Body' poems but also in texts such as 'The Riming Poem'[351] and 'Fates of the Apostles'.[352] The reframing of a central cultural trope into a negative and grotesque version evokes the uncanny and therefore creates a far more affecting image for the audience. For people in early medieval England, the hall was the centre of community and cultural life.[353] While textual evidence leaves little clear depiction of the realities of life within the hall, both 'Beowulf' and 'The Wanderer*'* depict its atmosphere as one of community and an intense sense of shared identity. In 'The Wanderer', the hall community is depicted through the speaker mourning the loss of his life within the hall:

> Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?
> Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
> Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!
> Eala þeodnes þrym! [354]

The speaker of 'The Wanderer*'* specifically describes particular aspects of the hall such as the benches, cups and the giving of gifts. The care of the poet to include each aspect as a

[350] For more on the imagery surrounding the hall see: Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Katherine Hume, 'The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 3 (1974), 63-74.
[351] *EB*, ll. 75-79a.
[352] *EB*, ll. 91b-95.
[353] Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[354] 'The Wanderer', *EB*, Ll.92-95a. Where is the horse? Where is the young man? Where is the gift-giver? Where are the seats at the feast? Where are the hall-joys? Alas the bright cup! Alas the mailed warrior! Alas the strength of the lord!

separate clause demonstrates their individual significance in addition to the importance of them when combined together into 'seledreamas' (hall-joys). The speaker laments the loss of each aspect of the hall, intensifying the clarity of the image to the poem's audience, but also demonstrating that 'seledreamas' is a complex construction which must consist of multiple aspects to be realised, and, as a result, the loss of each of these is mourned independently. In addition to the significance placed on the hall in 'The Wanderer', feasting and drinking within the hall are key uniting activities in wider Old English literature; with halls in 'Beowulf' being described according to this using compounds such as 'winsele' (winehall) and 'beorsele' (beerhall), leaving audiences in no doubt that part of what characterises the hall is the drinking and feasting which occurs inside.[355] The feast in Heorot after Beowulf defeats Grendel typifies this with the distribution of food, drink and gifts by Hroðgar before the gathered retainers on the mead-benches.[356] The depiction of joys within the hall is the epitome of ideal Germanic life and, therefore, the destruction of the hall and subversion of this ideal represents an attack upon society more widely; in 'Beowulf' this is evident through the attacks of Grendel on Heorot. Indeed, Grendel himself acts to challenge the stability of society through his appearance as the uncanny hall thane and, to an extent, the double of Beowulf.[357] Freud's theory of the 'unheimlich' suggests that the feeling of uneasiness is 'that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar'.[358] Grendel's appearance is not-quite human, but not-quite entirely inhuman and creates this impression of the uncanny, particularly in regard to his doubling of Beowulf. For example, Beowulf is said to have 'þritiges manna mægencræft on his mundgripe' (strength of

[355] 'Winsele', Beowulf, ll.695a, 771b, 2456a; 'Beorsele', Beowulf, ll. 482a, 492a, 1094a.
[356] 'Beowulf', Ll. 991 -1250.
[357] The complexities of the image of Grendel as the uncanny hall thane are not particularly relevant to my discussion of the corruption of the hall. They are explored further in: David Sandner, 'Tracking Grendel: The Uncanny in Beowulf', *Extrapolation*, 40.2 (1999), 162-176.
[358] Freud, p.156.

thirty men in his hand-grip),[359] and while attacking the hall, Grendel 'genam þritig þegna' (grabbed thirty thanes).[360] Furthermore, the sound of 'seledreamas' enrages Grendel, as he attacks in retaliation to the singing of the scop in the hall. The attack on Heorot, therefore, is the inversion of the ideal hall environment, as it is carried out by a hall-thane who is enraged by the sound of the hall, rather than comforted by it.[361] Similarly, later in the text, when the dragon attacks the Geatish hall, 'brynewylmum mealt gifstol Geata' (fire's surge melted the gift-stool of the Geats), it not only represents the destruction of the centre for social and cultural focus but also the beginning of the destruction of Geatish society more widely; the destruction of the hall and then of Beowulf himself leads to the projected descent of the Geats into disarray.[362] The attack upon Heorot by Grendel further corrupts the ideal image of the hall by subverting the common tropes associated with 'seledreamas', namely, feasting. When he attacks the hall, he has 'wistfylle wen' (hope of a full feast)[363] and when he seizes a victim, he 'blod edrum dranc' (drank blood from the veins),[364] corrupting the positive imagery of the feasting, drinking and abundance of food which is associated with the idealistic image of the hall by making the feast itself consist of the warriors themselves.

As seen in relation to Grendel, the language in the 'Soul and Body' poems used to depict the assault upon the body by *wyrmas* is also associated with feasting; indeed, graves are sometimes described as 'eorþsele' (earth-hall),[365] juxtaposing the usually positive associations with the grotesque image of the eagerness of the *wyrmas* when feasting upon the human body. Like Grendel, the *wyrmas* 'drincað…hra' (drinking the corpse)[366] in 'Soul and Body II'; considering the way in which drinking is presented as central to the community of

[359] 'Beowulf', Ll. 379b-330a.
[360] 'Beowulf', Ll. 121b-122a.
[361] Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.48.
[362] Beowulf, ll.2326b-2327a.
[363] 'Beowulf', L. 734a.
[364] 'Beowulf', L.742b.
[365] 'Beowulf', l. 2410, 'The Wife's Lament', *EB*, l.29.
[366] 'Beowulf', L. 107a.

the hall, the drinking of blood by *wyrmas* is horrifying as it is an uncanny and grotesque repurposing of a positive and idealised image where the body itself has become the feast. [367] Despite the usual positivity around drinking within the hall, the way in which the *wyrmas* drink during their grotesque feast is viewed within the context of the *wyrmas* wider presentation of 'gifer ond grædig'. As we are told in 'Beowulf' during Beowulf's flyting with Unferth[368] but also in 'Vainglory'[369], 'Juliana'[370], and 'The Fortunes of Men'[371], excessive consumption of drink could result in violence, the ultimate destruction of the ideals of the hall. When we consider the greed with which the *wyrmas* are presented it is likely that their drinking evoked images of disorder and aggression. The *wyrmas* assaulting the body in the 'Soul and Body' poems can be compared to Grendel's attack on Heorot as they take similar pleasure in their subverted feast as Grendel does in his, suggesting that there is a tradition of presenting the anti-feast as a terrifying subversion of the ideal norm. The damned body within he grave is described as being 'wiste wlanc ond wines sæd' (proud at the feast, soaked with wine)[372] a depiction of gluttony and pride, both sinful behaviours, which the *wyrmas* take on while devouring the body, essentially subverting the image of the proud hall-thane into a grotesque parody which acts to demonstrate the faults in their actions in life.

The *wyrmas* also subvert the ideal image around hosting of feasts. Magennis notes that 'feasting is a central activity in itself and it also encompasses other activities as well, such as the giving and receiving of gifts, music, and – above all – drinking.'[373] In the case of the hall, the activities Magennis describes, particularly the expectation of gift-giving which acted to benefit both the hall-thanes through their receipt of wealth and for the lord in the

[367] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* l. 107a.
[368] 'Beowulf', ll. 499-589.
[369] 'Vainglory', *EB,* ll. 35b-44a.
[370] 'Juliana', *EB,* ll. 486b- 490a.
[371] 'The Fortunes of Men', *EB,* ll. 48-50.
[372] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* l. 108
[373] Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.43.

assurance of warriors' support in future endeavours, are central to the structure of society. When we consider the description of how 'Gifer' 'ond to ætwelan oðrum gerymeð, wyrmum to wiste' (makes room for the others, a feast for *wyrmas*)[374] we can regard him as the ideal host, as he fulfils the expectations of a lord by providing a feast for his followers to enjoy; the verb 'geryman' gives the impression of warmth and generosity in the provision of the feast by 'Gifer'. In the context of 'Gifer' as host, the body is presented as an anti-hall which contains the merriment and the feast itself; however, by providing a feast in the form of the human body the poet offers a grotesque corruption of the typically positive host image. The violence with which the other *wyrmas* conduct themselves acts to subvert the image of the ideal host; as previously discussed, the act of feasting and drinking to excess could result in violence and it was the role of the lord or host to prevent violence from destroying the hall ideal. 'Gifer', however, actively encourages the violence of the other *wyrmas* within the body hall as they consume it. Considering the significance of the hall as the centre of societal structure, the image of a host or lord allowing thanes to actively destroy the hall itself emphasises the monstrosity of the *wyrmas* through their complete juxtaposition with normal societal structure. This allegory of the disintegration of the body as the destruction of the hall would not only have been symbolic in regards to the grave but would also have evoked other *wyrmas* discussed in this thesis, particularly the parasitic *wyrmas.* The grotesque imagery of 'Gifer' and his 'thanes' inhabiting and destroying the body after death must have reminded audiences of the *wyrm* infestations which were the reality for many people in early medieval England; considering the damage being done by 'Gifer', the anxieties surrounding having *wyrmas* already inhabiting the body must have been exacerbated when listening to the 'Soul and Body' poems.

[374] Soul and Body I, *VB,* ll. 121-122a.

As well as being used as a figure of ideal society, the hall is used as a metaphor for the body. Megan Cavell notes that bodies are often discussed in relation to man-made objects, since the natural world is potentially monstrous in that it cannot be kept under human control.[375] The body is described as 'banhus' (bone-house)[376] and as 'bansele' (bone-hall)[377], creating an image of the body as a man-made construction; attacks upon the body are, therefore, aligned with the imagery of attacks on the hall such as those of Grendel and the dragon. When the body is considered as a metaphor for the hall, the body, as well as 'Gifer', could be seen as being a subverted host, as it is physically providing 'wyrmum to wiste' by its presence within the grave. However, 'Gifer' seems a more suitable parallel for the host, since the other *wyrmas* behave almost as thanes following 'Gifer' as lord, while the body provides only the vessel in which the feasting takes place and is powerless in the process. We can consider the *wyrmas* in the depictions of feasting to be somewhat uncanny as they, like Grendel, take on a role which is familiar and cherished, but corrupt it in a way which forces the audience to confront their own mortality and their inevitable position as 'wyrmum to wiste'.

Both the body and the grave in the 'Soul and Body' poems fit the trope of being an anti-hall, a space which is presented as 'a negation of one or more normal hall characteristics, or as an internalization of the usual hall enemies'.[378] As in the case of the body, compounds depict the grave as a hall in order to give the impression of an environment which is normally controlled by man; indeed, there are far more examples of compounds associating the grave with the hall such as; eorðsele (earth-hall)[379], eorþhus (earth-house)[380], eorþærn (earth-

[375] Megan Cavell, 'Constructing the Monstrous Body in Beowulf', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 43 (2014), 155-181.
[376] 'banhus', 'bansele', *Dictionary of Old English* <https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [accessed July 2021]
Exodus: l. 524, Andreas: ll. 1240, 1405, Guthlac II, l. 1367; Beowulf: 2508a, 3147a.
[377] Ibid. Judgement Day I: l. 102b.
[378] Hume, p. 68.
[379] 'Eorðsele', *Dictionary of Old English* < https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [accessed July 2021].

house)[381], eorðreced (earth-house)[382] and eorþscræf (earth-cave).[383] While the grave is, of course, a man-made structure, particularly when it includes features such as lining stones or coffins, the grave environment once closed becomes a threatening and uncontrollable environment; this contradiction of a man-made but entirely uncontrollable environment is unique to the grave and its subversion of this norm contributes to the terror associated with it. Furthermore, the construction of the 'eorðsele' is unique in that it is a dwelling which lacks the usual weak points associated with other man-made structures; in 'Beowulf', Grendel accesses Heorot through the door despite it being 'fyrbendum fæst', demonstrating that even a well-built door is a potential point of entry for enemies. 'The Grave' poet describes the grave in terms of its lack of usual structural features, 'Dureleas is þet hus and dearc hit is wiðinnen';[384] considering the significance of the door as a weak point, the fact that the grave is 'dureleas' (doorless) should make it a safe structure.[385] The ability of *wyrmas* to invade a 'dureleas hus' (doorless house), therefore, demonstrates their unstoppable force as the usual protections against invaders are ineffective and even a seemingly impenetrable hall is insecure.[386]

Paul Battles discusses the nature of 'sleeping after the feast', a trope which often appears in relation to invasion of the hall; Battles concludes that when an Old English poem mentions [drinking and feasting] in close proximity, a third element -deadly danger - always follows.'[387] Battles draws comparisons between the use of this trope in 'Beowulf' and other

---

[380] 'eorþhus', Ibid.
[381] 'eorþærn', Ibid.
[382] 'eorðreced', Ibid.
[383] 'eorþscræf', Ibid.
[384] The Grave: Die Fragmente der Reden der Seele an den Leichnam, Buchholz, Erlanger Beiträge zur englischen Philologie 6 (Erlangen and Leipzig) 1890. L. 13. 'That house is doorless and it is dark within.'
[385] R. Buchholz ed., *Die Fragmente der Reden der Seele an den Leichnam* (Erlangen: Fruck der Universitäts-Buchdruckerei von Junge & Sohn, 1889).
[386] For More on the imagery of grave as house in 'The Grave', see: Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968).
[387] Paul Battles, 'Dying for a Drink: "Sleeping after the Feast" Scenes in Beowulf, Andreas and the Old English Poetic Tradition', *Modern Philology,* 112.3 (2015), 435-457 (p. 436).

texts, but the trope can also be applied figuratively to the attacks of *wyrmas*.[388] Battles notes that the death of Grendel is depicted in relation to 'sleeping after the feast' in lines 1002b-1008a:

No þæt yðe byð

To befleonne - fremme se þe wille - ,

Ac gesecan sceal sawlberendra,

Nyde genydde, niþða bearna,

Grundbuendra gearwe stowe,

Þær his lichoma legerbedde fæst

Swefeþ æfter symle.[389]

The commitment of the poet to the metaphorical description of death using the verb 'swefan' (to sleep) and the depiction of the grave as a 'legerbedde' (resting bed) demonstrates that associations with sleeping and death are clearly well understood, as the poet is confident that the audience would understand that the sleep alluded to is death. Linguistic associations between sleep and death persist to the present day with phrases such as being 'laid to rest' or 'put to sleep' often used to veil discussions of death. As previously discussed, the body and the grave are both often described in terms associated with the hall, and life is often depicted as a feast; indeed, Bede's 'sparrow in the hall' parable exemplifies the use of the hall and the comforts associated with it as a metaphor for life.[390] Considering the comparisons made

[388] For a full discussion of the appearance of the 'Sleeping after the Feast' trope see, Battles, 2015.
[389] 'Beowulf', ll. 1002b- 1008a. It is not easy to flee from this, whoever may try it! Compelled by necessity, each of those endowed with souls, each of the earth-dwelling sons of men, must seek out the prepared place where his body will sleep securely after the feast, on his resting bed.
[390] Bede, 'Book II, Chapter XIII', *HE*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 182-185.

between grave and hall, it is possible to view the attack of the body by *wyrmas* as part of this sleeping after the feast trope. Much like the warriors in 'Beowulf', since the body within the grave is asleep, in the figurative sense, after the feast of life it is unprepared for the onslaught of the *wyrmas* which it is then subjected to and is unable to fight back. As previously stated, *wyrmas* are depicted as invaders of the hall and their inclusion within the 'sleeping after the feast' trope must have exacerbated the audience's anxieties about their fate after death considering that, unlike Beowulf who merely stays awake after the feast in order to confront Grendel, the grotesque feast of the *wyrmas* after the feast of life is entirely unavoidable regardless of their behaviour in life.

While the idea of *wyrmas* acting as punishment for the sinful body is logical in the context of a Christian society, as previously noted in reference to Vercelli Homily IV, there is far less clarity regarding the fate of the saved body. The saved soul passage addresses the anxiety surrounding the fate of the body when saved. The likely persistence of pre-Christian ritual including the exposure of the dead, the use of 'heaford stoccan' (head stakes) and the probability that individuals were more closely acquainted with death than we are today means that mourners would have observed bodies decomposing regardless of the individuals' behaviour.[391] The 'saved soul' passage, unique to 'Soul and Body I', addresses the apparent anxiety which persisted amongst mourners about the fate of the deceased's immortal soul when decay was observed. The 'Soul and Body I' poet addresses this anxiety with his depiction of a speech by the saved soul which goes some way to explain decomposition:

Wine leofesta, þeah ðe wyrmas gyt

[391] Christina Lee, *Feasting the Dead: Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon Burial Rituals* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007); Helen Appleton, 'The Role of Æschere's Head', *The Review of English Studies*, 68.285 (2017), 428–447 (p. 434).

gifre gretaþ, nu is þin gast cumen,

fægere gefrætewod, of mines fæder rice,

arum bewunden. [392]

Perhaps surprisingly, the poet makes no attempt to conceal the fate of the saved body when describing how 'wyrmas gyt / gifre gretaþ', with the use of 'gifre' reflecting the previous, graphic description of 'Gifer' the *wyrm* only twenty lines previously. Furthermore, the poet goes on to describe the saved body as 'wyrmum to wiste' (food for *wyrmas*) in line 154a having used the same phrase in relation to the damned body in line 122a. The repetition of language and resultant mirroring of the fate of both earthly bodies makes clear the inescapable nature of being 'wyrmum to wiste' for mankind regardless of their behaviour. As attested to by the appearance of charcoal burials, *wyrm* stamps on cinerary urns and *wyrm* imagery on grave markers discussed previously, there is clearly anxiety present surrounding the fate of the body, and the 'Soul and Body I' poet appears to exploit these anxieties in the saved soul passage. Although the saved soul's consumption by *wyrmas* is described with far less graphic detail than that of the damned body, the proximity of the two passages to each other means that the audience would inevitably associate one with the other. Considering the moralising intention of the poem, the exploitation of these anxieties is entirely logical, as the description of *wyrmas* is followed immediately by the assurance of salvation through God in lines 136b-138a; indeed, after 'gifre gretaþ', the next half line begins 'nu', emphasising that the salvation of the soul provides immediate release from the *wyrmas.* Despite the Church's assertion that physical decay did not equate to spiritual damnation, the rare accounts of saints

[392] 'Soul and Body I', *VB*, l.135-138a, 'Beloved friend, though the *wyrmas* chew you greedily, now your soul has come, splendidly dressed, bound in glories, to my father's kingdom'.

remaining incorrupt would have demonstrated that in specific and miraculous cases, decay did not always occur.[393]

The Preservation of Memory

The consumption of the tongue in the 'Soul and Body' poems not only adheres to the themes of bodily punishment for worldly sin, perhaps specifically acting as punishment for sins committed with the mouth such as blasphemy, but, as previously suggested, also contributes to a cultural anxiety regarding the preservation of memory. The heroic boast, described in Old English texts using the terms 'beot' (boast) and 'gilpcwide' (boastful speech) was intended 'not to report one's past, but to plot one's future according to a governing personal history.'[394] The boast is significant both in terms of vowing to do something, as Beowulf does with Grendel in lines 677-687, and also in terms of ensuring one's future in the minds of those who hear the boast and then see the boast fulfilled. Indeed, when the poet recounts the history of Heorot and of Hroðgar, he states that 'he beot ne aleh', demonstrating the significance of the boast and the fulfilment of the boast in the formation of a warrior or lord's reputation.[395] O'Keefe identifies that 'a lasting reputation is a warrior's only hope for immortality', and as such, the boast had significance for warriors, particularly in a pre-Christian context, far beyond the immediate approval of their lord or retainers.[396]

Considering the significance of the boast, the consumption of the tongue represents not only an inability to speak against the chastisement from the soul, but also an inability to boast. The individual's inability to boast ultimately deprives him of the ability to preserve his memory and, in a pre-Christian context, prevents him from achieving immortality through the

[393] For a discussion of the significance of incorrupt saints, see Chapter Four, pp. 229 – 240.
[394] Dwight Conquergood, p.29.
[395] *Beowulf*, l. 80a; he did not lie when he boasted.
[396] Katherine O'Brien-O'Keefe, 'Heroic values and Christian ethics' *in The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Godden and Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 107-125 (p.108).

recounting of his deeds by his surviving peers. As the 'Soul and Body' poems were produced within the Christian context, the destruction of the tongue and therefore, the prevention of boasting, may have been an attempt by the poet to demonstrate the futility of the spoken boast as a method of preserving memory. Furthermore, the *wyrmas* destruction of the tongue could be regarded as a statement by a literate author about the ineffectiveness of spoken word as a method of preserving language. As both of the 'Soul and Body' poems appear in large, and therefore, expensive, manuscripts, this emphasis on the significance of the written word may be regarded as justification of the recording of literary works and the creation of permanent legacy. Other texts within The Exeter Book, in which 'Soul and Body II*'* appears, also make statements about the role of the oral and written word; 'Riddle 47'[397] is generally regarded to have the solution 'book worm', although, like all of the Exeter Book riddles, no solutions are given by the scribe.

> Moðde word fræt. Me þæt þuhte
> wrætlicu wyrd, þa ic þæt wundor gefrægn,
> þæt se wyrm forswealg wera gied sumes,
> þeof in þystro, þrymfæstne cwide
> ond þæs strangan staþol. Stælgiest ne wæs
> wihte þy gleawra, þe he þam wordum swealg.[398]

There are similarities in the depiction of the book's consumption and that of the consumption of the body in the grave in the 'Soul and Body*'* poems. In 'Riddle 47', the book is described only in terms relating to the human producing the words, and as a result takes on the impression of a human body. The consumption of the book then becomes akin to the

[397] 'Riddle 47', *EB*, p. 205.
[398] 'Riddle 47', ed. and trans by Paull F. Baum, *Anglo-Saxon Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), p.34. 'A moth ate words. To me it seemed a remarkable fate, when I learned of the marvel, that the worm had swallowed the speech of a man, a thief in the night, a renowned saying and its place itself. Though he swallowed the word the thieving stranger was no whit the wiser.'

consumption of flesh; indeed, considering the production of manuscripts using parchment during the period, the similarities between body and book are both symbolic and literal. The book worm is described as a 'þeof in þystro', and its invasion of the space within the book is reminiscent of the grave dwelling *wyrmas* which are depicted as invaders of the hall in their occupation of the grave space and of the human body itself.

The most explicit connection between bodies, books and *wyrmas* in 'Riddle 47' is that the *wyrm: '*forswealg / wera gied sumes, / […] þrymfæstne cwide / ond þæs strangan staþol'. As in the 'Soul and Body' poems, particular emphasis is put upon the consuming of the book, certainly, that the *wyrm* 'forswealg' the word expresses a finality in the destruction of the word. Furthermore, the poet emphasises how completely the *wyrm* destroys man's words; it does not only consume the song but also 'þrymfæstne cwide / ond þæs strangan staþol'. As previously stated, the heroic boast was a feature associated with the establishment of identity and the longevity of a person's reputation; Beowulf's deeds in defeating beasts are clearly remembered as the poem ends: 'Eahtodan eorlscipe ond his ellenweorc/ duguðum demdon'.[399] Remembering an individual, therefore, is strongly related to the way in which they speak, or are spoken about; in the context of the written word, its longevity would ensure that the individual associated with speech is retained along with the written word. For this reason, the consumption of the man's song by the *wyrm* is not only the consumption of words, but essentially the consumption of memory also. Further to this, while the consumption of the tongue in 'Soul and Body' could be regarded as a statement of the ineffectiveness of the spoken word as a preserver of memory, 'Riddle 47' suggests that the written word is also unable to preserve memory - it is clearly unsuccessful as the *wyrm* still consumes the word the song and thus the memory of the individual. While the written word is intended to be preserved in a way which the physical body cannot be, the consumption of the

[399] 'Beowulf', ll. 3173-3174a.. They praised his heroism and acclaimed the nobility of his courageous deeds.

book by the *wyrm* essentially dooms both the human body and the book to the same physical fate and to the same situation of being forgotten due to the lack of physical presence in the world. In the context of the boast, the destruction of the tongue by the *wyrm* in the 'Soul and Body' poems and the destruction of the book by the *wyrm* in 'Riddle 47' prevents the deceased from boasting and therefore prevents them from ensuring their future. Considering the Christian context of the production of The Exeter Book in which both 'Riddle 47' and 'Soul and Body II' appear, the proof of the futility of boasting and preservation of memory as a method of obtaining immortality is entirely appropriate. Both the destruction of the boast through the consumption of the tongue by *wyrmas* and the destruction of the written word by the bookworm remove the ability of an individual to 'plot… [their] future' through the more traditional pre-Christian methods of boasting and preservation of deeds. The removal of pre-Christian methods of achieving immortality thus encourages a Christian audience to put their hopes of immortality in God and to 'plot one's future' through pious living to ensure they obtain salvation.[400]

Conclusion

The relationship between *wyrmas* and normative death is both clear and complex, and the consistency with which imagery of consumption appears and the detail which authors provide about consumption suggests that it was intended to serve more than a simply poetic role. While there is little evidence from which to access the beliefs of the early 'Anglo-Saxons', the centrality of consumption in images of mortuary ritual is demonstrated by its presence in relation to cremation ritual as described in 'Beowulf'. While there are no direct references to animal interference either in the Finn episode pyre or Beowulf's own funeral, imagery of consumption is a part of their descriptions, 'forswealgan' is used to describe the action of both the smoke from Beowulf's pyre being swallowed by heaven and the flames of the Finn

[400] Conquergood, p.29.

episode pyre consuming bodies. Furthermore, the Finn episode fire is described as 'gifrost', the superlative form of 'gifre', which is used to describe the *wyrmas* of the 'Soul and Body' poems. This use of language demonstrates a connection to the wider cultural preoccupation with the process of the body being broken down specifically by the act of consumption and invites audiences to reflect upon the inevitability of the consumption of the body. The appearance of consumption imagery in texts which possibly have pre-Christian origins suggests that anxieties surrounding consumption of the body by *wyrmas,* and the development of inhumation rather than cremation as the primary mortuary practice likely exacerbated these already present anxieties. Texts with a more explicit Christian intention use the anxieties surrounding *wyrmas* to encourage moral and spiritual reform within audiences through the appropriation and development of consumption related anxieties. Despite this, anxieties surrounding the consumption of the body clearly presented challenges for the Church as 'Soul and Body I' and the Vercelli Homilies present contradictory messages regarding the role of *wyrmas* for the pious individual; perhaps unsurprisingly, there appear to have been concerns amongst mourners regarding whether the decay of their loved ones could be seen as an indication of the fate of their souls.

In the following chapter, Afterlife, I will consider further how consumption by *wyrmas* interacted with Christian doctrine regarding anxieties surrounding decay and the destination of the soul; I will conclude this section by suggesting that *wyrmas* may have acted as a precursor to Purgatory. I will then go on to consider how *wyrmas* feature in non-normative death; the death and afterlife of incorrupt Saints such as *Æ*thelthryth and Cuthbert, by contradicting the usual patterns of decay depicted in literature act to contextualise normative death. Following this, I will demonstrate that, much like the *wyrmas* within the earthly grave, *wyrmas* feature heavily in depictions of afterlives and specifically, depictions of Hell.

Chapter Four: Wyrmas and the Afterlife in Early Medieval England

Helen Foxhall Forbes states that '[t]he afterlife was a topic of constant interest between the early years of Christianity and the twelfth century', a position entirely supported by the range of surviving Old English prose and poetic texts which focus on the afterlife.[1] The imagery of *wyrmas* as physical and spiritual corruptors discussed in chapters two and three extend to the afterlife; *wyrmas* which inhabit Hell are depicted fifty times within my corpus of material and play an active part in the torment of damned souls.[2] As with many of the *wyrmas* discussed in this thesis however, the negative association of *wyrmas* as physical and spiritual attackers exists alongside positive imagery related to the afterlife, the hope of resurrection and the cleansing of the soul in order to gain access to the joys of heaven. To understand the relationship between *wyrmas* and the afterlife, this chapter will examine their role, or notable absence, in depictions of Judgement, Purgatory, Heaven and Hell. I will demonstrate that associations with the role of *wyrmas* during life and normative death feed into their roles in the afterlife, allowing *wyrmas* to embody both negative and positive roles simultaneously in this context.

The sources which early medieval scholars relied on for their interpretation of what happened after death were not, of course, limited to the information included in the Bible itself. Depictions of Heaven and Hell were also accessible in Latin and the vernacular through vision such as those depicted in the 'Visio Pauli', Gregory the Great's 'Dialogi' and Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[3] Judgement Day was also widely depicted in vernacular texts such as the 'Judgement Day' and 'Christ' poems. Using such sources to inform my discussion of Judgement, Heaven and Hell, I will focus in particular on the *wyrmas* depicted

[1] Helen Foxhall Forbes, 'The Theology of the Afterlife in the Early Middle Ages, c.400-c.1100', in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. by Richard Matthew Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 153– 175 (p.154).
[2] See Appendix V.
[3] Although the *Visio Pauli* was disregarded as apocryphal, its influence on understanding of the interim state persisted. See Kabir.

tormenting souls in Hell to reveal the similarities which exist between these imagined creatures and the *wyrmas* encountered during the lives and normative deaths of early medieval people. My discussion of Heaven will show that, while not explicitly described as being present in paradise, imagery of *wyrmas* connected to resurrection is used to represent Christian hopes for salvation after death.

In the final section of this chapter, I will analyse the relationship between *wyrmas* and post-mortem purgation and the non-normative afterlives of incorrupt saintly bodies. While Jaques Le Goff concludes that Purgatory was not recognised until the twelfth century, this is disputed by scholars such as Ananya Kabir, Helen Foxhall Forbes and Isabel Moreira who demonstrate that the understanding of an interim state was understood by early medieval English scholars and evolved far earlier than Le Goff accepts.[4] While the details of the location of the interim state and the method of purgation were not formalised during early medieval period, Foxhall Forbes summarises that:

> Anglo-Saxon texts may not discuss 'purgatorium', but they frequently mention or allude to sous in the interim who can be helped immediately by offerings of the living, and explain that these souls are purged of small sins. It is also clear from Anglo-Saxon texts that this interim condition runs concurrently with earthly time and is temporary, so that these souls will be released at the Last Judgement if not before.[5]

The differing accounts of the fate of the body and soul during the interim period is unsurprising as the existence of Purgatory was not fully solidified in doctrine until the Second

[4] Graham Robert Edwards, 'Purgatory: 'Birth' or Evolution?', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36.4 (1985),634-46; Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.1-2; Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Helen Foxhall Forbes, 'Diuduntur in Quattuor: the Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 61.2 (2010), 659- 684; Helen Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016);
[5] Helen Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith*, (p.182).

Council of Lyons in 1274.[6] However, the presence of references to an interim state in both Old English texts and a range of Latin works available to scholars in early medieval England, such as those of Ælfric, Boniface and Bede, demonstrates that ideas around post-mortem purgation were part of the consciousness of people in early medieval England.[7] Texts such as the 'Dialogi' by Gregory the Great along with Isidore's 'De Ecclesiasticis Officiis', writings by Augustine such as the 'Enchiridion', and Julian of Toledo's 'Prognosticum future saeculi' were read and circulated in various ecclesiastical contexts. In addition to texts discussing the philosophy around the fate of the soul after death, popular accounts of visions relating to the purgatorial interim such as those of the Monk of Wenlock, Dryhthelm and Fursa provided further information regarding the fate of the soul immediately after death.[8] Considering the development of beliefs in the fate of individual bodies and souls directly after death, the role of *wyrmas* in the grave, and associations with *wyrmas* as a corrupting force may have been seen as an indicator of the immediate fate of the deceased. However, my discussion of *wyrmas* and post-mortem purgation will demonstrate that, beyond being a symbol of damnation, *wyrmas* may also have become a figure of hope for the potential to serve penance for venial sin even after death.

Wyrmas and Judgement Day

While Judgement Day occurs after the soul's residence in Purgatory, or another interim state, the relationships between *wyrmas* and Judgement Day are a necessary starting point for this discussion as the events described are the foundation for my discussion of other parts of the afterlife. As a result of the work of Gregory the Great as a 'father of purgatory', it was generally accepted that not all souls would be judged on Judgement Day, since the very good and very bad would go straight to their fates, with those who were ordinarily good and bad

[6] Jerry L. Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.1.
[7] Kabir, pp. 1-2.
[8] For discussion of the visions of Dryhthelm and Fursa: see Chapter Four, pp. 216 – 221.

would require some process of judgement; martyrs and some saints were generally considered to go directly to Heaven and I will discuss the significance of this later in this chapter.[9] The description of Judgement Day in the Bible is heavily allegorical; the parable of the sheep and the goats in the gospel of Matthew emphasises the separation of man according to their actions,[10] a process echoed by Revelation which states in two concurrent verses that judgement takes place 'according to their/his deeds'.[11] In addition to depictions in the Bible itself, the vernacular translation of Augustine's 'Soliloquies' claims to be completed by Alfred gives a sense of what was deemed an appropriate understanding of Judgement Day.[12] The vernacular translation of the 'Soliloquies' does not attempt to provide definitive answers regarding the afterlife; indeed, the speaker –'Reason' – states that that 'ne mæg næfre nan [man] ongitan, ærðamþe seo sawl byd wyð þam lychaman gedeled, æall þæt he witan wolde, ne furðum ðonne giet er domes dæge, swa sweotole swa he wolde.'[13] This leaves little doubt to the author's view on attempts to understand the fate of the soul before Judgement Day; indeed, it can be read as having a critical tone towards those who attempt to understand the divine. While the author of the 'Soliloquies' makes no attempt to infer the fate of the body and soul between death and Judgement Day, much like Matthew 25.32-33 and Revelation 20.12-13, in the 'Soliloquies' 'Reason' suggests a narrative of the process of judgement in which everyone is judged individually: 'Ne sceal þeah nan man wenan þæt æalla þa þe on helle beoð habban gelic wite; ne ealle þa þe on heofenum beoð nabbað gelic wuldor. Ac ælc

[9] Le Goff, p.133.
[10] Parable of the sheep and the goats: Matthew 25: 31-46
[11] Revelation: 20:12-13.
[12] I cannot engage at length with the debate surrounding the validity of attributing the 'Alfredian' translations to Alfred. Materials on this topic include: Richard W. Clement, 'The Production of the Pastoral Care: King Alfred and his Helpers', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 129-152; Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 81-84; Janet Bately, 'The Alfredian Canon Revisited', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. by Timothy Reuter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 107 – 120; M. R. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum*, 76.1 (2007), 1-23.
[13] Thomas A. Carnicelli ed., *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's* Soliloquies (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), p.87. 'No man can ever understand all that he might wish to know before the soul is separated from the body - nor indeed before the Day of Judgement – as clearly as he desires'. Translation from: Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, p.146.

hefð be hy gearnunga, swa wite, swa wuldor, swæðer he on byð.'[14] Regardless of the identity of the translator, the translation of 'Soliloquies' was one of those provided as key texts in order to serve as an educational tool as a part of those books which Alfred regarded as 'most needful for men to know', demonstrating the importance that Alfred placed on understanding of the fate of the soul at Judgement Day.[15] This is further attested to as, in the latter part of Book II, the translator appears to deviate from Augustine's work and draws from other sources which have not been identified. Due to this it has been claimed that 'it is possible that we have the personal reflections of Alfred himself on his soul's immortality'. [16] The translation, distribution and possible adaptation of 'Soliloquies' demonstrates that there was great interest in the subject of the fate of the soul and attests to Helen Foxhall Forbes's observation of the importance of these discussions in the minds of early medieval English scholars.

In addition to the texts attributed to Alfred, Bede also wrote extensively on the topic of Judgement Day and chose the Book of Revelation for his first foray into biblical exegesis.[17] While the act of judgement itself is described relatively briefly in Revelation 20: 11-14, Bede 'found it easy and natural to stretch the theme of the Last Judgement across the whole text of Revelation…[and] scattered numerous references to the Judgement throughout his exegesis', demonstrating that he, like Alfred, identified Judgement Day as a key topic of discussion.[18] While *wyrmas* are not described as part of the judgement process itself, dragons appear in Revelation during depictions of the final days as an incarnation of the Devil; in his

[14] Thomas A. Carnicelli ed., p. 94. However, no one ought to suppose that all those who are in Hell have similar torments, nor that all those who are in Heaven have similar glory. Rather, everyone has either torment or glory (depending on where he is) according to his merits'. Trans: Keynes and Lapidge, p. 149.
[15] Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p.29.
[16] Augustine of Hippo, 'Soliloquies', in *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed and trans by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 138-152 (p.31).
[17] Faith Wallis ed. trans., *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, Translated Texts for Historians, Vol. 58 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.1.
[18] Ibid, p.82.

discussion of Revelation 20: 2 Bede connects the depiction of Satan as a dragon with imagery of other *wyrmas:*

> ET ADPREHENDIT DRACONEM SERPENTEM ANTIQUUM, QUI EST DIABOLUS ET SATANAS. Diabolus << deorsum fluens>> interpretatur, grece autem dicitur << criminator>>, satan << aduersarius>> siue << praeuaricator>>; draco ergo propter nocendi malitiam, serpens propter fallendi astutiam, diabolus propter status sui casum, satan propter obstinationem domino aduersandi nominatur.[19]

The appearance of dragons and serpents together here demonstrates a fluidity between the two creatures; considering that the Bible was a key source of learning about the natural world, the association between dragons and serpents in this context may have provided further evidence for the cohesion of these creatures into a group in the minds of the audiences. While much of Bede's material is drawn from other scholars,[20] the descriptions of the dragon and the serpent appear to be Bede's own work and suggest a clear belief in the symbolic significance of serpents and dragons as symbols of malice and deception as these qualities are such that they become synonymous for the name of the creatures. Certainly, the association of the quality of deception and craftiness creates a cohesive image with other depictions of serpents in the Bible as it provides a link between the devil-dragon at Revelation and the serpent which deceives Eve in Genesis 3:1. Despite his apparent condemnation of serpents in this exegetical passage, in his later exegesis of Genesis, Bede excuses the serpent for its role in the Fall, stating that 'the serpent did not understand the

---

[19] Bede, *Expositio Apocolypseos,* ed. by Roger Gryson, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 121A (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2001), p. 503.
And he [an angel] seized the dragon, that old serpent, who is the devil and satan. 'Devil' [*Diabolus*] means *flowing downwards.* But in Greek it means 'accuser', and Satan means 'adversary' or 'one who conspires to harm'. Therefore he is called 'dragon' because of his *malice in inflicting harm;* 'serpent' because of his craftiness in deception; 'Satan' because of his stubbornness in opposition to the Lord. Translation: Wallis, p.252.

[20] Gryson cites Bede's sources for this exposition as Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob* and Isidore *Etymologiarum libri XX.*

sounds of the words which were made by him to the woman', an apparent contradiction with his earlier work on Revelation which firmly identifies serpents as a symbol of deception.[21]

Depictions of Judgement Day also appear in a number of vernacular texts, 'Judgement Day I' and 'Christ III', which both survive in The Exeter Book[22], 'Homily IV' in the Vercelli Book, and 'Judgement Day II' which is found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 201.[23] 'Judgement Day II' clearly follows Bede's Latin poem 'De die iudicii', with the vernacular poet citing Bede in the poem's *incipit* and remaining 'remarkably close' in its translation of Bede's words.[24] The didactic theme in 'De die iudicii'[25] and 'Judgement Day II' is unmistakable and demonstrates that the texts were intended to serve the dual purpose of inspiring repentance with a view towards the horrors of judgement, and through the promise of the joys of Heaven. In addition to the imagery of floods and 'fire […which] are amongst the most significant images associated with the final judgement in Bede's works', *wyrmas* appear in the depictions of what might be observed as awaiting the damned at judgement:[26]

> Þonne fela mægða, folc unrim,
> heora sinnigan breost swiðlice beatað
> forhte mid fyste for fyrenlustum
> Þær beoð þearfan and þeodcyningas,
> earm and eadig, ealle beoð afæred.
> Þær hæfð ane lage earm and se welega,
> forðon hi habbað ege ealle ætsomne.

[21] Calvin B. Kendall ed. trans., *Bede: On Genesis*, Translated texts for Historians, Vol. 48 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 126.
[22] Krapp and Dobbie (ed), pp. 212-3, 3-4.
[23] Graham D. Caie (ed. trans.), 'Judgement Day II', in *The Old English Poem 'Judgement Day II'* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 84-103.
[24] Caie, pp. 84-103; Tara Ann Healy, 'Eall swylce þu cwæde': Translation and imitation in the Old English Judgement Day II', *Review of English Studies*, New Series (2020), 1-15 (p. 1).
[25] Bede, 'De die iudicii', in *The Old English Poem 'Judgement Day II',* ed. by Graham D. Caie (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000) pp. 129-133.
[26] Peter Darby, *Bede's Eschatological Thought* (unpublished phd thesis, University of Birmingham, 2009) p. 194, in database of University of Birmingham eTheses Repository < https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/> [accessed July 2021].

Đ<æ>t reðe flod ræscet fyre
and biterlice bærnð ða earman saula
and heora heortan horxlice wyrmas,
synscyldigra, ceorfað and slitað. [27]

That Old English language form lacks a future tense makes the depictions of the tumultuous earth all the more striking as while the future tense is implicit, the words themselves place the events within the present. Certainly, for a reflectively aural audience, the events can be interpreted as happening both in the future and in the present, adding a sense of urgency to their need to reform and strengthening the belief that Judgement Day had the potential to happen instantaneously without warning.[28]

As with the biblical sources, 'Judgement Day II' emphasises the universality of judgement, emphasising that everyone will be judged regardless of social status, and focuses instead on whether individuals will be 'miserable' or 'blessed'. Apparently, regardless of the eventual destination of the souls, both the wretched and blessed souls witness the terrors of Hell since the poet states that 'habbað ege ealle ætsomne' (all will share fear together) before they begin to describe the 'reðe flod' (raging flood) and the 'horxlice wyrmas' (loathsome worms) which all those awaiting judgement can see. The presence of the blessed souls, and their fear at witnessing judgement is also apparent in Vercelli 'Homily IV' as a blessed soul, on seeing its body, asks for it to be spared, 'lætaþ hine to me. Ne sie he næfre wyrma mete, ne to grimmum geolstre mote wyrðan.'[29] Unlike 'Judgement Day II', 'Homily IV' does not describe the *wyrmas* that the soul fears will consume its body, and therefore they are not

[27] 'Judgement Day II' Caie (ed), ll.159-169. Then many nations, innumerable people, will, afraid, beat their sinful breast violently with their fist, because of their sinful desires. The needy and kings of the people will be there, the poor and the rich, and all will be afraid. There will be one law there for the poor and the wealthy, because they will share the fear all together. The raging flood will crackle with fire and severely burn the wretched souls, and serpents will swiftly tear and slit the hearts of the sinful.
[28] Darby, p.190.
[29] 'Homily IV', Scragg (ed), p. 95. 'Leave him to me. He will never be food for worms, nor grim decayed matter to come.'

necessarily visible in the judgement scene, however, it is notable that the body expressly appeals to God to not allow the body to become 'wyrma mete'. As the body is visible to the soul on Judgement Day, it is fair to assume that the body has been in the grave until this point, so may well have already been 'wyrma mete' and 'grimmum geolstre' in the physical sense while awaiting resurrection. 'Homily IV' therefore can be seen to differentiate between two types of decay, that on earth which is inevitable and that after Judgement Day where the *wyrmas* in the afterlife which would apparently consume the body again as part of its punishment.

While the *wyrmas* are certainly depicted as being present in Hell, the vernacular texts discussed also appear to suggest that *wyrmas* were understood to be a presence at Judgement Day alongside the more well-established apocalyptic imagery of fire and flood. In some cases, the *wyrmas* are depicted as physically present alongside the fires and floods in order to create a spectacle and to accept judged souls. In 'Homily IV', while *wyrmas* are not necessarily physically present, the fear of being consumed by *wyrmas* in the afterlife is presented as a key anxiety in the minds of the souls witnessing judgement. Ultimately, *wyrmas* included in depictions of Judgement Day are not only terrifying in their own right but also make connections with other existing anxieties about *wyrmas* in the grave and in Hell. As with other imagery, such as fire, the consistent appearance of *wyrmas* in different depictions of judgement suggests that there was a tradition of including *wyrmas* in depictions of the afterlife.

Wyrmas and Hell

Considering that *wyrmas* appear at Judgement Day both as a form taken by Satan and as apparent servants of Satan which contributed to the overall sense of terror around Judgement Day, their appearance in Hell is unsurprising. As Petra Hofmann suggests, 'fear

[was] an important element of Anglo-Saxon Christianity' with scholars including Augustine believing that 'fear of Hell was a fundamental prerequisite for salvation and, by implication […] something that ought to be encouraged'.[30] This attitude towards fear is recognisable in relation to *wyrmas* as the significance of the fear associated with depictions of *wyrmas* in the grave discussed in the previous chapter is developed with the use of similar imagery in the appearance and behaviour of the *wyrmas* in Hell. As with the grave-dwelling *wyrmas*, the actions of the Hell-*wyrmas* are described in vivid detail to cause audiences to fear Hell, and therefore to reflect upon the consequences of poor actions. My data records fifty instances where *wyrm* or its compounds are used in relation to descriptions of Hell; furthermore, the poetic corpus contains twenty-two instances of *draca* used in reference to Hell and three of *næd[d]re.*[31] The negative associations discussed in chapters two and three establish *wyrmas* as corruptive both spiritually and physically through venom, disease, and physical assault; for these reasons, their role within Hell as physical and spiritual tormenters builds upon already well-understood imagery around the creatures to create a more vivid impression of the pains of Hell. In addition to demonstrating how the significance of *wyrmas* discussed previously relates to the role of *wyrmas* in the afterlife, this section will show that *wyrmas* became synonymous with depictions of Hell and should be considered alongside fire as one of the most conspicuous aspects of the landscape of Hell that early medieval people would have recognised.

Sarah Semple notes that illustrations in early medieval English manuscripts such as the Harley 603 Psalter exhibit a 'distinctly Anglo-Saxon version of hell and damnation, […which] comprises a living-dead existence, trapped within the earth, often within a hollow beneath a hill or mount, tormented by demons […] a landscape full of vents and smoking

[30] Petra Hofmann, 'Infernal Imagery in Anglo-Saxon Charters' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Saint Andrews, 2008) pp.71, 63, in database of University of St. Andrews Thesis repository < https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/> [accessed June 2021].
[31] See Appendix V.

fissures'.[32] While this differs in part from the imagery of Hell depicted in the Bible and from visions of Hell as a non-earthly location usually containing fire and devils, found in such texts such as Bede's 'Historia Ecclesiastica', illustrations such as those in this Psalter suggest that some earlier beliefs about the fate of the damned may have fed into early medieval understanding of the appearance of Hell.[33] While it is not possible to access the beliefs of pre-Christian people living in early medieval England, there is evidence of attempts to quiet the active dead including post-mortem decapitation, prone burial and the weighing down of the body with stones.[34] This physical evidence, alongside the beliefs of analogous cultures such as that of early medieval Iceland which depict 'draugar' residing within the barrow, demonstrates that people may have believed that the dead remaining close to their burial sites.[35] Due in part to their association with the ancestral past in the pagan afterlife and their association 'with concepts of liminality, timelessness and antiquity outside of normal daily routines and social interactions',[36] pre-Christian burial sites display a 'high rate of […] re-use of earlier monuments' such as Bronze-Age round barrows which was 'frequent throughout the fifth to eighth centuries and continued as a practice after the conversion'[37]; while 'monument reuse took place before, during and after the rise of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon

[32] Sarah Semple, 'Illustration of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 32 (2003), 231 – 245 (p. 240).
[33] Ibid.
[34] For further reading on markers of deviant burial see: A.L. Meaney and S.C. Hawkes, *Two Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Winnall, Winchester, Hampshire*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series, no. 4. (London: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 1970); M. Harmean, T.I. Molleson, and J.L. Price, 'Burials, Bodies and Beheadings in Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries', *Bulletin of the British Museum of Natural History (Geology)*, 35.3 (1981), 145–88; Andrew Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[35] An example of a draugr in Old Icelandic Literature is that of 'Glamr' in Grettir Saga. See: Sarah Bienko Eriksen, 'Traversing the Uncanny Valley: Glámr in Narratological Space', in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150-1400,* ed by Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd, The Northern Medieval World (Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp.89-108; Kent Pettit, 'The New Faith vs. The Undead: Christmas Showdowns, in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150-1400,* ed by Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd, The Northern Medieval World (Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp.227-244.
[36] Howard Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead: The Reuse of Prehistoric and Roman Monuments as Early Anglo Saxon Burial Sites', *Medieval Archaeology,* 41:1 (1997), 1-32 (p.3).
[37] Dunn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons c.597-c.700*, pp. 91-92.

England and cannot be explained as either 'pagan' or 'Christian''[38], the gradual move towards churchyard burial likely resulted in the Church discouraging the practice.[39] Semple argues that the association between Hell and barrows likely stems in part from the demonisation of pagan ritual and the belief in interring remains near ancestors; as a result of this, we see evidence that earlier pagan burial sites were later employed as execution cemeteries, likely due both to their connections to pagan religion and to the active exclusion of criminals from consecrated land.[40] The description of Hell existing 'beneath a hill or mount' certainly suggests that existing beliefs surrounding the burial remains in barrows and the potential for the deceased to be restless in and around their barrows were adapted in order to adhere to Christian doctrine. The reframing of pre-existing imagery to fit a Christian context is certainly not uncommon, as illustrated by 'The Dream of the Rood' where heroic imagery of the warrior is adapted through Christ's depiction as a warrior king approaching battle, with the apostles and the cross itself as loyal retainers.[41] The development of beliefs around the barrow and the possibility that the barrow became associated with Hell or as an entrance to Hell alters the reading of the act of interring a person on the site of an existing barrow. Locating a criminal or other individual who had been excluded from burial within consecrated ground such as those found at the execution cemetery at Sutton Hoo[42] would certainly have been a strongly symbolic assertion of their damned status as, ultimately, they were not only excluded from their community but also placed in proximity to an area associated with the entrance to Hell, or even within Hell itself.

[38] Howard Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead: The Reuse of Prehistoric and Roman Monuments as Early Anglo Saxon Burial Sites', p.25.
[39] Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 13.
[40] Semple, 'Illustration of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', (p.244).
[41] Carol Jean Wolf, 'Christ as Hero in 'The Dream of the Rood', *Neophilologische,* 71. 2 (1970), 202-210.
[42] Nicole Marafioti, 'Punishing Bodies and Saving Souls: Capital and Corporal Punishment in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Haskins Society Jounral: Studies in Medieval History,* vol 20, ed by William North (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009), pp. 39- 57.

The change in the usage of barrows, their Christianisation, and the possible belief that barrows were connected to Hell also creates a new reading of the barrow-dwelling 'Beowulf' dragon. Before Beowulf enters the barrow, the poet describes how 'stream ut þonan/ brecan of beorge; was þære burnan wælm/ heaðofyrum hat', which certainly aligns with Semple's observation of Hell within the barrow having 'smoking fissures'.[43] The dragon's residence in a barrow which can be understood to represent Hell is also logical as Christine Rauer notes that 'in Biblical and patristic texts, the dragon features as one of the commonest Christian symbols of evil'.[44] While the poet does not state explicitly that the barrow should be understood as an allegory for Hell, the *Beowulf* dragon is described as 'eald' (ancient)[45] and 'fyre befangen' (encircled by fire)[46], and it is stated that 'Hyne foldbuend/ swiðe ondrædað' (those who dwell on earth greatly dread it), [47] descriptions which could certainly be associated with the fires of Hell and with Satan as the 'serpens antiquus'. Furthermore, 'Christ and Satan' describes how 'he [Satan] spearcade ðonne he spreocan ongan fyre and atre'.[48] While Satan is not stated to be a dragon in this passage, the ability to produce 'fyre and atre' certainly creates links between Satan, Satan in the form of the dragon and with depictions of other dragons breathing fire and venom in literary texts including 'Beowulf.'

Considering that 'Beowulf' likely represents a much earlier story written down within a Christian context, it is perhaps unsurprising that traditional folkloric aspects were reframed to become synonymous with Hell. Indeed, it has also been widely suggested that Grendel's mere can also be read as an image of Hell:

Hie dygel lond

[43] 'Beowulf', ll.2545b-7a, A stream gushed out of the barrow; the surge of that brook was hot with deadly fire.
[44] Rauer, p.52.
[45] 'Beowulf', l.2271a.
[46] 'Beowulf', l. 2274a.
[47] 'Beowulf', ll.2274b-5a.
[48] George Philip Krapp (ed), 'Christ and Satan', ll. 78-79a, in *The Junius Manuscript* (London: Routledge, 1931), ebook https://search-proquest-com.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/lion?accountid=8630 [accessed May 2021]. 'He emitted sparks of flame and venom when he began to speak.'

warigeað, wulfleoþu, windige næssas,

frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream

undernæssa genipu niþer gewiteð

flod under foldan […]

Þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon

fyr on flode.[49]

[…]

Flod blode weol […]

Hatan heolfre […]

Gesawon ða æfter wætere wyrmcynnes fela,

Sellice sædracan sund cunnian[50]

The association between this passage and Hell is in part due to similarities between the description of the mere and that of Hell in texts such as Vercelli Homily IX and the 'Visio Pauli'.[51] Notably, the depiction of Grendel's mere includes the warriors' seeing 'wyrmcynnes fela / sellice saedracan sund cunnian' which contributes further to the assertion that Grendel's mere is intended to be viewed as Hell. As I have previously stated, the appearance of *wyrmas* in depictions of Hell was common, and therefore it may have been the case that audiences were expected to recognise aspects of Hell in the depiction of locations in 'Beowulf'.

[49] Beowulf, ed. and trans by Swanton, ll. 1357b -1366a. 'They [the Grendelkin] occupy a secret land, wolf-haunted slopes, windswept crags, dangerous swamp tracks where the mountain stream passe downwards under the darkness of the crags, water under earth. […] There each night may be seen a fearful wonder – fire on the flood.'

[50] Ibid, ll. 1422-1423a, 1425-1426. 'The flood welled with blood, with hot gore' […] 'they [the troop] saw then upon the water many of the serpent race, strange sea-dragons exploring the deep.'

[51] W.S. Mackie, 'The Demon's Home in Beowulf', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 37.4 (1938), 455-461; Carleton Brown, 'Beowulf and the Blicklng Homilies and Some Textual Notes', *Modern Language Association,* 53.4 (1938), 905-916 (p.908); Thalia Phillies Feldman, 'A Comparative Study of "Feond, Deofl, Syn and Hel in Beowulf"', *Neuphilolohische Mitteilungen,* 88.2 (1987), 159-174; Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature,* Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 106-174; Christopher Abram, 'New Light on the Illumination of Grendel's Mere', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 109.2 (2010), 198-216.

The relationship between Hell imagery and *wyrmas* is further strengthened by the development of Mouth of Hell imagery. Hofmann suggests that portraying the entrance of Hell as the jaws of a creature 'was developed in Anglo-Saxon England, and it became common infernal imagery from about CE 1200 onwards'.[52] Hofmann suggests that depictions of the entrance to Hell, or Hell itself, as a mouth is effective in Charters and Sanctions due to its strengthening of existing 'anthropophagy, the fear of being eaten, to which S 925 and the sanction of Formula Group (2) clearly allude'.[53] Well established tropes such as the 'beasts of battle' demonstrate that Hofmann is, without doubt, correct in stating the significance of anthropophagy in early medieval England; I suggest that the depiction of the mouth of Hell as a creature gains greater significance when considered alongside other imagery of consumption, such as that of *wyrmas* consuming the body within the grave. While Gary D. Schmidt suggests that 'ready acceptance of the [mouth of Hell] image came only in visual arts'[54], Hofmann identifies the mouth of Hell in 'Vercelli Homily IV: 'ne cumaþ þa næfre of þæra wyrma seaðe 7 of þæs dracan ceolan þe is Satan nemned. Þær æt his ceolan is þæt fyr gebet, þæt eall helle mægen on his wylme for þæs fyres hæto forweorðe.'[55] As opposed to being the non-descript creature common in manuscript illuminations such as that in the Junius Manuscript,[56] the Hell mouth in Vercelli Homily IV is specifically 'dracan […] þe is Satan nemned' which makes clear connections with the imagery of Satan as the 'great red dragon' which appears in depictions of Judgement Day in Revelation. The appearance of Satan as a dragon and the description of Hell as 'wyrma seaðe' (pit of *wyrmas*) emphasises the fear of consumption by *wyrmas* which is already present in depictions of the grave. The

[52] Hofmann, p. 86.
[53] Ibid, p. 82.
[54] Gary D. Schmidt, *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Pres; London: Associated University Press, 1995), p. 63.
[55] 'Vercelli Homily IV, Scragg (ed), '[they] never come out of the pit of snakes and of the throat of the dragon which is called Satan. There in his throat is fire attended to, so that the entire host is destroyed in his burning because of the fire's heat.'
[56] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, f. 3, 16.

existence of this fear, and its relationship with depictions of Hell as a 'wyrma seaðe' is further compounded by the illustrations of a serpent pit in British Library, MS Harley 608; [57] the appearance of this image both in a literary and visual arts context demonstrates a continuity between the imagery which surrounded Hell, clearly, the appearance of *wyrmas* in Hell was understood and expected by early medieval English audiences. The passage of Vercelli Homily IV makes clear to audiences that for the damned, the torment of being consumed by *wyrmas* in the earthly grave is inescapable and worsens when entering Hell through the mouth of Satan in the form of a *wyrm,* and into a pit of *wyrmas* who will assumedly continue to torture the soul. Considering the anxieties around being consumed by *wyrmas* discussed in Chapter Three, and efforts to discourage *wyrmas* such as charcoal burial, the depiction of consumption by creatures which can be called *wyrmas* both as an entrance to Hell, and Hell itself, must have heightened already present anxieties in mourners.

In addition to exploiting the fear of consumption, the depiction of the mouth of Hell as a dragon in 'Vercelli Homily IV' may have strengthened associations between barrows and Hell described by Semple. Considering the significance of associations between dragons and barrows, it is possible to read their appeanace together as strengthening the association between barrows and Hell. Indeed, while dragons were seen as natural creatures, depictions of Satan in the form of a dragon both in the Bible and in texts such as 'Vercelli Homily IV' demonstrate that certain dragons could be Satan and an entrance to Hell. For this reason, the belief about Hell existing 'beneath a hill or mount'[58] which already surrounded barrows may have been made more prominent by the belief that a dragon residing within a barrow could, in fact, be Satan in the form of a dragon rather than a natural creature.

[57] British Library, MS Harley 608, folio 3v, <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts> [accessed 16 June 2022].
[58] Semple, p. 240.

Much like the 'Beowulf' dragon, Satan the dragon and possible Hell mouth is depicted with fire 'æt his ceolan' (in his throat).[59] While the ability of dragons to breathe fire creates a clear association with the fires of Hell, the connection between *wyrmas* and fire in descriptions of Hell appears repeatedly in relation to other types of *wyrm*. While not all *wyrmas* are depicted as being able to produce fire, depictions of Hell often follow a formulaic structure which collocates fire and *wyrmas.* Of the fifty instances of *wyrmas* in Hell collected for this project, more than half of *wyrmas* appear alongside descriptions of fire; this figure is greater still if the instances of *draca* collocated with fire in Hell are also counted.[60] 'Exodus' describes Hell in direct relation to the presence of both fire and *wyrmas,* referring to 'manhus […] fæst under foldan, þær bið fyr and wyrm, open ece scræf'.[61] Similarly, in the more extended description of Hell in 'Christ and Satan', which is also found in the Junius Manuscript, the poet describes 'cyle and fyr, wean and witu and wyrma þreat.'[62] The 'Christ and Satan' poet chooses to describe the 'cyle' of Hell which Schmit describes as being a 'fairly traditional' aspect of Hell; however, it a feature missing from 'Exodus' demonstrating that there was variation in some of the aspects of Hell highlighted by poets even when aspects were regarded as typical[63]. It is, therefore, particularly significant that *wyrmas* appear alongside fire in depictions of Hell so frequently. Considering the commonness of the portrayal of the *wyrm* as spiritual and physical corruptor in the grave and its associations with venom and corruption more broadly, these fears of the role of the *wyrm* in life and death must have become connected with a similar anticipation of their role as corrupter in the afterlife. Indeed, it seems logical that the tormentor of the body in the grave, which Chapter Three demonstrated was a figure of great anxiety, extended into the afterlife to continue the process

[59] 'Vercelli Homily IV', Scragg (ed), p. 188.
[60] See Appendix VI.
[61] Exodus, 'Junius Manuscript', Krapp (ed), ll. 536b- 538a. 'the house of pain, secure under the earth, where there is fire and the worm, an open pit of evil.'
[62] 'Christ and Satan', 'Junius Manuscript', Krapp (ed), Ll.334b-335. 'frost and fire, torture and pain and teaming serpents.'
[63] Schmidt, p.62.

of destroying sinful individuals. *Wyrmas* were evidently recognised as an innate part of the landscape of Hell, and their presence could have provoked fear due to their existing cultural associations with death and corruption.

While many texts in my data set describe the presence of *wyrmas* within the landscape of Hell, 'Christ and Satan' is notable in its use of multiple semantically related terms. The poet describes how 'nabbað he to hyhte nymþe cyle and fyr, wean and witu and wyrma þreat, dracan and næddran and þone dimman ham'[64] and also states that 'Hær is nedran swæg, wyrmas gewunade'.[65] There is no detail in the description of the *wyrmas* in either passage, but it is significant that the poet chooses to emphasise their presence, number and variety by using multiple terms for them. The variety of the creatures is clearly intended to have a greater impact, and evoke more of a fear response, than any of the creatures appearing alone. Considering Mary Douglas's identification of the fear of *wyrmas* being in part due to their lack of conformity to any class,[66] the emphasis that the use of multiple terms places on the variety and abstract nature of the creatures which they could describe likely contributed to the uncanny feelings produced by the poem. In lines 101b-102a the poet places emphasis not only on the presence of *wyrmas* but the sound the creatures make; 'swæg' can be translated both as 'unregulated, confused sound, noise, din, crash' and as regulated sound made by living creatures, 'voice cry, note of a bird, song'.[67] This reference to sound creates a more complete sense of the landscape of Hell with a specific focus on an aspect of the *wyrmas;* indeed, it is not only their presence and actions as attackers which makes the landscape of Hell terrifying but the noises and assaults which they launch on other senses also. The ambiguity of 'swæg' and its possible translation as 'voice cry' or the noise of another animal

[64] 'Christ and Satan', 'Junius Manuscript', Krapp (ed), Ll. 334-336. 'frost and fire, torture and pain and teaming serpents, dracan and næddran and a home of darkness.'
[65] Ibid, Ll. 101b-102a. 'Here is the sound of the serpent, worms dwell'.
[66] Douglas, pp. 46-48.
[67] Swæg, also Sweg, *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* < https://bosworthtoller.com/> [accessed July 2021].

may also have resulted in an uncanny response from audiences. Indeed, if we consider the uncanny by Freud's definition of that which is 'that species of the frightening which goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar', the inability to distinguish between the terrifying hissing of serpents in Hell from familiar sounds such as birdsong would be uncanny, particularly as the implication of birdsong is broadly positive whereas the hissing of serpents in Hell is entirely negative.[68] By using 'swæg', the author creates an uncanny ambiguity as the noise described can be understood as something familiar or something wholly unfamiliar and unpleasant.

Indeed, that aspects of the behaviour of *wyrmas* may have been familiar to people living in early medieval England such as observing the consumption of bodies – human or animal- heightens the fear created by *wyrmas*. By framing the torments of Hell as being similar to an identifiable earthly torment would enable people to understand more vividly the torments that they might expect in Hell should they live sinfully. The comparison of Hell-dwelling *wyrmas* and grave or earth dwelling *wyrmas* may also have created an uncanny reaction in audiences as the unfamiliar and terrifying landscape of Hell would be inhabited by *wyrmas* which were comparable with *wyrmas* encountered during life, but also greatly different in that they punished the soul rather than the body.[69]

In addition to emphasising the number of *wyrmas* within Hell and their ability to punish the damned, poets also depict *wyrmas* as 'undeadlic' which Bosworth and Toller define as being 'immortal, undying, imperishable, endless', a description also applied to God and angels. The focus of poets on the 'undeadlic' *wyrmas* rather than simply the everlasting nature of Hell's punishment again places the focus of the horror on the *wyrmas* themselves. In Ælfric's 'Passion of St. Julian and his Wife Basilissa', the immortality of the *wyrmas*

[68] Freud, p.156.
[69] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.156.

alongside other features of Hell is described: 'swa swa hi besuncon on ðone sweartan grund, swa sceole ge hæðene on hellegrund besincan, þær bið æfre ece fyr and undeadlic wyrm, þe eowre lichaman cywð and ge þeah ne sweltað, ac bið æfre se lichama geedniwod to ðam witum.'[70] As discussed previously, the 'ece fyr' features alongside *wyrmas* here in a typical presentation of the features of Hell and the image also retains elements of Hell as being 'trapped within the earth' as Semple suggests.[71] That the heathen figure is described here as being 'lichama', a term which specifically applies to the corporeal rather than the spiritual, creates connections between the *wyrmas* within Hell and those in the earthly grave; the assault on the body is continued both finitely in the grave and infinitely by the 'undeadlic' *wyrmas* in Hell. Ælfric not only emphasises to the reader that the heathen bodies 'ne sweltað' because they will be always be 'geedniwod to ðam witum', but also emphasises that the *wyrmas* themselves are 'undeadlic'; it is clear that the *wyrmas* themselves play a more significant role than that of a simple tormenter as their immortality suggests that they were viewed as a crucial component of Hell, perhaps acting as servants of Satan in the same way as other devils or demons. The Ecclesiastical Institutes describe *undeadlic wyrmas* in depth when depicting Hell: 'Ne mæg us þonne ure gold ne ure seolfer gefylstan of þæm wælgrimmum tintregum & þæm unadwæscedlicum ligum & þæm undeadlicum wyrmum þa hwettað hyra blodigan teð to þon þæt hig butan ælcre mildheortnisse ure lichoman wundian & slitan'.[72] The *wyrmas* in the Hell vision contained in this homily are depicted in a similar way to those in the Passion of St. Julian and his wife in that they also live alongside fire, are immortal and chew at the body; however, the homilist in this passage specifies that they

[70] Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Passion of St. Julian and his Wife Basilissa; Just as they sunk into the dark ground, so must you heathens sink into the ground of hell, there will always be perpetual fire and undead worms that will chew your body and yet you will not die but your body will always be renewed for the torture.
[71] Semple, p. 240.
[72] Benjamin Thrope ed., *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England: Comprising Laws Enacted Under the Anglo-Saxon Kings from Æthelbirht to Cnut,* vol. 2 (London: Record Commissioners, 1840), p.396. 'After then neither our gold or our silver are able to give help to us from the bloodthirsty torment and unquenchable flames and the immortal serpents which whet their bloody teeth as, against every mercy, they wound and slit our earthly body.'

‘hwettað hyra blodigan teð’ and continue to attack people ‘butan ælcre mildheortnisse’, a feature which frames the *wyrmas* as servants of Satan as opposed to the hungry but ultimately natural *wyrmas* in the grave.

Much like for the *wyrmas* depicting the grave, authors often do not include the majority of physical features of Hell dwelling *wyrmas* apart from those which would produce the greatest fear response, such as their teeth, and the depiction of teeth appears in a wide range of texts depicting *wyrmas* in Hell. The grave-dwelling *wyrmas* in the ‘Soul and Body’ poems make the ‘goman toslitene’ (jaws gaping)[73] and ‘rib reafiað’ (plunder the ribs)[74], and it is their ‘geaflas […] nædle scearpran’ (jaws, sharper than a needle)[75] which allow them to do this; similarly, the *wyrmas* in the Hell of ‘Judgement Day II’ ‘ceorfað and slitað’[76] and ‘heora ban gnagað brynigum tuxlum’.[77] While the language use is not identical, the *wyrmas* in the grave and those in Hell are both described using the emotive verb ‘slitan’ alongside the statement that the *wyrmas* have teeth which are not only capable of destroying human flesh and bone but also appear to do this as part of a punishing act. The significance of ‘slitan’ in association with *wyrmas* is continued by ‘In die Iudicii’, a text attributed to Wulfstan by Napier which contains the single appearance of the compound term ‘wyrmslite’ which can be translated as a *wyrm* bite,[78]and which is used to describe the state of those who reside in Hell ‘in wean and on wyrmslitum’ (in woe and with *wyrm* bites).[79] The similarity of terms creates further means of comparison between the *wyrmas* such as those in the ‘Soul and Body’ poems which are enactors of physical punishment in the grave and the spiritual punishments of Hell. Indeed, Wulfstan goes further than the authors of the ‘Soul and Body’ poems and

[73] ‘Soul and Body II’, *EB,* L.104b.
[74] Ibid, l.106a.
[75] Ibid, ll.111b-112a.
[76] ‘Judgement Day II’, Caie (ed), l.169. ‘Tear and slit’.
[77] Ibid, l.213. ‘gnaw their bones with burning tusks’
[78] ‘wyrmslite’, *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* < https://bosworthtoller.com/> [accessed July 2021].
[79] Athur Napier ed., ‘In die Iudicii’, in *Wulfstan: ammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883), pp.182-190 (p.188)

'Judgment Day II' in characterising the *wyrmas* by their 'slitting' of human bodies, as the *wyrmas* in Hell are described as 'wælslitendum *wyrmum*' (corpse-rending *wyrmas*).[80] While it is perhaps unsurprising that the *wyrmas* which reside in Hell would attack the damned in the same way as the *wyrmas* in the grave, this comparison further demonstrates the blurring between what early medieval English people imagined *wyrmas* to be as a feature of the earthly grave and the attributes of those imagined creatures which inhabited spaces within the afterlife.

While texts do not provide any description of the physical form of Hell-dwelling *wyrmas* beyond the presence of teeth, some images survive which appear to show *wyrmas* in the context of Hell. Sections of cross-shafts from Masham and Thornton Steward both appear to depict naked men struggling against serpents.[81] While interpretation of the images cannot be made with any certainty due to their fragmented nature, the striving of naked sinners against *wyrmas* in Hell is depicted in the poem known as 'Christ and Satan': 'hwilum nacode men winnað ymb wyrmas'.[82] Considering that these sculptures were produced for use in a Christian context, it seems likely that imagery of *wyrmas* in Hell attacking sinners were intended to remind illiterate laity of the horrors of Hell, and the potential for these horrors to be avoided through the worship of the Christian God; indeed, the placement of these images on a cross-shaft itself is a highly literal visual reminder to focus on Christ's sacrifice on the cross in order to avoid the fates depicted. In addition to cross shafts, images of *wyrmas* in Hell are found in some manuscript illuminations, most notably the nearly full-page colour miniature on folio 2r in British Library Cotton MS Claudius b. IV which depicts a *wyrm* consuming bodies beneath the earth.[83]

---

[80] Napier (ed), p. 187.
[81] Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Marsham 3A; Thornton Steward 2D.
[82] 'Christ and Satan', Junius Manuscript, Krapp (ed), l.134b-135a. 'Sometimes naked men strive with *wyrmas*'.
[83] British Library Cotton MS Claudius b. IV <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_claudius_b_iv_fs001r> [accessed 16 June 2022].

The imagery of *wyrmas* within Hell is, unsurprisingly, overwhelmingly negative, with *wyrmas* acting as servants of Satan to enact torture on the souls of the damned. Furthermore, the collocation of *wyrmas* with fire in Hell suggests that the presence of the *wyrm* had become so synonymous with the landscape of Hell that audiences in early medieval England would have associated one with the other, intensifying the fear created by texts such as the 'Soul and Body' poems discussed in the previous chapter. The data collected through my research; however, demonstrates that *wyrmas* imagery does not only appear in relation to Hell and the destruction of the body in negative terms. I will now go on to examine the ways in which *wyrmas* play a positive role in the depiction of the Christian afterlife and how they represent the hope of resurrection and everlasting life through Christ. While it may seem impossible that these two contrasting images of *wyrmas* existed within one cultural context, the 'fuzziness' of the term *wyrmas* outlined in Chapter One allows the creatures to enact multiple roles without devaluing any one interpretation.

Wyrmas and Heaven

While *wyrmas* are not depicted in any surviving literature as inhabiting Heaven, due to the ambiguity around whether Heaven and an interim Paradise similar to Eden were separate locations, the presence of *wyrmas* in Eden may have meant that people would have regarded *wyrmas* as existing in some form in the heavenly sphere.[84] As outlined in Chapter One, a feature shared by almost all creatures within the category of *wyrmas* is the shedding of the skin or exoskeleton in order to grow.[85] While the skin-shedding behaviour of snakes, lizards and other *wyrmas* is observable given any prolonged interaction with the creature, and through the finding of discarded skins, the skin shedding of other creatures such as dragons or parasites is less easily observed. Victoria Thompson remarks that 'the serpent shedding its

[84] For futher discussion of Heaven and the interim paradise see: Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature.*
[85] See Figure Three.

skin is a model for the Christian shedding his carapace of sin' and this ability is often used symbolically to depict regeneration and rebirth, resulting in their being associated with the Christian promise of both corporal and spiritual resurrection.[86] Thompson, however, fails to recognise that skin shedding is not only associated with serpents and that, despite their marked differences, almost all the creatures within the *wyrmas* category can be observed to shed their skins.[87] This section will analyse the ways in which skin shedding and other behaviours associated with *wyrmas* were used as analogies for resurrection by early medieval writers to make the mystery of resurrection accessible to audiences.

Ælfric famously connects *wyrmas* to resurrection in 'Homily XVI', by drawing an analogy between the life cycle of the silkworm and Christ's resurrection of mankind:

> and licgað þonne deade to duste adruwode. and man deþ hi on pochum. Hehð uppon wagum ofer eallne þone winter oð ðæt lencten cume. and liðe gewideru. 'þonne deþ man þe dust on leadenum dihsum ond sett ongean þa sunnan ond hi swa acuciað ælc dust to wyrme swa swa hi ær wæron.[88]

Considering that there is no identifiable direct source for the use of silkworms as a metaphor for resurrection, this passage 'may well be one of the most personal passages in the Ælfrician corpus [… which] expand[s] the traditional Pauline image of the seed as a symbol of resurrection'.[89] In addition to the imagery from Paulinus, Ælfric would certainly have known how Isidore, in his chapter in 'Etymologiae' on God, Angels and Saints, compares Christ to a

[86] Thompson, 'Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England', p. 169.
[87] While biologically, the shedding of skin or exoskeleton allows for the continued growth of some creatures including reptiles and arachnids, symbolism around the process is associated with resurrection, rebirth and immortality. As mentioned previously in Chapter One, and illustrated by Figure Three, the ability to shed skin is shared by the majority of creatures which the Anglo-Saxons referred to as *wyrmas*.
[88] Peter Clemoes ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*: *The first series*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 533-534. 'and then [the worms] fall dead, all dried up to dust, and a person puts them into a bag. Someone hangs them up on a wall for the whole winter, until spring comes, and mild weather; then someone puts the dust in leaden dishes, and set it out in the sun. And thus they come to life again—each bit of dust quickens to a worm, just as before.'
[89] Milton Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p.88.

'Serpens pro morte et sapientia; idem et Vermis, quia resurrexit'[90]; clearly, Ælfric's analogy between the life-cycle of the silkworms and the resurrection represents his contribution to an already present theme. Ælfric uses wyrm imagery for a second time in 'Homily XVI' to describe the resurrection of the phoenix from its ashes, 'ðonne wehst an lytel wyrm of his flæsce eft & wyrð þonne to fugole gefiðerhamod eall on ða ylcan wisan ðe se oðer wæs'.[91] The reference to the *wyrm* in this passage is clearly being used to describe the appearance of the newly born bird. Considering that the phoenix and the silkworms are both described as being reduced to dust before re-emerging as a something similar to a *wyrm,* there may be an intention to align the imagery with Genesis 3. 19, 'for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return'. Ælfric's choice to describe the creature as 'wyrm' twice fourteen lines apart when discussing the concept of resurrection suggests that he may have been referring to a traditional association between *wyrmas* and rebirth.

In the Bible itself, serpents appear as an instrument of judgement but also as a symbol of wisdom, healing and, potentially, resurrection: in Numbers 21, after the Israelites speak against God, 'the Lord sent among the people fiery serpents, which bit them, and killed many of them.'[92] Once they repent their sins, 'Moses therefore made a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign: which when they that were bitten looked upon, they were healed'.[93] The brazen serpent heals the injured in Numbers, rather than resurrecting the dead; however, the act of saving poisoned people from certain death is analogous to the saving of the soul from the second death as a result of sin. The image of the brazen serpent is later referred to by John in the New Testament as an image of Christ crucified: 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the

[90] Isidore, Book VII, 3.43, *Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum*, books I-X ed. by W M Lindsay, Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxonii : e typographeo Clarendoniano, 1911). 'serpent (Serpens) for his death and his sapience (sapientia), and again Worm (vermis) because he rose again' trans. by Barney, p.157.
[91] Clemoes ed., pp. 533-534. Then comes again a little worm out of his flesh and then it becomes a bird, all feather-clad, as the other one was.
[in ref. to a pheonix]
[92] Numbers 21. 6.
[93] Numbers 21. 9.

desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him, may not perish; but may have life everlasting'; this makes explicit the saving of the Israelites as an allegory for the saving of the soul through the sacrifice of Christ.[94] The drawing together of the image of Christ's passion and the serpent makes further connections with Isidore's description of Christ as a worm 'because he rose again'.[95]

The process of shedding skin and the association with resurrection alludes to the cyclical processes within which *wyrmas* in Old English literature often participate; in addition to being an image of resurrection, *wyrmas* are also an image of decay and the consumption of the earthly body, as Chapter Three has demonstrated. While the consumption by *wyrmas* in the grave perhaps leaves little for an audience to be positive about, the overarching message of these texts is to place faith in resurrection through the Christian God and the necessity of the destruction of earthly and transient things in favour of the eternal. The *wyrmas*, then, provide in the grave what the brazen serpent provides for the Israelites, that is, the ability to put aside earthly preoccupations in order to focus upon the promise of resurrection as realised by Christ at the Crucifixion. The complexity of the *wyrm* image, and the negative role that it plays within depictions of Hell and Judgement Day in the Bible and in wider culture clearly does not detract from the use of *wyrmas* as figures of resurrection.

In addition, *wyrmas* also appears as figures of wisdom in the Bible; in the Gospel of Matthew, Christ tells his disciples that they must be 'wise as serpents and simple as doves'.[96] The application of serpent imagery to the disciples, individuals expected to embody the teachings of Christ, is clearly contradictory to the negative associations serpents have when presented as agents of Satan and inhabitants of Hell. James H. Charlesworth, R.W.L. Mobley and John F.A. Sawyer have argued that the interpretation of the serpent in Eden purely as an

[94] John 3.14-15.
[95] Isidore, trans. by Barney, p.157.
[96] Matthew, 10. 16.

evil doer is incorrect, and that the serpent's wisdom would have been recognised by contemporary audiences as it had appeared as a symbol of wisdom 'for over one thousand years, in biblical and parabiblical works'.[97] Mobley argues that the serpent can be read as truthful in that it appears to possess higher knowledge comparable to that held by God; indeed 'everything happens exactly as the serpent had said' as a result of eating the fruit a Man does not immediately die as previously implied, and does gain knowledge of good and evil like God.[98] The serpent's correct predictions are confirmed in verse seven 'And the eyes of both of them were opened'[99] and so it can be argued that it is 'thanks to the serpent that Adam and Eve came to resemble God, 'knowing good and evil'.[100] However, while the serpent is correct in its statement that Man will gain knowledge and not instantly die as a result of eating of the tree, its words still ultimately result in suffering and death for mankind which prevents the serpent as being read as revealing deception by God.

The serpent does, indeed, appear to possess knowledge unique to it amongst animals as, while Balaam's ass is also depicted as speaking in Numbers 22:28-35,[101] this instance of speech is clearly the direct intervention of God and the Angel: 'And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass', while the serpent is depicted as speaking of its own volition, 'And he said to the woman'.[102] While speech is not specified as a divine attribute, prior to the appearance of the serpent in Genesis 3:1, speech is only used by God and by man, who has been created in God's image and placed in a position of power over other creatures.[103] The serpent's

[97] James H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 298.
[98] R.W.L Mobley, 'Did the Serpent Get it Right?', *The Journal of Theological Studies,* 39.1 (1988), 1-27 (p.9).
[99] Genesis, 3.5.
[100] Sawyer, p. 66.
[101] Numbers, 22:28-35. For further discussion of the significance speech in relation to Balaam's ass see: G. Savran, 'Beastly Speech: Intertextuality, Balaam's Ass and the Garden of Eden', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament,* 19. 64 (1994), 33-55.
[102] Genesis, 3.1.
[103] Genesis 1:26-30. And he said: Let us make man to our image and likeness: and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth. [27] And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. [28] And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth,

ability to speak, therefore, suggests a level of intelligence above that of other beasts which is acknowledged by Genesis 3:1: 'now the serpent was more subtle than any of the beasts of the earth which the Lord God had made'. John F.A. Sawyer highlights the ambiguity surrounding the language used to describe the serpent in Genesis 3:1, with the Hebrew word 'arum' able to refer to 'something that is respected and advocated in some contexts, where it is translated as 'prudent', but feared and condemned in others.'[104] The contradictory readings of the serpent as wise and feared exemplified by the ambiguity of Genesis 3 are reflected in a similar sentiments towards *wyrmas* in Old English literature. Indeed, in 'Maxims II' and *Beowulf*, dragons are depicted as 'frod', a term also applied to Hroðgar and to Beowulf which translates to 'wise', and more specifically, 'worthy of veneration on account of age/ experience/ wisdom'.[105] That the 'Beowulf' dragon is 'wintrum frod' (old and wise in winters),[106] but then 'lað' (hateful)[107] only twenty-seven lines later demonstrates the conflicting images of *wyrmas* both as wise creatures worthy of veneration and evil or hateful creatures often associated with damnation.

The long-standing symbolic association between serpentine creatures, wisdom and resurrection was clearly understood by Ælfric, the 'Beowulf' poet and the author of 'Maxims II' as their depictions reflect aspects of *wyrmas* beyond their role as consumer. Considering the different genres of these texts, it is possible to suggest that there was a wider understanding amongst early medieval English authors, and by extension audiences, of the

---

and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth. [29] And God said: Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind, to be your meat: [30] And to all beasts of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to all that move upon the earth, and wherein there is life, that they may have to feed upon. And it was so done.

[104] John F.A. Sawyer, 'The Image of God, the Wisdom of Serpents and the Knowledge of Good and Evil', in *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden,* ed. By P. Morris, D. Sawyer (Sheffield: 1992) pp. 64- 73, (p. 68).

[105] 'frod', *Dictionary of Old English,* < https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [accessed July 2021].

[106] 'Beowulf', l. 2277a.

[107] 'Beowulf', l.2304a.

positive roles that *wyrmas* had in both a distinctly Christian sense as a symbol of resurrection, and in a wider sense as wise. The diverse roles of *wyrmas* reflect the diversity of the group of creatures themselves; understanding *wyrm* as meaning an earthworm does not eliminate the ability to understand the term to mean a dragon or other creature. It is perhaps the range of features and abnormal bodies of creatures within the group which allows for the range of meanings they represent, since neither the creatures themselves, nor their symbolic significance, can be regarded as singular.

Wyrmas in Purgatory

The role of *wyrmas* in the afterlife gains greater complexity when considered alongside the belief in a purgatorial interim state in which those who were neither 'very bad' or 'very good' existed before Judgement Day. The *wyrmas* which appear in the purgatorial interim are complex as they are neither entirely positive like those associated with wisdom and resurrection, nor entirely negative like those inhabiting Hell. *Wyrmas* in the purgatorial interim occupy a space which is neither positive nor negative because their role in cleansing the soul is terrifying but also ultimately enables those who have committed minor sin to enter Heaven after purification. In the final part of this chapter, I will examine how the simultaneous positive and negative associations with *wyrmas* allow them to perform a purifying role in the context of the belief in post-mortem purgation. The negative and terrifying image of a consumer of body and soul interacts with associations between *wyrmas* and resurrection enabling the creatures to become a necessary cleanser of sin through both their interactions with the physical body and with the soul at a time where the details about the location of the interim state and how purgation occurred were not fully formed.

The variation in agreement on the nature of the interim means that it difficult to ascertain with any certainty what lay people believed about the interim period in early

medieval England. While it was generally agreed that there was some interim state prior to Judgement Day, the exact structure of this interim was not agreed upon. Bede, following Gregory the Great, ascribes to a four-part structure based on the four types of people, 'with the saints already assigned to heaven, the less-than-perfect waiting until Judgement in 'paradise', those of mixed moral worth purged in fire before coming to that Judgement, and the unbaptized and the apostate consigned immediately to eternal torment.'[108] Augustine and Ælfric ascribe to a tripartite structure divided into 'those who do not suffer at all, those who suffer temporarily, and those who will never be released from punishment' with those who were to suffer temporarily able to benefit from the intercession of the living.[109] These views were both apparently able to persist simultaneously during the period and demonstrate that the interim state was a topics of sufficient interest that popular visions of the afterlife were being circulated.[110] The popularity of visions such as those of the Monk of Wenlock, Dryhthelm and Fursa were circulated in major texts including Boniface's letter to Eadburg, Gregory the Great's *Dialogues,* Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Ælfric of Eynsham's *Catholic Homilies.*[111]

Gregory's *Dialogues* 'were among the most popular works of the Middle Ages for the discussion of the beyond', and despite the four-part structure of the interim which Gregory presents being contrary to the more orthodox thinking of scholars such as Ælfric, Bede's visions, which were heavily influenced by Gregory, were clearly viewed as acceptable enough to be translated by Ælfric.[112] Bede's account of the vision of Fursa[113] and his account of the vision of Dryhthelm are largely based on the ideas found in Gregory's *Dialogues*, with

[108] Richard Sowerby, *Angels in Early Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.120.
[109] Foxhall Forbes, 'The Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England', p.678.
[110] Ibid, p.684.
[111] Dunn, p. 192.
[112] Foxhall Forbes, 'The Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England', p.683.
[113] Bede also draws upon the 'Transitus Beati Fursei' for his account.

depictions of the interim locations, such as the meadows of paradise and the bridge that only the saved may cross, both identifiable in Gregory's work.[114]

Dryhthelm is a married layman who dies and journeys through different regions of a four-part otherworld with a guide before coming back to life and, rejecting his previous earthly role and possessions, retiring to a monastery. During his journey, Dryhthelm visits two interim locations, separated by a seemingly impenetrable wall, one of which he believes to be Heaven as the spirits there are at peace and the other which he believes is Hell as spirits are punished by fire and cold. Dryhthelm can see but not access two further locations which are more extreme versions of the peace and punishment which he witnesses. The spirit which guides him explains:

> "Vallis illa, quam aspexisti flammis feruentibus et frigoribus horrenda rigidis, ipse est locus in quo examinandae et castigandae sunt animae illorum, qui differentes confiteri et emendare seculera quae fecerunt, in ipso tandem mortis articulo ad paenitentiam confugiunt, et sic de corpore exeunt; qui tamen, quia confessionem et paenitentiam uel in morte habuerunt, omnes in die iudicii ad regnum caelorum perueniunt. Multos autem preces uiuentium et elimosynae et ieiunia et maxime celebration missarum, ut etiam ante diem iudicii liberebtur, adiuuant. Porro puteus ille flammiuomus ac putidus, quem uidisti, ipsum est os gehennae, in quo quicumque semel inciderit, numquam inde liberabitur in aeuum. Locus uero iste florifer, in quo pulcherrimam hanc iuuentutem iucundari ac fulgere conspicis, ipse est, in quo recipiuntur animae eorum qui in bonis quidem operibus de corpore exeunt; non tamen sunt tantae perfectionis, ut in regnum caelorum statim mereantur introduci; qui tamen omen in die iudicci ad uisionem Christi et gaudia regni caelestis intrabunt. Nam quicumque in

[114] For the bridge, see Gregory's account of the resurrection of an unnamed Roman knight (*Dialogues*, 4.37.11–12).

> omni uerbo et opera et cogitatione perfecti sunt, mox de corpore eressi ad regnum caeleste perueniunt; ad cuius uicinia pertinent locus ille, ubi sonum cantilenae dulcis cum odore suauitatis/ ac splendore lucis audisti…"[115]

This description of the location which contains fire and cold certainly reflects Gregory's idea of a place where imperfect souls reside prior to entrance into Heaven as it is implicit that many of the souls in the interim location may be able to enter Heaven in the future, particularly as they are marked out as separate from those who had fallen into the mouth of Hell. This purgatorial space also features fire and cold, both features which are associated with punishment in Hell in other texts discussed previously. It is perhaps unsurprising that Dryhthelm mistakes the purgatorial space for Hell as it contains all the central features of Hell such fire and/or cold, devils and foul smells, although *wyrmas* which attack men in Hell are not depicted in Dryhthelm vision. The great wall which separates the two locations is a literal way to depict the separation between the pure and the impure created by sin and marks a clear division between the two sections of the interim. Le Goff argues that, while the locations described in Dryhthelm vision have some features of Purgatory the separation between the two parts of the interim prevent it from being so as 'it is not Purgatory until a better system of communication is installed between it and Paradise: the wall must come down.'[116] However, considering Gregory's description of humanity: 'some people are judged

[115] Bede, 'Book V, Chapter XII', ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp.494-495. "The valley that you saw, with its awful flaming fire and freeing cold, is the place in which those souls have to be tried and chastened who delayed to confess and make restitution for the sins they had committed until they were on the point of death; and so they died. But because they did repent and confess, even though on their deathbed, they will all come to the kingdom of Heaven on judgement day; and the prayers of those who are still alive, their alms and fastings and specially the celebration of masses, help many of them to get free even before the day of judgement. Furthermore, the fiery noisome pit which you saw is the very mouth of Hell, into which whoever once falls will never be released from it through all eternity. This flowery place in which you see a fair and youthful company, so joyous and bright, is where the souls are received of those who depart from the body practising good works; but they are not in such a state of perfection that they deserve to be received immediately into the kingdom of Heaven; nevertheless all of them at the day of judgement will enter into the presence of Christ and the joys of the heavenly kingdom. But any who are perfect in every word and deed and thought, as soon as they leave the body, come to the kingdom of Heaven. This kingdom is near the place where you heard the sound of sweet singing, amid delightful fragrance and glorious light."

[116] Le Goff, p. 116.

and perish, others are not judged and perish. Some are judged and reign, others are not judged and reign'[117] and the influence of Gregory on Bede's view of the structure of the interim, it is unsurprising that Bede's version of Dryhthelm's vision contains a 'vividly segregated landscape'.[118]

Bede also alludes to a purgatorial location in his account of the visions of Fursa who is taken by angels to observe the four fires of 'mendacium' (falsehood), 'cupiditas' (covertousness), 'dissensio' (discord) and 'impietas' (injustice) which will consume the earth at Judgement Day.[119] When Fursa expresses fear at being burned by the fires the angels tell him that 'quod non incendisti non ardebit in te'[120]; however, when Fursa is struck by a sinner from whom he accepted gifts in life, he is burned because 'quod incendisti […] hoc arsit in te. Si enim huius uiri in peccatis suit mortui pecuniam non accepisses, nec poena eius in te arderet.'[121] What is most significant about Fursa's vision is its apparent implications for the remainder of his life; his physical body is permanently marked by the scars from the burning, a visual representation of the cleansing of sin. Crucially, Fursa is described as remaining incorrupt after his death; clearly, the physical punishment undertaken during his vision was enough to cleanse his body of sin and since he remained blameless for the remainder of his life, he was able to immediately enter heaven, a fact reflected in the preservation of his earthly body.[122]

[117] Gregory the Great, 'XXVI.xxvii.50', in *Moralia in Iob*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob, CCSL 143, 3 vols. (Turnhout: Brepolis, 1985), p. 1304. Translation from Richard Sowerby, *Angels in Early Medieval England*, p. 120.
[118] Richard Sowerby, *Angels in Early Medieval England*, p. 120.
[119] Bede, 'Book III, Chapter XIX', *HE*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 272-273.
[120] Ibid, pp.272-273. 'That which you did not kindle will not burn you'.
[121] Ibid, pp. 274-275. 'You were burned by the fire you had kindled. For if you had not received the property of this man who died in his sins, you would not have been burned by the fire of his punishment.'
[122] I will further discuss the significance of Fursa's vision later in this chapter.

Bede's accounts of purgatorial spaces align with his earlier 'Homily for Advent', written in the 720s or early 730s which present purgatory as 'quite simply as fact'.[123]

> At vero non nulli propter bona quidem opera ad electorum sortem praeordinati sed propter mala aliqua quibus polluti de corpore exierunt post mortem severe castigandi excipiuntur flammis ignis purgatorii et vel usque ad diem iudicii longa huius examinatione a vitiorum sorde mundantur vel certe prius amicorum fidelium precibus elemosinis ieiuniis fletibus et hostiae salutaris oblationibus absoluti a poenis et ipsi ad beatorum perveniunt requiem.[124]

This description of the fate of imperfect souls leaves no doubt to Bede's views on the existence of post-mortem purgation. There are similarities between the view of purgatory expressed by Bede in both the Homily for Advent and the two otherworld visions such as the description of the purgatorial location with the feature of 'flammis ignis' which also appears in the the purgatory of Dryhthelm and Fursa. Most significantly, the claim that the acts of 'faithful friends' influence the fate of souls in purgatory reflects the advice of Dryhthelm's guide on the significance of the prayers of the living in assisting the souls in the interim period. This demonstrates that Bede believed not only in the existence of post-mortem purgation but also in the possibility of souls being redeemed after death by the actions of the living, a topic which had been contentious for other scholars such as Augustine.[125]

While the apparent certainty expressed by Bede's writings appear to suggest that post-mortem purgation was an accepted belief, the differences between the visions of Fursa and of

---

[123] Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 159.

[124] Bede, *Homilies of the Gospels,* But in truth there are some who were preordained to the lot of the elect on account of their good works, but on account of some evils by which they were polluted, went out from the body after death to be severely chastised, and were seized by the flames of the fire of purgatory [flammis ignis purgatorii]. They are either made clean from the stains of their vices in their long ordeal (examinatione) up until Judgement Day, or, on the other hand, if they are absolved from their penalties by the petitions, almsgiving, fasting, weeping, and oblation of the saving sacrificial offering by their faithful friends, they may come earlier to the rest of the blessed.

[125] Le Goff, pp. 64-78.

Dryhthelm demonstrate that the finer details of how post-mortem purgation functioned and the nature of purgatory as a distinct location were not understood. The Old English poems 'The Wife's Lament' and 'Judgement Day II' can be interpreted as a further exploration of post-mortem purgation. The soul in 'Judgement Day II' can be read as residing in a form of purgatory, as he begins by referencing his surroundings, 'Ic ana sæt innan bearwe, / mid helme beþeht, holte tomiddes'.[126] The term 'bearu' is translated as a wood grove or, in some cases, a grove of trees with a religious significance; notably, the same term is used in 'The Wife's Lament' where the 'wife' is described as dwelling 'on wuda bearwe' (in a wooded grove).[127] Luyster comments that the goddess Freyja shares some key traits with the 'wife' such as her lamentation over a lord and association with groves and trees, providing a context for the significance of her abode.[128] While an association with Freyja in an overtly Christian text such as 'Judgement Day II' may appear unlikely, the reframing of pre-Christian imagery to fit Christian doctrinal ideas was certainly not unheard of, as previously discussed. That a soul resides in a grove in both 'The Wife's Lament' and 'Judgement Day II' suggests that previous associations between wood groves, death and Freyja had become connected with Christian ideas of purgatorial spaces, possibly as a result of the trope of the 'locus amoenus' (pleasant place) and the lack of clarity between this and the Garden of Eden as possible interim paradises prior to Judgement Day.[129]

Further evidence that the speaker of 'Judgement Day II' is in a purgatorial space is that they clearly fear the approach of Judgement Day: 'Ic ondræde me eac dom þone miclan / for mandædum minum on eorðan'.[130] The speaker's anxieties about their sins are not

[126] Judgement Day II, ed and trans by Caie, ll. 1-2b. 'I sat alone within a grove concealed with sheltering cover in the middle of a wood.
[127] 'The Wife's Lament', *EB,* l.27b.
[128] Robert Luyster, 'The Wife's Lament in the Context of Scandinavian Myth and Ritual', *Philological Quarterly*, 77.3 (1998), 243- 270 (p. 248).
[129] Kabir, pp. 71, 81, 173.
[130] Judgement Day II, ed and trans by Caie , ll.15-16b. 'I also dread the great judgement because of my sins on earth.'

compounded by any suggestion of a change in behaviour, only a regret for a life poorly lived; furthermore, qualification that the sins were committed 'on eorðan' implies that they are no longer residing there. The speaker's apparent lack of agency implies that they are no longer in a position to alter their behaviour and improve their chances of reaching Heaven, implying that they are likely already dead and therefore unable to atone. The poem is ambiguous regarding whether the speaker is damned or whether they can hope to achieve the glories of Heaven which he describes in the second half of the poem. However, the speaker's direct appeal to the audience to prayers and atone leaves no doubt to the message of the poem to its audience – repent and improve your behaviour prior to death in order to avoid the lamentable situation that the speaker is in.

Much like the speaker in 'Judgement Day II', the speaker in 'The Wife's Lament', also extant in the Exeter Book, could be regarded as inhabiting a state of Purgatory. Elinor Lench convincingly argues for the interpretation of the 'wife' as a 'barrow-wight' lamenting from her 'eorðscræfe' after being murdered by her husband's kin.[131] Certainly, when we examine the wife's location, it seems most likely that she is already dead as she exists seemingly without sustenance in 'herheard' (dwelling/ abode in a grove/ pagan sanctuary).[132] This living-dead existence within the area around her grave could also suggest links with pre-Christian beliefs in the afterlife taking place within the burial mound as discussed previously in this chapter, and with the goddess Freyja who shares some key traits with the 'wife' such as her lamentation over a lord and association with groves and trees.[133] While it is possible that the *Lament* retains links with the pagan gods, it seems unlikely that these associations would be preserved so overtly in a Christian text such as the Exeter Book and it would have

[131] Elinor Lench, 'The Wife's Lament: A Poem of the Living Dead', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* 1.1 (1970), 3-23.
[132] 'herheard', in *The Dictionary of Old English* < https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [accessed July 2021].
[133] Robert Luyster, 'The Wife's Lament in the Context of Scandinavian Myth and Ritual', *Philological Quarterly,* 77.3 (1998), 243- 270 (p. 248).

instead been adapted to fit a Christian reading much like Semple's assessment of the 'distinctly Anglo-Saxon version of hell and damnation' discussed earlier in this chapter.[134] While the poem may have had its origins in pre-Christian belief, I would suggest that in the Christian context of the Exeter Book's tenth-century production the speaker in the *Lament* is intended to be read as residing in a purgatory-like space.

Although she does not appear to be under any physical torment or suffering, the predominant feature of the wife's suffering is feelings of loneliness and exile, which are certainly to be viewed as suffering in the context of early medieval England as demonstrated by anguish of the speakers in both 'The Wanderer'[135] and 'The Seafarer'.[136] Swanton has suggested that the speaker in the *Lament* should be read as a bride of Christ lamenting her separation from God during life and her hope for a reunion with him on her death.[137] While I find Lench's argument more convincing than that of Swanton due to Swanton making a number of assumptions regarding the identity of the speaker herself which I feel lack clear evidence, I think it likely that the speaker's hope of reunion with her *leofan* does refer to Christ or God. Certainly, if we take the most convincing aspect of Lench's reading – that the 'wife' is dead – to be true, then Swanton's explanation for her desire to be reunited with her 'leofan', God, makes more sense than Lench's argument that the 'wife' been murdered by her husband; indeed, it seems highly unlikely that she would hope for a reunion with him following his committing uxoricide against her. Instead of being a Bride of Christ, I would suggest that it is unnecessary to come to conclusions about the identity of the speaker beyond that she is a Christian individual who is residing in purgatory after a possibly violent death and is lamenting her state of limbo between the joys of her previous life and the joys of

[134] Semple, p. 240.
[135] 'The Wanderer', *EB,* pp. 134-135.
[136] 'The Seafarer', *EB,* pp. 143-144.
[137] Michael J. Swanton, 'The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message: A Reconsideration', *Anglia,* LXXXII (1964), 269-290.

heaven that she looks towards. The similarities between the pre-Christian afterlife and the Purgatorial space inhabited by the speaker in the 'Wife's Lament' points to the lack of clarity regarding the exact location and nature of Purgatory. The variation between the different depictions of Purgatory in the 'Wife's Lament', 'Judgement Day II' and the 'Historia Ecclesiastica' demonstrates that there were not set views of how Purgatory should appear and that pre-Christian ideas had bled over into the depictions of Purgatory as it did for other Christian images.

In a similar way to the preservation of associations between wooded groves and the afterlife, it seems likely that beliefs about the negative implications of decay and consumption in the fate of the soul discussed in Chapter Three also persisted.[138] Certainly, some of the most holy bodies escape corruption through non-normative death, suggesting that decay and spiritual corruption were still considered to be connected as the spiritual purity of these individuals was manifested physically through their lack of decay. Mary[139], Jesus[140], Elijah (Elias)[141] and possibly [H]Enoch[142] all ascend to Heaven, suggesting that these individuals were considered of a higher level of purity which allowed them to enter Heaven with their earthly bodies as well as spiritually or with their resurrected body on Judgement Day. Considering the assertion 'that physical decay did not equate to spiritual damnation', the phenomenon of bodily assumption and the more common miracle of saints remaining

[138] See Chapter Three, pp. 157- 166.
[139] The corporeal assumption of Mary appears in apocryphal narratives which initially emerged in Syrian, Greek, Coptic and Arabic. Discussion of the complexity around the *Transitus Mariae* narratives is beyond the remit of this thesis. For further see: M. Clayton (ed.), *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England,* CSASE 26 (Cambridge, 1994); Kabir, *Paradise Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature,* pp. 31-37.
[140] Luke, 24.51, 'And it came to pass, whilst he blessed them, he departed from them, and was carried up into Heaven.' Acts 1.9, 'And when he had said these things, while they looked on, he was raised up: and a cloud received him out of their sight.'
[141] 4th Book of Kings, 2.1, 'And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elias into Heaven by a whirlwind, that Elias and Eliseus were going from Galgal.'
[142] Genesis: 5.23-4, 'And all the days of Henock were three hundred and sixty-five years. [24] And he walked with God, and was seen no more: because God took him.'

incorrupt appears to contradict this fact; surely, if all bodies decay regardless of their spiritual destination and piety, saints would also be consumed within the grave.

In this thesis so far, I have predominantly focused on eating as a negative process since the consumption of the body by *wyrmas* in the grave and the soul in Hell are both associated with torment. However, Caroline Walker Bynum summarises that 'through the centuries, eating and fasting have been to Christians complex symbols and complex acts', a statement which certainly applies to the imagery around *wyrmas* and consumption as, I suggest, their consumption of the body has associations with the cleansing of sin prior to Judgement Day.[143] The celebration of the Eucharist is the most prominent positive eating ritual and represents a key element of the wider thematic significance of food in Christian culture and the potential for acts of consuming to cleanse the sins of those partaking in the ritual. The Eucharist relates directly to the promise of resurrection expressed by Christ: 'I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. [52] If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread which I will give, is my flesh for the life of the world'.[144] Through transubstantiation, the Eucharist embodies the real presence of Christ and therefore 'allows the Christian to add some molecules of God into the body […] intimate physical contact [which] can be a cherished encounter with God.'[145] The process of consumption of Christ in the Eucharist is twofold, as the devotees not only consume Christ's body but are also themselves consumed and assimilated into the larger body of the Church through this act. During the Eucharist, 'Christ is gift, giver, and recipient' by becoming both physical and

[143] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* p. 32.
[144] John 6.51-2.
[145] Laura M. Hartman, 'Consuming Christ: The Role of Jesus in Christian Food Ethics', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics,* 30.1 (2010), 45-62 (p.54).

spiritual food for the congregation, literally embodying the vow to feed the hungry and by providing access to resurrection for those that partake fully in the ritual.[146]

Christ himself is depicted as both fasting and feasting on a number of occasions; he also performed miracles which relate to food and drink, such as the multiplication of the five loaves and the two fishes in John 14.13-21 or the turning of water to wine at the wedding of Cana in John 2.1-11. The consumption of food and drink are not condemned by the Church; certainly, Christianity is unusual in its lack of influence on the diets of followers in comparison to other faiths including Judaism and Islam. In Matthew 15. 11,[147] 17-20[148] and Mark 7.18-20[149] it is made clear that a man cannot be made impure by what he eats, but only through sin. Nevertheless, considering the anxieties surrounding consuming *wyrmas* discussed in Chapter Two,[150] the discussion of Leviticus by Douglas,[151] and the sentiment of 1 Corinthians 3. 16-17 - 'Know you not, that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy' - it is clear that the consumption of food and drink can be sinful in itself in extreme cases where it becomes damaging to the body, and anxieties around this persisted. Cases of sinful consumption include Noah's drunken episode in Genesis 9.20-27,[152] although arguably, while

[146] William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 2008).
[147] Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man: but what cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.
[148] Do you not understand, that whatsoever entereth into the mouth, goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the privy? [18] But the things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man. [19] For from the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. [20] These are the things that defile a man. But to eat with unwashed hands doth not defile a man.
[149] And he saith to them: So are you also without knowledge? understand you not that every thing from without, entering into a man cannot defile him: [19] Because it entereth not into his heart, but goeth into the belly, and goeth out into the privy, purging all meats? [20] But he said that the things which come out from a man, they defile a man.
[150] See Chapter One, pp. 91-92.
[151] Douglas, pp. 42-58.
[152] And Noe, a husbandman, began to till the ground, and planted a vineyard. [21] And drinking of the wine was made drunk, and was uncovered in his tent. [22] Which when Cham the father of Chanaan had seen, to wit, that his father's nakedness was uncovered, he told it to his two brethren without. [23] But Sem and Japheth put a cloak upon their shoulders, and going backward, covered the nakedness of their father: and their faces were turned away, and they saw not their father's nakedness. [24] And Noe awaking from the wine, when he had learned what his younger son had done to him, [25] He said: Cursed be Chanaan, a servant of servants shall he

Noah looks like a fool, it is the acts of his son Ham are punished more severely, and most notably, the consumption of the forbidden fruit by Adam and Eve depicted in Genesis 3. While Genesis depicts The Fall as having ultimately been caused by intentional disobedience to the word of God, it is significant that the disobedience takes the form of an act of consumption. Bynum highlights that 'theologians and spiritual directors from the early Church to the sixteenth century reminded penitents that sin had entered the world when Eve ate the forbidden fruit and that salvation comes when Christians eat their God in the ritual of the communion table'; it is the case then, that one act of eating is repaid by another.[153] The celebration of the Eucharist re-enacts the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross, as once again his body and blood are willingly given to the faithful; Christ's sacrifice and the action of eating at the Eucharist which accompanies it responds directly to the act of eating which caused the Fall. Considering Bynum's assessments of the significance of eating in Christian doctrine and its role within liturgical tradition, there are possible associations between those acts of eating in preparation for death such as the consumption of the body of Christ as part of the last rites, and the acts of eating inflicted upon the body after death as part of the natural process of corruption which the Church deems to be separate from the fate of the soul. For those who are judged to be damned, there is a further continuation of eating imagery which is certainly observable both in depictions of damned souls being chewed by *wyrmas* in Hell, but also as being consumed by a physical Hell-mouth, an image which begins to appear in manuscripts produced in early medieval England and continues to gain popularity throughout the later-medieval period.[154]

---

be unto his brethren. [26] And he said: Blessed be the Lord God of Sem, be Chanaan his servant. [27] May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Sem, and Chanaan be his servant.

[153] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women', *Representations,* 11 (1985), 1-25 (p.1).

[154] Schmitt, p. 83.

Acts of eating and the possible implications for the soul also served as causes of anxiety for Christian thinkers. Thomas Aquinas, along with early Christian apologist writers such as Tertullian, Athenagoras and Irenaeus debated the nature of the relationship and identity of the body and soul after Judgement Day which 'had become a major topic of controversy among Christians and between Christians and their pagan critics' at the end of the second century.[155] The consumption of the body, and the resulting assimilation of the body into that of other creatures was feared to prevent the resurrection of the body on Judgement Day by God, and this would certainly have made the prospect of the consumption of the body by *wyrmas* in the grave highly distressing. This anxiety was further heightened with regard to the chain consumption argument and those bodies consumed in cannibal acts; concern was expressed as to whether the cannibal body assimilated the human tissue it consumed, and whether parts of one human consumed by another would thus be impossible to separate at resurrection.[156] As a result of the fear of cannibalism, questions were raised regarding whether human tissue was consumed as a result of the food chain – specifically the consumption of meat from animals which grazed upon plants nourished by soil fertilised by the decomposition of interred human remains. Anxieties around cannibalism and its influence on resurrection continued to be problematic despite Irenaeus's assertion that the consumption of Christ in the Eucharist acted to disprove the chain consumption argument since 'eating God is a transcendent cannibalism that does not consume or destroy.[157] Furthermore, writers including Augustine emphasised that the fate of the body was irrelevant in the hope of resurrection, with only the actions of living person, not the nature of burial, having an

[155] It is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss the complexity of arguments around resurrection and chain consumption. For further discussion see: Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity: 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). For chain consumption specifically, see: pp. 27-43.
[156] Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, p. 33.
[157] Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, p. 39.

influence on the fate of the soul.[158] Despite this, as discussed in Chapter Three, anxieties clearly persisted regarding the role of the *wyrmas* as a consumer within the grave setting. The anxieties surrounding the ability of the body to be resurrected if consumed, and the possible cannibalism caused by the entrance of human tissue to the food chain through soil begins with the *wyrmas.* Indeed, associations with *wyrmas* and consumption of the body in the grave may have led individuals to view the earthworms in arable soil as nourishing crops as a result of the consumption of bodies, providing further layers of fear in perceptions of these creatures. 'Soul and Body I' makes clear to the audience that being consumed by *wyrmas* in the grave is not reflective of how well the deceased person lived, or indicative of their destination in the afterlife when the soul reassures the body 'þeah ðe wyrmas gyt/ gifre greatþ, nu is þin gast cumen,/ fægere gefrætewod, of mines fæder rice,/ arum bewunden'[159], making clear that, despite the destruction of the body in the grave the promise of the full resurrection of the body and soul is maintained. The effort to which the poet goes to reassure their audience demonstrates that the implications for the souls of consumed bodies was indeed an area of anxiety for early medieval Christians, and that there were connections made between the consumption by *wyrmas* and punishment or damnation.

Although the 'Soul and Body I' poet goes to great lengths to normalise the consumption of the body and to remove any associations with damnation, texts describing the incorruption of a small number of saintly bodies demonstrated that, in extraordinary cases, there were exceptions. In the remainder of this chapter, will discuss how the accounts of two early medieval English saints who remained incorrupt after their deaths – Saint Æthelthryth of Ely and Saint Cuthbert – may have interacted with beliefs about *wyrmas* and post-mortem

[158] Book I, 12. ed. and trans. by George E. McCracken, 1957.
[159]'Soul and Body I', *VB,* Ll. 135b-138a. 'Though the *wyrmas* greedily chew at you, now your spirit is coming to my father's kingdom, beautifully adorned, bound in glories.

purgation.[160] In a discussion of post-mortem purgation which is included in a homily for the second Sunday after Advent, Bede states that perfect souls including 'apostles, martyrs [and] confessors' will be admitted immediately to Heaven, without a need to remain in an interim location.[161] However, considering that many saints, including Cuthbert and Æthelthryth, lived worldly lives before committing to God, it is certainly conceivable that some saints may have had some minor sin to be cleansed prior to their entry into Heaven. In the cases of Æthelthryth and Cuthbert, both suffered excessively prior to their deaths, in the cases of martyrs, 'heroic deaths become all the more laudable if the sufferings preceding them have been demonstrable agonising', and this same concept could be applied to the experiences of these two saints.[162] I suggest that, like martyrs, these periods of suffering could have been viewed as purifying, and it may be the case that some of the early medieval English scholars reading accounts of their lives and incorruption concluded that their suffering prior to death allowed them to enter Heaven immediately, and that this was attested to by their incorrupt bodies.

The miraculous incorruption of Æthelthryth of Ely is recounted by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*[163] and by later the *Liber Eliensis* which draws on Bede's account alongside oral traditions.[164] Her sanctity is largely attributed to the preservation of her virginity throughout two marriages, a status that she maintains with the assistance of God

[160] For the extent of the Cult of Saint Æthelthryth see: Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: the Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Monika Otter, 'The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth', *Exemplaria,* 9.1 (1997), 139-163 (pp. 139-140); Virginia Blanton-Whetsell, 'Tota Integra, Tota Incorrupta: The Shine of St. Æthelthryth as Symbol of Monastic Autonomy', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 32.2 (2002), 227-267; Ian Styler, *The Story of an English Saint's Cult: An Analysis of the Influence of St Æthelthryth of Ely, c.670- c.1540* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham 2019).
[161] Bede, Homily 1.2, *Homilies on the Gospels,* Book One, ed. and trans. by Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst OBE (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1991), pp. 9-17 (p.16).
[162] Aideen M. Hartney, *Gruesome Deaths and Celibate Lives: Christian Martyrs and Ascetics* (Exeter: Bristol Pheonix Press, 2005), p.33.
[163] Bede, 'Book IV, Chapter XIX (XVII)', *HE,* ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 390-397;
[164] *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth,* ed, trans Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005). While the *Liber* is a post-conquest text, the sections recounting miracles of Æthelthryth's incorrupt body are attributed to a contemporary clerk Aelfhelm, so we may assume that these stories were circulating in early medieval England.

through miraculous events such as the rising of waters around Coldeburcheshevet where she sheltered from her second husband, Ecgfrith.[165] Prior to her death, Æthelthryth developed a tumour on her neck which she attributed to vanity when wearing jewellery during her youth. After her death and burial in a simple coffin within the nuns' graveyard at Ely, her body was exhumed in order to be moved both into a more fitting sarcophagus which had been discovered to fit her perfectly, and to a position within the church; it was at this time that she was found to be incorrupt and to have been healed of her wounds.[166]

In March 698, three years after Æthelthyrth and eleven years after his own death, St Cuthbert was found to be incorrupt when monks at Lindisfarne moved his body from a stone coffin below the church floor into a more fitting tomb.[167] The life, death and afterlife of Cuthbert is described in detail in the anonymous *Vita* produced by a monk in Lindisfarne, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and in Bede's prose and poetic *Vitae*. In the prose *Vita*, Bede draws direct comparison between the usual fate of the earthly body, which the other monks expect to find, and that of Cuthbert:

> Transactis sepulturae eius annis undecim immisit in animo fratrum ut tollerent ossa illius, quae more motuorum consumpto iam et in puluerem redacto corpore reliquo sicca inuenienda rebantur, atque in leui arca recondite in eodem quidem loco sed supra pauimentum dignae uenerationis gratia locarent.[168]
>
> […]

[165] This event is only described in the *Liber Eliensis* Book 1.11 (p.34) and not by Bede.
[166] *Liber Eliensis,* Book 1.21 (pp. 50-52); Bede, 'Book IV, Chapter XIX (XVII)', *HE,* ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, p.394.
[167] Bede, Vitae Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda, in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert,* ed and trans by Bertram Colgrave (London: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 290-295.
[168] Vitae Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda, p.293. He [God] put it into the hearts of the brethren, eleven years after his [Cuthbert's] burial, to take his bones – which they expected to find quite dry, the rest of the body, as is usual with the dead, having decayed away and turned to dust – and to put them in a light chest in the same place, but above the floor, so that they might be worthily venerated.'

> Et aperientes sepulchrum inuenerunt corpus totum quasi adhuc uiueret integrum, et flexibilibus artuum ompagibus multo dormienti quam mortuo similius. Sed et uestimenta omnia quibus indutum erat non solum intemerata, uerum etiam prisca nouitate et claritudine miranda parebant.[169]

The appearance of Cuthbert's clothes and his appearing asleep are shared by Æthelthryth who is also described in these ways. Emphasis is placed on the juxtaposition between the expected appearance of burial garments on a deceased body and the new appearance of the saints' burial clothes the uncanny double of the living, apparently sleeping, but dead body.[170] Bede's comparison between the bodies 'turned to dust' and the description of the incorrupt body also not only emphasises the miraculous nature of the incorruption by demonstrating how special the saintly body is, but also provides an uncanny and uncomfortable reminder for the audience of the transience of their own bodies which will likely become dust in comparison to those of the saints which retain the uncanny similarity to the bodies of the living.

The description of Cuthbert's incorrupt body and the processes around the translation of both bodies share a strong resemblance with that of Saint Æthelthryth of Ely, with the main difference being 'that Cuthbert's body, which had been ceremonially washed at his funeral in 687, was not washed again at the elevation' unlike that of Æthelthryth who is washed by nuns at her elevation in 695.[171] In addition to this variation, Cuthbert's incorruption is also not related explicitly to his virginity; as is typical with hagiographical accounts of incorrupt male saints, it is usually only the *vitas* of female saints which emphasise virginity as a primary virtue. However, the most significant comparison which I

[169] Ibid. And opening the sepulchre, they found the body intact and whole, as if it were still alive, and the joints of the limbs flexible, and much more like a sleeping than a dead man. Moreover, all his garments, in which he had been clothed, were not only undefiled but seemed to be perfectly new and wondrously bright.
[170] Turner Camp, p. 419.
[171] Alan Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West,* ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.45-73 (p.46).

will consider is their experiences of suffering prior to death, Æthelthyth's suffering is associated with a tumour, while Cuthbert's is associated with an ulcer on his leg.

Æthelthryth suffered from a tumour prior to her death which she attributed to the wearing of jewellery in her youth; while the 'Historia Ecclesiastica' does not go into detail about the nature of the tumour, it includes multiple references to her suffering and describes how a doctor named Cynefrith was ordered 'incidere tumoremm illum, ut efflueret noxius umor qui inerat'.[172] The 'Historia Ecclesiastica' recounts Æthelthyth's reaction to her illness and that 'multum delectata sit hoc genere infirmitatis',[173] stating that 'et credo quod ideo me superna pietas dolore colli uoluit grauari, ut sic absoluar reatu superuacuae leuitatis'.[174] Æthelthryth's hope here suggests that the pain she suffered for her vanity may release her from her previous sin and, as such, this may have been sufficient to provide necessary cleansing of her few worldly sins prior to her death. The 'Historia Ecclesiastica' also reports Cynefrith's account of how, on her translation sixteen years later, the wound made by lancing the tumour was healed: 'Sed et discooperto uultus indumento monstrauerunt mihi etiam uulnus incisurae, quod feceram, curatum, ita ut mirum in modum pro aperto et hiante uulnere, cum quo sepulta erat, tenuissima tunc cicatricis uestigia parerent.'[175] Rather than the usual processes of decay, Æthelthryth's body is twice miraculous, firstly because her as her body is preserved in tact, and secondly because she exhibits post-mortem healing of her wound. In addition to the incorruption of her body, the post-mortem healing demonstrates the extraordinary nature of her life and the purity of her body.

[172] Bede, 'Book IV, Chapter XIX (XVII)', *HE*, ed. and trans by Colgrave and Mynors, p. 394. 'to cut this tumour so as to drain out the poisonous matter within it.'
[173] Bede, 'Book IV, Chapter XIX (XVII)', *HE*, ed. and trans by Colgrave and Mynors, p. 396. 'she gladly welcomed this sort of pain'.
[174] Ibid. 'I believe that God in His goodness would have me endure this pain in my neck in order that I may thus be absolved from the guilt of my needless vanity.'
[175] Bede, 'Book IV, Chapter XIX (XVII)', *HE*, ed. by Colgrave and Mynors, p. 394. 'They drew back the cloth which covered her face and showed me the wound I had made by my incision, now healed, so that instead of the open gaping wound which she had when she was buried, there now appeared, marvellous to relate, only the slightest traces of a scar.'

Incorruption is most commonly associated with virginity in female saints,[176] and the anxiety surrounding outside influence and the threat of continued attacks on the purity of a saint defined by her virginity provides another element of suffering in the life and after-life of Æthelthryth's body. In addition to fleeing the lustful attacks of her husband Ecgfrith during her life, and suffering from his unwillingness to accept her desire for purity, Æthelthryth's body continues to suffer attacks after her death and translation. Although it is a later text, stories recorded in the 'Liber Eliensis' describes how a pagan man pokes a small hole in the stone sarcophagus and attempts to look inside it in order to view Æthelthryth's incorrupt body; he is blinded as a result of his actions.[177] Furthermore, a priest inserts a stick and then a candle into the coffin in order to try and verify the saint's incorruption, he, his family and his accomplices die.[178] There are clearly sexual and phallic suggestions to the ways in which the invader and the priest attempt to gain access to her body, which Otter describes as 'attempted symbolic rapes';[179] the Liber's emphasis upon the punishments of those who try to access the saint clearly demonstrates an anxiousness to prevent further potential assaults upon her fragile purity both for her sake, and for the symbolic importance of her purity for the continuation of the house at Ely.[180] The graphic descriptions of decay and the attacks of the *wyrmas* within the grave in texts such as the 'Vercelli Homilies' and the 'Soul and Body' poems can be interpreted as phallic. If this interpretation was widespread, such imagery would have been unacceptable when associated with Æthelthryth's body. The graphic depictions of the *wyrmas* attack on the body in the 'Soul and Body' poems includes penetrating imagery such as 'rib reafiað' (plunders the ribs)[181] and images such as that of

[176] John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal,* International Archives of the History of Ideas, series minor 17 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 95-110.
[177] *Liber Eliensis,* Book I.41.
[178] *Liber Eliensis,* Book I. 49.
[179] Monika Otter, 'The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth', *Exemplaria,* 9.1 (1997), p.140.
[180] Monika Otter, 'The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth', *Exemplaria,* 9.1 (1997), 139-163 (pp. 139-140); Virginia Blanton-Whetsell, 'Tota Integra, Tota Incorrupta: The Shine of St. Æthelthryth as Symbol of Monastic Autonomy', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 32.2 (2002), 227-267.
[181] 'Soul and Body II', *EB,* l. 106a.

many *wyrmas* moving across and throughout the corpse, a level of perverse intimacy and contact that is inappropriate when applied to a saintly body, particularly when virginity is held in such high importance. Furthermore, the grave is described using the compound 'legerbed',[182] which can be translated both as a death or sick bed, or as a marital bed; this association between grave and bed may have been solidified by the tradition of bed burials which have been identified in the graves of high-status women such as that of a young woman at Swallowcliffe Down.[183] This aligns with a common trope in Latin saints' lives where female saintly bodies are depicted as brides of Christ and, after death, looking like brides in bed rather than corpses in the grave. Æthelthryth's status as a Bride of Christ and the emphasis on her purity in life and the miraculous preservation of her purity after death also would make placing the saint and the *wyrmas* together in an intimate location such as the 'legerbed' damaging to the sanctity and chastity of her body. Considering the role of post-mortem purgation to cleanse the worldly sins accrued in life, Æthelthryth's determination to preserve her virginity and remain chaste in her relationship with Christ ensured that she did not commit bodily sins.

In his prose 'vita', Bede describes how Cuthbert was attacked by a 'arreptus infermitate subita, temporalis igne doloris ad perpetuae coepit beatitudinis guadia praeparari.'[184] Bede emphasises Cuthbert's suffering prior to death far more than the author of the anonymous *vita*, demonstrating that he clearly regarded this period of suffering as of particular significance in Cuthbert's life. Bede also uses fire imagery to describe the pain of his illness which can be related to Hell or Purgatory; notably, Æthelthryth's suffering is also described in relation to fire as the Old English version of the Bede describes the tumour as

[182] Ibid, l. 155b.
[183] George Speake, *A Saxon Bed Burial on Swallowcliffe Down: Excavations by F de M Vatcher*, Archaeological Report 10 (Unknown: English Heritage; Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England, 1989).
[184] Bede, Vitae Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda, ed and trans by Colgrave, p.271. '[he was attacked by a] sudden illness and began to be prepared by the fires of temporal pain for the joys of perpetual bliss'

'rubor' (red) and 'ardor' (fiery).[185] The relation of the saints' illnesses to purgatorial imagery and their acceptance of pain as a necessity demonstrates that there is an awareness of the power of physical torment to result in the purgation of sin. The association between the pain of both Æthelthryth and Cuthbert's ailments could also be considered in relation to the depiction of infection in the Leechbooks discussed in Chapter Two; indeed, both the 'superating ulcer' endured by Cuthbert and Æthelthryth's lanced tumour appear to be infected, which would place them into the category of *wyrms* as 'purelence'.[186] While the saint's lives do not go into great enough detail regarding the nature of the tumour and the ulcer themselves, it is worth considering how understanding of illness and corruption, and its association with *wyrmas* and *wyrms* may have influenced the understanding that early medieval people had of the suffering of Æthelthryth and Cuthbert. This is particularly relevant in regards to Æthelthryth as she viewed her tumour being the result of sin, making a link between the associations between physical and spiritual corruption and *wyrms/wyrmas* and the appearance of the tumour.

Unlike Æthelthryth, whose suffering is directly related to her ailment and the treatment of it, in addition to the pain caused by the ulcer, Cuthbert is separated from aid by a tempest and by his remote island location:

> Ut enim omnipotens Deus famulum suum ab omni labe mandanae fragilitatis ad purum catigaret, utque aduersariis eius quam nichil contra fidei uirtutem ualerent ostenderet uoluit eum tanto tempore segregatum ab hominibus et suae carnis dolore et antiqui hostis acriori certamine probari.[187]

[185] Bede, 'Book IV, Chapter XIX (XVII)', *HE*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, p. 396.
[186] See Chapter Two, pp.131-135.
[187] Bede, 'Vitae Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda', ed. and trans. Colgrave, p.275. 'For in order that Almighty God might, by chastisement, purify His servant from all blemish of worldly weakness and in order that He might show his adversaries that they could avail nothing against the strength of his faith, He wished to test him by bodily pain and by a still fiercer contest with the ancient foe, cutting him off from mankind for that space of time.'

Bede's *vita* makes clear that the pain inflicted upon Cuthbert is a result of God's will, and that God uses the tempest and the ulcer to purify Cuthbert. By enduring and overcoming his pain in his final days, like Æthelthryth, Cuthbert is purified enough to avoid post-mortem purgation and the associated destruction of the earthly body through *wyrmas.*

The 'vita' also describes the fate of the hermit Hereberht, who also illustrates that purification by ailments from God can provide some purification prior to death. Hereberht so desires to be with Cuthbert that he prays to die at the same hour so as not to be separated. In order to be blessed by receiving his wish and to allow his continued proximity to the saint, Hereberht is also purged by physical ailments prior to death:

> Sed Herebertus diutina prius infirmitate decoquitur, illa fortassis dispensation dominicae pietatis, ut si quid minus haberet meriti a beato Cuthberto suppleret dolor continuus longae egritudinis, quatinus equatus gratia suo intercessori sicut uno eodemque tempore cum eo de corpore egredi, ita etiam una atque indissimili sede perpetuae beatitudinis mereretur recipi.[188]

The key aspect here is that the author identifies that Hereberht is not able to equal Cuthbert's grace and, therefore, it is necessary for him to undergo prolonged purgation to enter heaven with Cuthbert. In order to cleanse his sins, the long illness is sent 'dominicae pietatis' to bring him to a similar level of grace as Cuthbert; here, Bede acknowledges the potential for suffering in life to cleanse sins and to allow individuals to enter heaven soon ('mox'). This passage appears to not only acknowledge the necessity for post-mortem purgation for the majority of individuals to rid them of venial sin, but also to suggest that extended and extreme suffering prior to death can replace post-mortem purgation in some cases.

[188] Bede, 'Vitae Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda', ed. and trans. Colgrave, p. 251. 'But Hereberht was first consumed by a long illness, perhaps by the dispensation of the Lord's grace, so that though he had less merit than the blessed Cuthbert, the continual pain of a long illness would make up for it, and being made equal in grace to his intercessor, he might be counted worthy to depart from the body with him at one and the same hour and also to be received into one and the same dwelling of perpetual bliss'

While they were certainly an anomaly, incorrupt saints' avoidance of decay demonstrates to an audience how special they were, as they are saved from the humiliating and potentially painful consumption by *wyrmas* which is described in many of the texts discussed in this thesis. The *wyrmas* which destroy both the saved and the damned body in the 'Soul and Body' poems demonstrate that the poet wishes to communicate the inevitability of destruction by *wyrmas*, a fate which some saints avoid. The stories associated with the lives and deaths of both Æthelthryth and Cuthbert, and the suffering of Herebert demonstrate how in exceptional cases pain sent by God prior to death could serve to reduce or eliminate the need for cleansing in Purgatory. The graphic imagery of suffering and pain inflicted by actions of *wyrmas* on the conscious body in the 'Soul and Body' poems – regardless of whether the individual is blessed or damned – alongside the possible persistence of the belief in a relationship between decay and the soul, have resulted in an association between the grave and purgatory.

With the development of doctrine around post-mortem purgation throughout the early medieval period, an acceptance of aspects of the imagery associated with Hell, most notably fire, became associated with the cleansing of venial sin in Purgatory. As demonstrated previously in this chapter, *wyrmas* were commonly featured in depictions of Hell as a key aspect of the landscape alongside fire; as such, it is logical to consider whether the actions of *wyrmas* similarly became associated with post-mortem purgation. If this is the case, the relevance of *wyrmas* and consumption in the human experience as understood by early medieval Christians gains further significance, as the act of eating encouraged by the *wyrm* in Genesis is atoned for by the death and consumption of Christ in the Eucharist, then the remaining sin venial sins are atoned for through post-mortem suffering at the mercy of *wyrmas* in the grave. Ultimately, however, the complexity of the imagery around *wyrmas* allows for this process to relate to the hope of resurrection.

Conclusion

This chapter has further demonstrated the complex, and often seemingly contradictory meanings associated with *wyrmas*; the *wyrmas* which appear in the afterlife in many ways are a culmination of the associations explored in the previous three chapters of this thesis. The *wyrmas* which are described as being visible at Judgement Day, and as a key feature of the landscape of Hell are, without doubt, intended to evoke fear and encourage audiences to alter their sinful behaviours. Imagery surrounding the consumption of the body which is found in depictions of the earthly grave is also applied to Hell; the *wyrmas* in Hell also magnify the elements of the uncanny which are felt when considering other types of *wyrmas* as, while unseen, the Hell-dwelling *wyrmas* retain some aspects of familiarity. The additional aspect of the depiction of Satan as a dragon *wyrm* contributes further to the fear associated with *wyrmas* in both Hell, as he represents the ultimate torment, but also through his association with a familiar creature, and the potential for this creature to exist on earth around structures such as barrows.

Despite these clear associations with fear and damnation, *wyrmas* can be understood as having connections with Heaven and the hope of resurrection due to both depictions of *wyrmas* as possessing wisdom and, most significantly, with resurrection and the shedding of sin as a result of their ability to shed their skins. Indeed, the use of *wyrmas* in the writings of Ælfric alongside positive biblical references to *wyrmas* such as the brazen serpent and the instruction of the disciples to be 'wise as serpents' demonstrates that *wyrmas,* while feared, were also revered for aspects of their behaviour and their apparent ability to resurrect themselves.

The interplay between the positive and negative depictions of *wyrmas* can be read as having significance in relation to the developing understanding of post-mortem purgation in

early medieval England. Indeed, while ideas around Purgatory were not fixed, the visions of Dryhthelm and Fursa, and their circulation in texts such as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica,* alongside literary texts such as 'The Wife's Lament' demonstrate an understanding and interest in the fate of the soul and the body between death and Judgement Day. Fears regarding the implication of the consumption of the body by *wyrmas* on the fate of the soul are clearly still present in the beliefs of early medieval English people as the poet of 'Soul and Body I' demonstrates in their attempt to allay these fears by describing the consumption of the blessed individual in the grave. However, as Bynum notes, acts of eating 'to Christians [are] complex symbols and complex acts', and the destruction of the body by *wyrmas* may have been viewed as an aspect of post-mortem purgation which enabled venial sins to be cleansed. Certainly, the incorruption of saints such as Æthelthryth of Ely and Cuthbert demonstrate that there remained some understanding of a relationship between the breakdown of the body and the presence of sin, as very special bodies unblemished by sin remain undisturbed by *wyrmas.* The suffering endured by both Æthelthryth and Cuthbert may have enabled them to escape the necessity of post-mortem purgation as their physical afflictions cleansed what little sin they had prior to death; indeed, if we consider this

alongside the depiction of the suffering of Herebert, this seems all the more likely. The role of *wyrmas* in the afterlife epitomise that of the *wyrm* group as a whole, as they simultaneously, and seemingly without issue, inhabit conflicting areas of the lived experience of people living in early medieval England.

Conclusion

Whether it is on grave markers, as decoration on items of war-gear, or as a central feature of a vernacular poem, *wyrmas* featured repeatedly as a symbol throughout early medieval English culture. The purpose of this thesis was to examine the category of creatures referred to as *wyrmas* and to establish their significance as a symbol in early medieval England. In particular, it sought to address the way that *wyrmas* were viewed in multivalent ways as simultaneously positive and negative symbols for the futility and transience of life and the hope of resurrection in the context of a developing Christian society.

This thesis has demonstrated that *wyrmas* had a significant presence in the lives, deaths and afterlives of people living and dying in early medieval England. It has established that, much like other symbolic devices such as the 'beasts of battle', rather than an incidental feature of literary texts, authors included *wyrmas* to tap into anxieties and beliefs which permeated early medieval English culture. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that the relationship between *wyrmas* and religious imagery were used to communicate information about how people should behave, and the fates of those who behaved correctly or incorrectly.

While previous scholars have addressed individual *wyrmas*, or considered early medieval attitudes to the natural world more generally, this thesis is the first scholarly examination of *wyrmas* as a complete group. This thesis built upon the foundations laid by Victoria Thompson in *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* by considering in depth how the *wyrmas* in Old English literature can be read alongside archaeological data and theological material to gain a greater understanding of attitudes towards *wyrmas* and towards their involvement in the various stages of the human experience.[1] In order to do this it has

[1] Thompson, pp. 132-169.

taken an interdisciplinary approach and utilised data collection and analysis to facilitate better understanding.

Chapter One addressed the lack of clarity regarding the meaning of the term *wyrm* and how the category could be most suitably understood. Through exploration of modern taxonomical theory and of sources available to early medieval scholars it demonstrated that western scientific models should be set aside in favour of a less rigid understanding of classification. Instead, I proposed the understanding of *wyrmas* as a 'fuzzy set', a category without clear boundaries which is based upon degrees of membership according to a central prototype. Chapter One then presented my methodological approach and a selection of case studies to demonstrate the diversity of the set and to consider how data collection can help to theorise what traits the prototypical *wyrm* may have had.

Chapter Two explored the role of *wyrmas* in the lives of early medieval people. I drew upon Mary Douglas to argue that, in addition to being polluting to the body if eaten, *wyrmas* were viewed as a corrupting influence on the body as a result of any interaction.[2] I examined the relationship between venom and types of *wyrm* including dragons, snakes and spiders in order to demonstrate that the danger posed by *wyrmas* was related to the potential corrupting influence of venom. The primary focus of Chapter Two was the role of *wyrmas* in leechbooks, as these appearances represented the most numerous types of *wyrmas* in the surviving Old English corpus.[3] I argued that the endemic infection with parasites that would have been common in early medieval England became interwoven with the imagery of corruption presented by Leviticus IX and highlighted by Douglas. Chapter Two then demonstrated how the similar term 'wyrms' became indistinguishable from *wyrm* to

[2] Douglas, pp.56-57; Meens, p.16.
[3] See Appendix IX.

strengthen the associations, and resulting anxieties, between the presence of *wyrmas* in the body and their corrupting influence on both body and soul.

Chapter Three focused upon the role of *wyrmas* in early medieval English people's experiences of death. It explored archaeological evidence alongside literary depictions of mortuary practice to consider how attitudes towards death and mortuary rites developed. I then demonstrated that the grotesque imagery of *wyrmas* devouring the body in the grave, as exemplified by the 'Soul and Body' poems, epitomises the anxieties which existed around the consumption of the body and the implications of this on the soul. I connected this argument with the recognised imagery of the 'beasts of battle' and the trope of 'sleeping after the feast' to demonstrate how *wyrmas* fit into the wider understanding of literary imagery and cultural anxieties.

The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter Four, focused on the role of *wyrmas* in the afterlife and examined four aspects of the Christian afterlife, Judgement Day, Heaven, Hell and post-mortem purgation. I considered how the negative imagery surrounding *wyrmas* in the grave, and biblical associations between *wyrmas* and Satan extended into Judgement Day and Hell; furthermore, I argued that *wyrmas* were a common and recognisable element in literary depictions of Hell. Chapter Four then argued that, despite the negative associations between *wyrmas* and damnation, *wyrmas* were a positive image of wisdom and of resurrection. The remainder of the chapter argued that the interaction between positive and negative imagery of *wyrmas* as tormentors and as symbols of resurrection result in their association with the developing doctrine of post-mortem purgation. I used the case studies of incorrupts saints SS. Æthelthyrth of Ely and Cuthbert to exemplify how suffering of the body on earth could be viewed as purging sin and, as a result, the consumption of the body by *wyrmas* became representative of the purgation of venial sin.

Figure X: A Snake from the Staffordshire Hoard. Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust. [4]

This thesis has ongoing implications for studies of early medieval England as the prevalence of *wyrm* imagery in both literary texts and archaeological artefacts can be considered within the context of the wider *wyrm* category and its meaning, rather than being viewed in isolation. Indeed, the decorative golden snakes which were found as part of the Staffordshire Hoard exemplify how my research may influence future research. The purpose of the snakes is unclear and, due to their fragility, particularly when viewed in the context of the other items in the hoard which are mostly intended for war, they must have a purely decorative role. With the ideas presented in this thesis, the snakes' purpose can be understood as part of the wider symbolic context of *wyrmas,* leading to an understanding of them as symbols of wisdom, fear, and the hope of resurrection in the face of death. Furthermore, this thesis has demonstrated the benefits of studying early medieval English material using interdisciplinary

[4] Photo © Birmingham Museums Trust. The Staffordshire Hoard is owned by the Birmingham City Council and the Stoke-on-Trent City Council and cared for on their behalf by Birmingham Museums Trust and The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery.

methods in order to gain greater understanding of the period. In particular, this has been demonstrated by the use of a database to produce quantitative and qualitative data which can be analysed to identify trends within literary texts. Furthermore, the application of theory outside the humanities such as taxonomy and categorisation theory have allowed me to provide a clearer basis for the understanding of *wyrmas* which aims to limit the inevitable assumptions which can be imposed by modern readers who are hard-wired to understand the natural world according to western scientific models.

This thesis contributes to the field of animal studies in early medieval England which is an area of current scholarly interest.[5] It demonstrates how creatures that may have previously been viewed in isolation can be understood as part of a wider cultural theme and presents fresh opportunities for the reconsideration of the roles of other creatures which appear in text or artefact sources. This thesis also contributes to the already significant study area of monster theory by exemplifying how monstrousness can be seen in creatures present in the lives of those living in early medieval England. By considering how monsters may have appeared in the daily lives of people living in early medieval England, rather than those which are confined to literary texts, it is possible to gain a greater insight into the anxieties which these monsters represented in the society which produced them.

This thesis has demonstrated how *wyrmas* as a collective group of diverse but related creatures appeared in each stage of the human experience of early medieval Christians and came to represent the anxieties that were felt about their lives and deaths in the context of a developing Christian society. Due to the large amount of material available, this thesis focused its attention of the term *wyrm*, but there are further questions to be asked regarding the significance of *næd[d]re* and *draca* and whether these semantically related terms had the same significance as *wyrm*. This thesis has also raised wider questions around the discussion

[5] See literature review, Introduction, pp. 10-13.

of anxieties using literary texts and how scholars may have used material such as the 'saved soul' passage in 'Soul and Body I' were used to relieve anxieties about new doctrinal developments.[6] This thesis has also focused predominantly on Old English material with additional references to relevant Latin works and those Latin texts translated into the vernacular. The Norman invasion marked a change in language and texts which have been beyond the remit of this thesis; further study into the extent to which *wyrmas* imagery extended into later medieval English literary culture may also be of interest.

Overall, this thesis has demonstrated that the significance of *wyrmas* in early medieval English literature and culture has previously been overlooked. Rather than being a term which is simply 'non-specific', the use of *wyrm* allowed for the development of a category of interrelated creatures with shared meaning and associations.[7] In texts such as *Beowulf* and *Wonders of the East*, we see *wyrmas* functioning as a monstrous presence which threatens the lives and societies of early medieval people. Furthermore, the corrupting influences of *wyrmas* in the Bible demonstrates how the presence of *wyrmas* within the body, and in proximity to people throughout their lives, as well as in the grave, would have been a cause of great anxiety. In addition, depictions of the afterlife when read alongside texts depicting *wyrmas* during life and in the grave demonstrate that this category of creatures became associated with the torment of the soul, and with the hope of purification and eventual resurrection of the body. The application of interdisciplinary studies on a variety of sources have allowed us to gain greater understanding of *wyrmas* and to interpret their meaning within early medieval English society.

[6] Soul and Body I, *EB*, ll 135-166.
[7] Neville, p.108, n. 88.

Appendix I: Appearances of vermis in the Latin Vulgate Bible

Exodus 16.20

Qui non audierunt eum, sed dimiserunt quidam ex eis usque mane, et scatere coepit vermibus, atque computruit : et iratus est contra eos Moyses.

And they hearkened not to him, but some of them left until the morning, and it [the food given by god] began to be full of worms, and it putrefied, and Moses was angry with them.

Exod. 16.24

Feceruntque ita ut praeceperat Moyses, et non computruit, neque vermis inventus est in eo.

And they did so as Moses had commanded, and it did not putrify, neither was there worm found in it.

Job 17.14

Putredini dixi : Pater meus es : mater mea, et soror mea, vermibus.

If I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father; to worms, my mother and my sister.

Job 21. 26

et tamen simul in pulvere dormient, et vermes operient eos.

[one might die rich and happy and another poor and bitter] And yet they shall sleep together in the dust, and worms shall cover them.

Job 24.20

Obliviscatur ejus misericordia, dulcedo illius vermes : non sit in recordatione, sed conteratur quasi lignum infructuosum.

Let mercy forget him: may worms be his sweetness: let him be remembered no more, but be broken in pieces as an unfruitful tree.

Job 25.6

Quanto magis homo putredo, et filius hominis vermis!

How much less man that is rottenness and the son of man who is a worm?

Psalm 21.7

Ego autem sum vermis, et non homo; opprobrium hominum, et abjection plebis

But I am a worm, and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people

Proverbs 25.20

Et amittit pallium in die frigoris. Acetum in nitro, qui cantat carmina cordi pessimo. Sicut tinea vestimento, et vermis lingo, ita tristitia viri nocet cordi.

And one that looseth his garment in cold weather. As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a very evil heart. As a moth both by a garment, and a worm by the wood: so the sadness of a man consumeth the heart.

Ecclesiasticus 7.19

Humilia valde spiritum tuum, quoniam vindicta carnis impii ignis et vermis

Humble thy spirit very much: for the vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms.

Eccles. 10.13

Cum enim morietur homo, haereditabit serpentes, et bestias, et vermes.

For when a man shall die, he shall inherit serpents, and beasts, and worms.

Eccles. 19.3

*Et qui se jungit fornicariis erit nequam : putredo et vermes haereditabunt illum : et extolletur in exemplum majus, et tolletur de numero anima ejus***.**

And he that joineth himself to harlots, will be wicked. Rottenness and worms shall inherit him, and he shall be lifted up for a greater example, and his soul shall be taken away out of the number.

Prophecy of Isias (Isiah) 14.11

Detracta est ad inferos superbia tua, concidit cadaver tuum; subter te sternetur tinea, et operimentum tuum erunt vermes.

Thy pride is brought down to hell, thy carcass is fallen down: under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering.

Isias 41.14

Noli timere, vermis Jacob, qui mortui estis ex Israel; ego auziliatus sum tibi, dicit Dominus, et redemptor tuus Sanctus Israel.

Fear not, thou worm of Jacob, you that are dead of Israel: I have helped thee, saith the Lord: and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.

Isias 51.8

Sicut enim vestimentum, sic comedet eos vermis; et sicut lanam, sic devorabit eos tinea: salus autem mea in sempiternum erit; et Justitia mea in generationes generationum

For the worm shall eat them up as a garment: and the moth shall consume them as wool: but my salvation shall be forever, and my justice from generation to generation.

Isias 66.24

Et egredientur, et videbunt cadavera, virorum qui praevaricati sunt in me; vermis eorum non morietur, et ignis eorum non extinguetur; et erunt usque ad satietatem visionis omni carni.

And they shall go out, and see the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched: and they shall be a loathsome sight to all flesh.

First Book of Machabees 2.62

Et a verbis viri peccatoris ne timueritis, quia gloria ejus stercus et vermis est :

And fear not the words of a sinful man, for his glory is dung, and worms

Second Book of Machabees 9.9

ita ut de corpore impii vermes scaturirent, ac viventis in doloribus carnes ejus effluerent, odore etiam illius et foetore exercitus gravaretur :

So that worms swarmed out of the body of this man, and whilst he lived in sorrow and pain, his flesh fell off, and the filthiness of his smell was noisome to the army.

Gospel According to St. Mark 9.42-3

Et si scandalizaverit te manus tua, abscide illam : bonum est tibi debilem introire in vitam, quam duas manus habentem ire in gehennam, in ignem inextinguibilem, [43] ubi vermis eorum non moritur, et ignis non extinguitur.

And if thy hand scandalize thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life, maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into unquenchable fire: [43] Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished.

Mark 9.44-5

Et si pes tuus te scandalizat, amputa illum : bonum est tibi claudum introire in vitam aeternam, quam duos pedes habentem mitti in gehennam ignis inextinguibilis, [45] ubi vermis eorum non moritur, et ignis non extinguitur.

And if thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off. It is better for thee to enter lame into life everlasting, than having two feet, to be cast into the hell of unquenchable fire: [45] Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished.

Mark 9.46-7

Quod si oculus tuus scandalizat te, ejice eum : bonum est tibi luscum introire in regnum Dei, quam duos oculos habentem mitti in gehennam ignis, (47) *ubi vermis eorum non moritur, et ignis non extinguitur.*

And if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out. It is better for thee with one eye to enter into the kingdom of God, than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire: [47] Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished.

Prophecy of Jonas (Jonah) 4.7

Et paravit Deus vermen ascensu diluculi in crastinum : et percussit hederam, et exaruit.

But God prepared a worm, when the morning arose on the following day: and it struck the ivy and it withered.

Deuteronomy 28.39

Vineam plantabis, et fodies : et vinum non bibes, nec colliges ex ea quippiam : quoniam vastabitur vermibus.

Thou shalt plant a vineyard, and dig it, and shalt not drink the wine, nor gather anything thereof: because it shall be wasted with worms.

Book of Judith 16.21

Dabit enim ignem et vermes in carnes eorum, ut urantur et sentiant usque in sempiternum.

For he will give fire, and worms into their flesh, that they may burn, and may feel for ever.

The Acts of Apostles 12.23

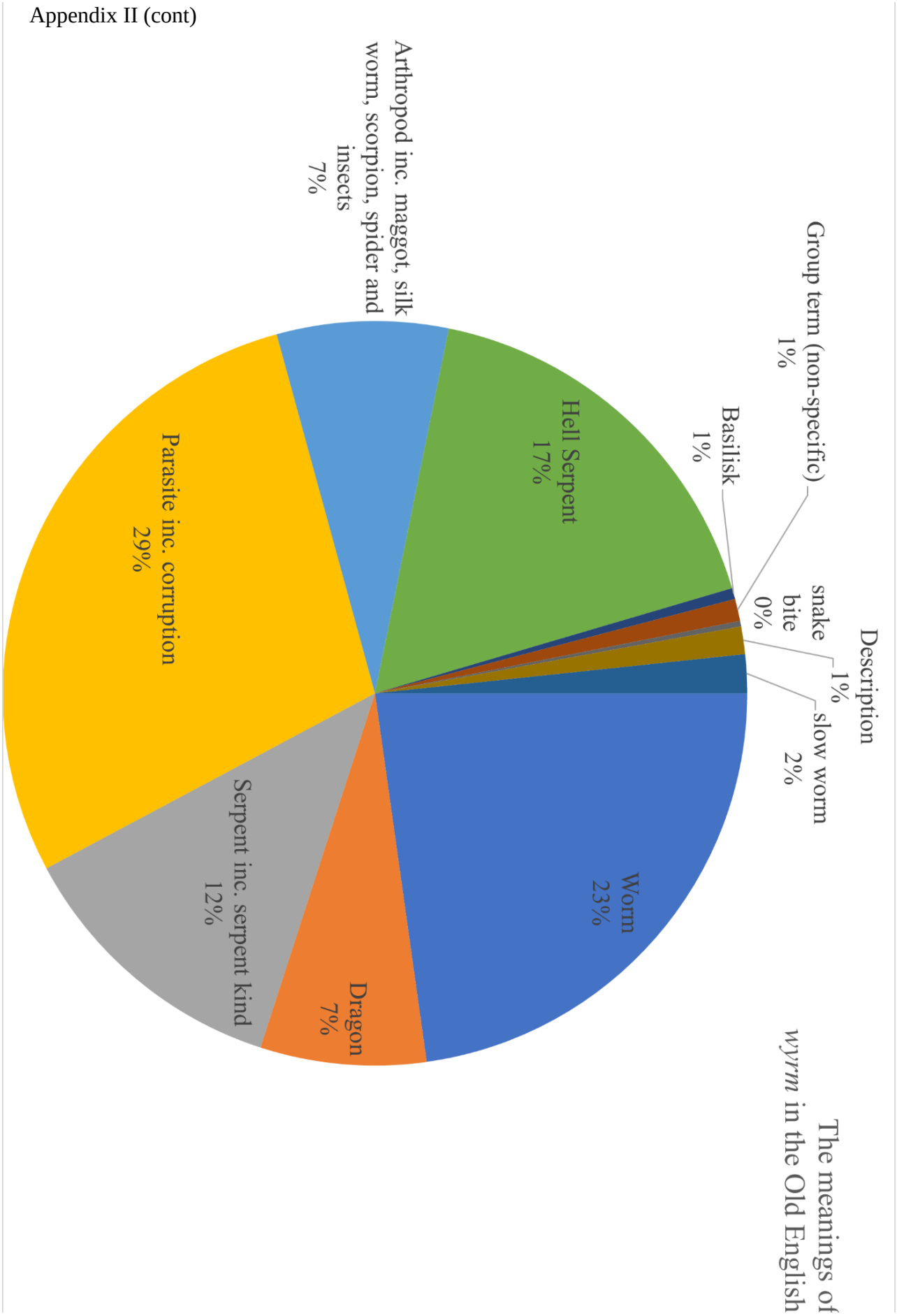
Confestim autem percussit eum angelus Domini, eo quod non dedisset honorem Deo : et consumptus a vermibus, expiravit.

And forthwith an angel of the Lord struck him [Herod], because he had not given the honour to God: and being eaten up by worms, he gave up the ghost.

Appendix II: Appearances of wyrmas in the Old English corpus

Term	No. Wyrmas	% of total
worm [parasitic]	100	31.2%
Worm	63	19.6%
earth dwelling worm	36	11.2%
Serpent	23	7.2%
serpent-kind	18	5.6%
Insect	14	4.4%
worm [corruption]	13	4.0%
Arachnid	10	3.1%
Dragon	10	3.1%
Maggot	5	1.6%
slow worm	5	1.6%
non-specific group term	4	1.2%
fire-dragon	3	0.9%
angling worm	2	0.6%
Basilisk	2	0.6%
earth-dragon	2	0.6%
Asp	1	0.3%
malicious dragon	1	0.3%
sea-dragon	1	0.3%
serpent-hall	1	0.3%
serpent-hoard	1	0.3%
serpent-like	1	0.3%
serpent-pattern	1	0.3%
snake pit	1	0.3%
snake-bite	1	0.3%
worm eaten	1	0.3%
worm-charm	1	0.3%
Total	321	

Appendix II (cont)



Appendix III: Physical Traits and Abilities of wyrmas, draca and næddre

Physical Traits of *wyrmas* *Draca* and *næddran*	
No Legs/Wings	5
Legs	10
Wings	26
Legs&Wings	1
Teeth	45
More than 1 head	10
Horns	8
Massive size	34
Small	4
Colour/Beauty	13
Sting	5
Coiled body	7
Move by 'creeping'	6
Many tails	1
N/A	970

Abilities of *wyrmas*, *draca* and *næddre*	
Constriction	2
Strength	2
Greed	9
Wisdom/cunning	9
Immortal	6
Curative	7
Spinning	3
Swimming	2
Slitting bite	9
Adulterous	1
N/A	499
Fire	18
Flight	0
Poison	30
Fire and poison	19

Appendix IV: Terms Used to Describe Serpent Creatures in 'Marvels of the East', 'Genesis B' and 'Judgement Day II'

Exact term	Text_Name	Edition
Næddran	Marvels of the East	Pride and Prodigies, Orchard, 1995
Næddran	Marvels of the East	Pride and Prodigies, Orchard, 1995
Næddran	Marvels of the East	Pride and Prodigies, Orchard, 1995
Næddran	Marvels of the East	Pride and Prodigies, Orchard, 1995
Næddran	Marvels of the East	Pride and Prodigies
Draca	Marvels of the East	Pride and Prodigies, Orchard, 1995
Draca	Marvels of the East	Pride and Prodigies, Orchard, 1995
Wyrm	Genesis B	Junius Manuscript, Krapp, ASPR, 1931
Wyrm	Genesis B	Junius Manuscript, Krapp, ASPR, 1931
Nædran	Genesis B	Junius Manuscript, Krapp, ASPR, 1931
Wyrm	Genesis B	Junius Manuscript, Krapp, ASPR, 1931
Nædran	Genesis B	Junius Manuscript, Krapp, ASPR, 1931
Wyrm	Genesis B	Junius Manuscript, Krapp, ASPR, 1931
Wyrm	Judgement Day II	Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, Dobbie, ASPR, 1942
Wyrm	Judgement Day II	Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, Dobbie, ASPR, 1942

Appendix V: appearances of wyrmas in Hell

Exact term	Text_Name	Location
Wyrmslite	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	Hell
Wyrmsele	Judith	Hell
wyrmgeard	Solomon and Saturn II	Hell
wyrmcyn/wurmcyn	Homily	Hell
wyrmcyn/wurmcyn	Ælfric's Lives of Saints: On Auguries	Hell
WYRM	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: VIII: Dominica III Post Epiphania Domini	Hell
WYRM	The Rushworth Gospels	Hell
WYRM	The Rushworth Gospels	Hell
WYRM	The Rushworth Gospels	Hell
WYRM	Lindisfarne Gospels	Hell
WYRM	Lindisfarne Gospels	Hell
WYRM	Lindisfarne Gospels	Hell
WYRM	Time Specific Homily	Hell
Wyrm	Vercelli Homily II	Hell
Wyrm	Vercelli Homily XXI	Hell
WYRM	West Saxon Gospel of Mark	Hell
WYRM	West Saxon Gospel of Mark	Hell
WYRM	West Saxon Gospel of Mark	Hell
WYRM	Homily	Hell
Wyrm	Vercelli Homily VIII	Hell
Wyrm	Vercelli Homily XXI	Hell
WYRM	Time Specific Homily	Hell
Wyrm	Judgement Day II	Hell
Wyrm	Vercelli Homily IV	Hell
WYRM	Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Passion of St. Julian and his Wife Basilissa	Hell
WYRM	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	Hell
Wyrm	Homily IX (L)	Hell
WYRM	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies (2): Homily XXXI-II: Natale Sancti Iacobi Apostoli	Hell
WYRM	Homily	Hell
Wyrm	Christ	Hell
Wyrm	Christ and Satan	Hell
Wyrm	Exodus	Hell
WYRM	Judith	Hell

Exact term	Text_Name	Location
Wyrm	Christ and Satan	Hell
Wyrm	Homily IX (L)	Hell
WYRM	Liber Scintillarum	Hell
Wyrm	Christ and Satan	Hell
WYRM	Homily	Hell
Wyrm	Christ	Hell
Wyrm	Judgement Day II	Hell
WYRM	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: VIII: Dominica III Post Epiphania Domini	Hell
WYRM	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	Hell
WYRM	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	Hell
WYRM	Homily	Hell
WYRM	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	Hell
WYRM	Time Specific Homily	Hell
WYRM	Time Specific Homily	Hell
WYRM	Time Specific Homily	Hell
Wurm	Time-Specific Homily	Hell
Wurm	Homily	Hell
Nedran	Christ and Satan	Hell
Nedran	Solomon and Saturn II	Hell
Næddran	Christ and Satan	Hell
Draca	Vercelli Homily IV	Hell
Draca	Elene	Hell
DRACA	Dialogues of Gregory the Great	Hell
Draca	The Panther	Hell
DRACA	Homily	Hell
DRACA	Homily	Hell
Draca	Vercelli Homily II	Hell
DRACA	Time Specific Homily	Hell
DRACA	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	Hell
DRACA	Dialogues of Gregory the Great	Hell
Draca	Christ and Satan	Hell
DRACA	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: IV: Assumptio Sancti Iohannis Apostoli	Hell
DRACA	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	Hell
DRACA	Homily	Hell
DRACA	Time Specific Homily	Hell
DRACA	Homily	Hell
Draca	Christ and Satan	Hell
DRACA	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: XXXV: Dominica XXI Post	Hell

Exact term	Text_Name	Location
	Pentecosten	
DRACA	Time Specific Homily	Hell
DRACA	Time Specific Homily	Hell
DRACA	Dialogues of Gregory the Great	Hell
Draca	Homily IX (L)	Hell

Appendix VI: Wyrmas and Draca in Hell: Appearances Alongside Fire

Exact term	Text_Name	Context	Description
Draca	Elene	þa sio werge sceolu under heolstorhofu hreosan sceolde in wita forwyrd, þære hie in wylme nu dreogaþ deaðcwale in dracan fæðme, þeostrum forþylmed.	Then the weary ones must fall down into the darkness of hell in the torment of departure, there now in the whelm [of flame] painful death, choking darkness, in the dragon's clutch
Wyrm	Christ	Donne bið þridde, hu on þystra bealo þæt gesælige weorud gesihð þæt fordone sar þrowian, synna to wite, weallendne lig, on wyrma slite bitrum ceaflum, byrnendra scole.	Then the third thing, the happy host see that destruction, how in dark destruction, those pained by sin suffer pain, fierce flame, in the bitter jaws and the slitting of worms, a host of burning ones.
Wyrm	Christ	Ne mæg þæt hate dæl of heoloðcynne in sinnehte synne forbærnan to widan feore, wom of þære sawle, ac þær se deopa seað dreorge fedeð, grundleas giemeð gæsta on þeostre, æleð hy mid þy ealdan lige, ond mid þy egsan forste; wraþum wyrmum ond mis wita fela, frecnum feorhgomum, folcum scendeð.	Never might that hot pit of devils in perpetual darkness burn away their sins from afar, the stain on their souls, but there but then the deep pit feeds the sorrowful ones, bottomless it holds spirits in the darkness, burns them with the old flame and frosty terror, the wrath of worms and with many tourments, horrible fatal jaws it harms the people
Draca	Christ and Satan	æce æt helleduru dracan eardigað, hate on reðre; heo us helpan ne magon.	Dragons dwell always at the gates of hell, inflamed and wrathful, they might not help us.
Wyrm	Christ and Satan	nabbað he to hyhte nymþe cyle and fyr, wean and witu and wyrma þreat, dracan and næddran and þone dimman ham.	They have no hope but frost and fire, torture and pain and teaming serpents, dracan and næddran and a home of darkness.
Draca	Christ and Satan	nabbað he to hyhte nymþe cyle and fyr, wean and witu and wyrma þreat, dracan and næddran and þone dimman ham.	They have no hope but frost and fire, torture and pain and teaming serpents, dracan and næddran and a home of darkness.
Wyrm	Exodus	manhus witon fæst under foldan, þær bið fyr and wyrm, open ece scræf.	[man is] mindful of the house of pain secure under the earth, where there is fire and the worm, an open pit of evil.
Wyrm	Judgement Day II	ðæt reðe flod ræscet fyre and biterlice bærnð ða earman saula, and heora heortan horxlice wyrmas, synscyldigra, ceorfað and slitað.	That red flood crackles with fire and bitterly burns the hopeless souls, and here the ready worms tear and slit the sin-guilty
Wyrm	Judgement	þær beoð þa wanigendan	There will be the diminishing and

Exact term	Text_Name	Context	Description
	Day II	welras gefylde ligspiwelum bryne laðlices fyres, and hy wælgrimme wyrmas slitað and heora ban gnagað brynigum tuxlum.	contaminated lip, vomiting burning, hateful fire, and there cruel worms slit, gnaw bone with burning tusks/teeth
Wyrm	Vercelli Homily VIII	þære syndon þa undeaðlican wyrmas þe næfre ne sweltað, þæt fyr ne bið næfre adwæsced, ac hit to widan feore byrneð, eowra synna on eowrum sawlum þær byrnað.	There are the immortal worms that never die a violent death, that fire is never extinguished, but it burns far and wide, after your death you will burn there for your sins
Draca	Vercelli Homily II	se deaðberenda draca & diofla forwyrd & se nearwa seaþ & se swearta deaþ & se byrnenda grund & se blodiga stream	the death-bearing dragon and destruction of the devil and the lake of confinement and the black of death and the burning ground and the stream of blood
Wyrm	Vercelli Homily XXI	þara folca wop & se scamienda here & seo byrnende hell & þara wyrma gryre.	the weeping of people, and their shamefulness there, and the burning in hell and the horror of serpents
Wyrm	Vercelli Homily XXI	þær mid deoflum drohtnian on morðre & on mane, on susle & on sare, on wean & on wyrmum, betweox deadum & deoflum, on bryne & on biternesse	There way of life with devils in murder and crime, in torment and sorrow, in misery and serpents, in burning and in bitterness
Wyrm	Homily IX (L)	Nu bidde we eow & myndgiaþ þæt ge don soðe dædbote eowra synna, for þon hell hafað seofon witu: þæt forme wite is ece hungor, oþer is ece þurst, þridde is ece cyle, feorþe is fyres hæto, fifte is ece wyrma slite, syxte is ece fulnes, seofoþe ece smyc & þrosm.	Now we bid you and remember that you do true penitence for your sins. For hell has seven punishments: that first punishment is eternal hunger, another is eternal thirst, third is eternal chill, forth is the hot fire, fifth is the serpent's slice, sixth is eternal foulness, seventh is eternal smoke and vapour
Draca	Homily IX (L)	& in fæþme þæs beornendan dracan se þe is deoful cweden.	and in the lap of the burning Dragon that is called the devil
WYRM	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: VIII: Dominica III Post Epiphania Domini	ðær næfre heora wyrm ne swylt: ne heora fyr ne bið adwæsced.	There their serpent will never die, their flames will never be quelled

Exact term	Text_Name	Context	Description
WYRM	Homily	Ne mæg us þonne ure gold ne ure seolfer gefylstan of þæm wælgrimmum tintregum & þæm unadwæscedlicum ligum & þæm undeadlicum wyrmum þa hwettað hyra blodigan teð to þon þæt hig butan ælcre mildheortnisse ure lichoman wundian & slitan	After than neither our gold or our silver are able to give help to us from the bloodthirsty torment and unquenchable flames and the immortal serpents which whet their bloody teeth as, against every mercy, they wound and slit our earthly body.
WYRM	Homily	þar heora wyrmas ne sweltað næfre, ne heora fyr þar næfre adwæsced ne byð	There those serpents will never die, those fires will never be quenched.
WYRM	West Saxon Gospel of Mark	Þar hyra wyrm ne swylt & fyr ne bið acwenced.	There the serpents will never die and the fire cannot be quenched. (repeated refrain, every other line)
WYRM	West Saxon Gospel of Mark	Þar hyra wyrm ne swylt & fyr ne bið acwenced.	There the serpents will never die and the fire cannot be quenched. (repeated refrain, every other line)
WYRM	West Saxon Gospel of Mark	Þar hyra wyrm ne swylt & fyr ne bið acwenced.	There the serpents will never die and the fire cannot be quenched. (repeated refrain, every other line)
DRACA	Homily	Sio helle hafað iserne weal and xii siðum hio beliet ða helle, and ofer þam xii fealdum þara wealla wæron xii dracan fyrene.	Hell has walls of iron and 12 paths? ….? And over the 12 fields there is a wall of 12 flaming dragons.
DRACA	Homily	Se ytemesta draca, þæt is þæt ealdordeoful, se <lihð> gebunden onbecling mid raceteage reades fyres, to tacne Cristes rode, in hellegrunde.	The last dragon, that is the prince of devils, the dishonoured one bound behind with chains of red fire, to the sign of Christ's cross, in the depths of hell.
DRACA	Homily	and þær biþ hungor and þurst an hellesuslum, and geomerung and þoterung and þæt wyrste wyrmcyncg eal byrnende and dracan kin þe næfre ne sweortaþ	And there with hunger and thirst in hell-suffering, and groaning and howling, and that cruel serpent-kind, all burning and dragon kin
DRACA	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	ðe deoflu hi ða læddon and bescuton hi anum fyrenan dracan innan þone muð, and he hi þærrihte forswealh and eft aspaw on þa hatostan brynas hellewites.	Then the devils took them and flung them into the mouth of the one firey dragon, and he immediately swallowed them and afterwards he spewed them into the hottest flame of the depths of hell.

Exact term	Text_Name	Context	Description
DRACA	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	On swyltcwale and in sarum sorgum, in fyrenum bryne and on fulnesse, in toða and in tintregum, in angmodnysse earmra sawle, on cyle and on wanunge, in hungre and in þurste, on <hæte> and in earfoðnesse, in neowlum attre and in ecere forwyrde, and in muslicum wita cynne, on muðe and on fæðme þæs deaðberendan dracan, þe is deofol genemned.	In death and in painful cares, in burning fires and in foulness, in gnashing teeth and in torment, in sorrow of the wretched soul, in cold and in lamentation, in hunger and in thirst, in heat and in hardship, in the poison in the pit and in painful ruin, in wickedness and in a variety of cruel things, in the mouth and in embrace of the death-bearing dragon which is named devil.
DRACA	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: IV: Assumptio Sancti Iohannis Apostoli	Eow wæs heofonan rice gearu. & scinende gebytlu. mid wistum afyllede. & mid ecum leohte: þa ge forluron þurh unwærscipe: & ge begeaton eow þeosterfulle wununga mid dracan afyllede. & mid brastliendum ligum.	The kingdom of heaven was prepared for you, and brilliant buildings with filled with subsistence and with eternal light, there you have lost through heedlessness and you have got for yourself dark dwellings filled with dragons and with crackling flames
WYRM	Judith	Læg se fula leap gesne beæftan, gæst ellor hwearf under neowelne næs ond ðær genyðerad wæs, susle gesæled syððan æfre, wyrmum bewunden, witum gebunden, hearde gehæfted in hellebryne æfter hinsiðe.	The foul trunk (of Holofernes' body) lay behind, lifeless, the spirit departed elsewhere, under the abyss and was condemned there, bound in torment forever afterwards, wound in serpents, bound in punishments, severely bound in hell-fire after death
WYRM	Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Passion of St. Julian and his Wife Basilissa	Swa swa hi besuncon on ðone sweartan grund, swa sceole ge hæðene on hellegrund besincan, þær bið æfre ece fyr and undeadlic wyrm, þe eowre lichaman cywð and ge þeah ne sweltað, ac bið æfre se lichama geedniwod to ðam witum.	Just as they sunk into the dark ground, so must the heathens sink into the ground of hell, there always with perpetual fire and undead worms that will chew your body and yet you will not die but your body will always be renewed for the torture.
wyrmcyn/wurmcyn	Ælfric's Lives of Saints: On Auguries	Gehwa mot yfeles geswican and gebetan, ac gif he ðurhwunað on yfelnysse and forsihð his scyppendes beboda and deofla gecwemð, þonne sceal he unðances on ecnysse ðrowian, on ðam unadwæscendlicum fyre, betwux ðam wyrrestan wurmcynne, þe næfre ne bið	Everyone might cease and improve from evil, but if he continues in evilness and despises the commands of his Creator and pleases the devils, the he must unwillingly suffer in eternity in the unquenchable fire, between the worst serpent kind that will never be destroyed but chew always the bodies of the wicked in the fire of

Exact term	Text_Name	Context	Description
		adyd, ac ceowað symle þæra arleasra lichama on ðam hellican lige.	hell.
WYRM	Time Specific Homily	Ac anra gehwylc his sylfes yrmþa heofað, forþonþe hellefyr nefre ne biþ adwesced, ac a þa dracan & þa wyrmas þara arleasra manna sawla slitað; & hi nefre ne beoð sweltenda.	But each one mourns his own miseries, because the hellfire will never be quenched, but always the dragons and the worms slit the shameful souls of men; and they are never ending.
WYRM	Time Specific Homily	ac anra gehwilc hys sylfes yrmða wepað and heofað; forðon ðe hellefyr næfre ne byð adwæsced ac þa dracan and þa wyrmas þæra arleasra manna sawla <slitað> and hi næfre na beoð sweltende.	but each one weeps and laments his own misery, because the hellfire will never be quenched but the dragon and the serpents will slit the soul of the dishonourable man, and they will never die.
wyrmcyn/wurmcyn	Homily	þær biþ wop butan frofre, and þær biþ þeowdom butan freowdome and unrotnes butan gefean; þær biþ fulnys butan awendednysse, and biternes butan swetnesse; and þær biþ hungor and þurst an hellesuslum, and geomerung and þoterung and þæt wyrste wyrmcyncg eal byrnende and dracan kin þe næfre ne sweortaþ k	and there with hunger and thirst in hell-suffering, and groaning and howling, and that cruel serpent-kind, all burning and dragon kin
WYRM	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	ðær beoð þa waniendan weleras afylde ligspiwelum bryne on þam hellican fyre, and hi wælgrimme wyrmas slitað, and heora ban gnagað byrnendum toðum.	There are the lamenting ones, lips filled with vomiting flames in burning hellish fire, and the slaughter-grim serpents will slit, and they gnaw their bones with burning teeth.
Wyrmslite	Homily attributed to Wulfstan	in wean and on wyrmslitum betweonan deadum and deoflum, in bryne and on , in bealewe and on bradum ligge, in yrmþum and on earfeðum.	in woe and in snake-bites, between the dead and devils, in flame and in bitterness, in evil and in expansive flame, in poverty and hardships.
WYRM	Lindisfarne Gospels	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur ðer wyrm hiora ne bið dead & þæt fyr ne bið gedrysned.	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur: there the serpent never dies and that fire is never quenched.
WYRM	Lindisfarne Gospels	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur ðer wyrm hiora ne bið dead & þæt fyr ne bið adrysned.	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur: there the serpent never dies and that fire is never quenched.

Exact term	Text_Name	Context	Description
WYRM	Lindisfarne Gospels	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur ðer wyrm hiora ne bið dead & þæt fyr ne bið gedrysned.	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur: there the serpent never dies and that fire is never quenched.
WYRM	The Rushworth Gospels	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur ðer wyrmas hiora ne biað deode & þæt fyr ne bið gidrysnad.	Ubi uermis eorum non morietur et ignis non extinguitur: there the serpents never die and that fire is never quenched.
WYRM	The Rushworth Gospels	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur ðer wyrmas hiora ne biað deode & þæt fyr ne bið drysnad.	Ubi uermis eorum non morietur et ignis non extinguitur: there the serpents never die and that fire is never quenched.
WYRM	The Rushworth Gospels	Ubi uermis eorum non moritur et ignis non extinguitur ðer wyrmas hiora ne biað deade & fyr hiora ne bið adrysnad.	Ubi uermis eorum non morietur et ignis non extinguitur: there the serpents never die and that fire is never quenched.
WYRM	Liber Scintillarum	Humilia ualde spiritum tuum quoniam uita carnis impii ignis et uermis: geeadmed swyþe gast þinne forþy lif flæsces þæs arleasan fyr & wyrm.	Strongly humble your spirit because the life of this dishonourable flesh is fire and the serpent
Wurm	Homily	And þær þa scyldige bærnæþ, and þa wurmæs heom mid weallende muðes forswolgeð; and heoræ ansyne bið þær mid teares oferfleowen, and þær bið egeslic toðene grind.	And there the sinful burn, and the swarming serpents swallow them with their mouths; and their faces will overflow with their tears, and there threatening teeth will grind.
DRACA	Time Specific Homily	And xii dracan syndan in þam xii weallum, and hy synd ealle afylled mid readum lige and mid fulum stænce.	And 12 dragons are in the 12 walls, and they are all filled with red flame and with foul stench
DRACA	Time Specific Homily	Ac anra gehwylc his sylfes yrmþa heofað, forþonþe hellefyr nefre ne biþ adwesced, ac a þa dracan & þa wyrmas þara arleasra manna sawla slitað; & hi nefre ne beoð sweltenda.	But each one mourns his own miseries, because the hellfire will never be quenched, but always the dragons and the worms slit the shameful souls of men; and they are never ending.
DRACA	Time Specific Homily	ac anra gehwilc hys sylfes yrmða wepað and heofað; forðon ðe hellefyr næfre ne byð adwæsced ac þa dracan and þa wyrmas þæra arleasra manna sawla <slitað> and hi næfre na beoð sweltende.	But each one weeps and laments his own misery, because the hellfire will never be quenched but the dragon and the serpents will slit the soul of the dishonourable man, and they will never die.

Exact term	Text_Name	Context	Description
DRACA	Homily	ða deoflu hig þa gelæddan & wepende & geomrigende hy sealdon suman fyrenan dracan se ontynde his þa fyrenan & þa scearpestan goman & he hig swealh & hig eft aspaw on þa hattestan ligas.	Then the devils take them and weeping and groaning they are given to a certain fiery dragon who burns with flames and has the sharpest teeth and he swallows them and then he spews them into the hottest fires.

Appendix VI: Earth Dwelling *Wyrmas* Acting as Consumers

Exact term	Text_Name	Translation	Role
Weorm	Fates of the Apostles	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body I	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body I	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
moldwyrm	Soul&Body I	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body I	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body I	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body I	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body I	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body I	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Christ II	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	The Phoenix	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Juliana	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Vainglory	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body II	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
moldwyrm	Soul&Body II	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body II	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body II	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body II	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Soul&Body II	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wurm	Soul's Address to the Body (Fragment C)	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wurm	Soul's Address to the Body (Fragment C)	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wurm	Soul's Address to the Body (Fragment D)	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wurm	Soul's Address to the Body (Fragment D)	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wyrm	Riming Poem	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
WYRM	Life of St. Nicholas	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
WYRM	Blickling Homily 8	earth dwelling worm	Consumer
wurm	The Grave	earth dwelling worm	Consumer

Appendix VII: Caterpillars and Other Insects

Exact term	Context	Description	Text_Name	Translation	Role
wyrm	Sealde erucan, yfelan wyrme, let hiora wyrta wæstme forslitan, and hiora gram gewinn hæfdan gærshoppan.	He sent the caterpillar, the evil insect, it devours and hinders the growth of plants, and he had a grim contest from locusts	Paris Psalter (Psalm 77)	insect	Consumer
WYRM	leohtre ic eom micle þonne þes lytla wyrm þe her on flode gæð fotum dryge.	I am much lighter than this little insect that goes on the water with dry feet	Riddle 40 [creation]	insect	Non-descript
wurm	Ge sawað micel sæd & ripað litel, for ðam gærstapan hit fretað eall. Ge plantiað wineardas & delfað, & ge ne drincað ðærof, for ðam ðe wurmas hine fretað	You will sow much seed and reap little, for the grass-stepper (locust) will devour it all. You will plant vineyards and dig them, and you will not drink of them, for the worms will devour them.	Deuteronomy	insect	Consumer
WYRM	Hi mihton þa syððan seonysse þrowian, and hine byton lys and lyftene gnættas and eac swylce flean and oðre gehwylce wyrmas	Then afterwards they could suffer sickness, and lice and gnats of the air bit them and all such fleas and other insects.	Hexameron	insect	Attacker Moral & Physical
WYRM	Hi mihton þa syþþan seocnysse þrowian & hi biton gnættas & eac swylce flean & oðre gehwylce wyrmas & him & næddran & þa <reðan> deor mihton derian his cynne <ær> arwurðodon swiðe.	Then afterwards they could suffer sickness, and gnats bite them, and all such fleas and other insects and the dragons and serpents and the cruel beasts might hurt his kind which were previously very honoured.	De creatore et creatura	insect	Attacker Moral & Physical
treowyrm	& he sealde þam treowyrm [symbol] emele westm hyra & gewinn hyra gærshoppan Et dedit erugini fructus eorum et labores eorum locuste.	& he gave them to the caterpillar [symbol] their growth to the caterpillar, and their toil to the locust: Et dedit erugini fructus eorum et labores eorum locuste.	Psalm 78:46	insect	Consumer

Exact term	Context	Description	Text_Name	Translation	Role
treowyrm	& salde treowyrme westmas heara & gewin heara gershoppan: Et dedit erugini fructus eorum et labores eorum lucustae	and he sold their fruit to the caterpillar and their toil to the locust: Et dedit erugini fructus eorum et labores eorum lucustae	Psalm 78:46	insect	Consumer
leafwyrm	& he sealde leafwyrme wæstm heora & geswinc heora gærstapan: Et dedit erugini fructus eorum et labores eorum lucustae	and he sold their fruit to the caterpillar and their toil to the locust: Et dedit erugini fructus eorum et labores eorum lucustae	Psalm 78:46	insect	Consumer
treowyrm	& he sealde treowyrme wæstmas hira & gewin heora gærstapan: Et dedit erugini fructus eorum et labores eorum locustæ	and he sold their fruit to the caterpillar and their toil to the locust: Et dedit erugini fructus eorum et labores eorum locustæ	Psalm 78:46	insect	Consumer
cawelwyrm	'Gurgulio' cawelwyrm.	'Gurgulio' catepillar.	Latin-Old English Gloss. [Plantin-Moretus MS. 32 & BM MS Additional 32246	insect	Gloss.
WYRM	'Termes [or] teredo' wyrm þe borað treow.	'Termes [or] teredo' the worm [termite] which bores a tree.	Latin-Old English Gloss. [Plantin-Moretus MS. 32 & BM MS Additional 32246	insect	Gloss.
twinwyrm	'Bupestris' twinwyrm.	Bupestris: beetle [poisonous beetle found in grass which cattle eat and are caused to swell up.]	Latin-Old English Gloss. [Plantin-Moretus MS. 32 & BM MS Additional 32246]	insect	Gloss.
cawelwyrm	'Eruca' cawlwyrm.	'Eruca' catepillar.	Latin-Old English Gloss. [Plantin-Moretus MS. 32 & BM MS Additional 32246	insect	Gloss.
wurm	'Bibiones' [or] 'mustione' muscfleotan [or] wurmes mite	'Bibiones' [or] 'mustione' small fly found in wine [or] insect of worms	Latin-Old English Gloss. [Plantin-Moretus MS. 32 & BM MS Additional 32246	insect	Gloss.

Appendix VIII: Arachnids

Exact term	Context	Description	Text_Name	Translation
wyrmcyn/wurmcyn	ða toforan monan upgonge þa cwomon þær Scorpiones þæt wyrmcyn swa hie ær gewunelice wæron toweard þæs wætersciepes.	Then before the moon rise there came a type of wyrm-kin called a scorpion, just as they usually did, towards the water.	Letter of Alexander to Aristotle	Arachnid
wyrm	wæs þæra wyrma micel mænegeo	There was a great multitude of these wyrms	Letter of Alexander to Aristotle	Arachnid
WYRM	Wið þæra wyrma slite þe man spalangiones nemneð genim þysse sylfan wyrte seaw þæs wyrtwalan þe we hederam nemdun, syle drincan.	When these worms, named spalangio [a poisonous spider] bites a man, take the juice of the root of this herbs, named hedarum, give to drink.	Old English Herbarium	Arachnid
WYRM	He cwæð þa oðer bispel: hwilc fæder wile syllan his cylde stan. gif hit him hlafes bitt? oððe nædran: gif hit fisces bitt? oððe þone wyrm þrowend gif hit æges bit.	He said the other story: which father will give his child a stone, if it prays for bread? Or a serpent, if it prays for a fish? Or a scorpion wyrm if it prays for an egg.	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: XVIII: In Letania Maiore	Arachnid
WYRM	Se wyrm þrowend: þe is geset ongean þæt æig: is ættren. & slihð mid þam tægle to deaðe.	The wyrm scorpion: he is position opposite to the egg, is poisonous, and strikes with that tail to death.	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: XVIII: In Letania Maiore	Arachnid
WYRM	symle we sceolon þæs gode þancian, & his naman bletsian, þonne bið ure hiht gehealden wið þæs wyrmes slege.	always we must thank God and bless his name, it is our hope that protects from the scorpion's sting.	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: XVIII: In Letania Maiore	Arachnid
wyrm	Oððe gif he bitt æges sylð he him þone wyrm þe is gehaten þrowend	Or if he prays for an egg will he give a worm that is called scorpion	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: XVIII: In Letania Maiore	Arachnid
WYRM	Wyð þæra wyrma slite þe man spalangiones hateþ genim þas ylcan wyrte aizos on wine gesnucude, syle drincan.	For the a man with the bite of a worm that is called 'spalangio' [a poisonous spider] the same wort 'aisos' in wine,	Old English Herbarium	Arachnid

Exact term	Context	Description	Text_Name	Translation
		give to drink.		
WYRM	Wið nædrena slitas & wið <þara> wyrma ðe man spalangiones hateþ genim þysse wyrte wos gecnucud on wine, syle drincan.	For the man with the bite of snakes and for bite of the insect that has the name 'spalangiones' [poisonous spider], the juice of this wort in wine, give to drink.	Old English Herbarium	Arachnid

Appendix IX

The database I in which I have collected and collated the appearances of *wyrm* in the surviving Old English corpus can be accessed via:

https://beardatashare.bham.ac.uk/getlink/fiF1a4BXY5Ka56UZj8ymNevr/

Bibliography

Manuscripts

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11

London, British Library MS Harley MS 6258 B

London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius C III

London British Library, MS Harley 608

London, British Library Cotton MS Claudius b. IV

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 201

Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus MS. 32

London, British Library MS Additional 32246

London, British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III

Primary Sources

Ælfric of Eynsham, Homilies, ed. Peter Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies: First Series*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Aldhelm, Enigmata, ed. and trans A.M. Juster, *Saint Aldhelm's Riddles* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 62-3

Alexander's Letter to Aristotle, ed., trans., Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscripts* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1985; Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003)

Alfred the Great, 'Soliloquies', ed. Carnicelli, Thomas A, *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969)

Alfred the Great, Laws, ed. F.L. Attenborough, F.L., *The Laws of the Earliest English King*s, new edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in multiple volumes, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, gen. eds. David Dumville and Simon Keynes: vol. 3, ASC MS A, ed. Janet M. Bately (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986); vol. 5, ASC MS C, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); vol. 6, ASC MS D, ed. G. P. Cubbin (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996); vol. 7, ASC MS E, ed. Susan Irvine (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004); and vol. 8, ASC MS F, ed. Peter S. Baker (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000)

The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary, ed and trans by Mary Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Augustine of Hippo, 'Soliloquies', Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (ed., trans) in *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 138-152

Bald's Leechbook, ed. Cockayne, Thomas Oswald, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, volume II, in 3 vols (London: Rolls, 1864-66)

Battle of Finnesburh, ed. Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (London: Routledge, 1942)

Battle of Maldon, ed. Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (London: Routledge, 1942)

Bede, 'De die iudicii', Graham D. Caie (ed), *The Old English Poem 'Judgement Day II'*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000) pp. 129-133

Bede, Commentary on Revelation, ed. and trans. Faith Wallis, *Commentary on Revelation* Translated Texts for Historians, Vol. 58 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013)

Bede, *Expositio Apocolypseos*, ed and trans. Roger Gryson, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 121A (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2001)

Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Bede, *On Genesis*, Calvin B. Kendall (ed., trans), Translated texts for Historians, Vol. 48 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008)

Bede, 'Vitae Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda', ed and trans. Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 291-295

Beowulf, ed. and trans by Michael Swanton, *Beowulf*, revised edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)

The Bible, ed. George Haydock, *The Holy Bible: translated from the Latin vulgate: diligently compared withthe Hebrew, Greek, and other editions in divers languages: The Old Testament, first published by the English college at Douay, A.D. 1609 and The New Testament, first published by the English college at Rheims A.D. 1582*, rev. and cor. Fredrick Canon Oakeley and Thomas G. Law, 2 volumes (London: Virtue and Company, 1899)

Byrhtferth's Manual, ed by Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, *Byrhferth's Enchiridion*, Early English Texts Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Cæsarius of Arles, Sermons, ed. and trans. Sister M.M Mueller, *Sermons: 81-186*, vol 2, Fathers of the Church, vol.47 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Pres, 1963)

Christ and Satan, ed. George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript* (London: Routledge, 1931)

Ecclesiastical Institutes, ed by Benjamin Thrope, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England: Comprising Laws Enacted Under the Anglo-Saxon Kings from Æthelbirht to Cnut,* vol. 2 (London: Record Commissioners, 1840)

Exodus, ed. George Philip Krapp, *The Junius Manuscript* (London: Routledge, 1931)

The Grave, ed. Buchholz, *Die Fragmente der Reden der Seele an den Leichnam* (Erlangen: Fruck der Universitäts-Buchdruckerei von Junge & Sohn, 1889)

The Wanderer, ed. George Philip Krapp and Dobbie, Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936)

Herbarium, ed. De Vriend, Hubert Jan, *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de quadrupedibus*, Early English Texts Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1984)

In die Iudicii, ed. Arthur Napier, *Wulfstan: ammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883)

Isidore, ed. by W M Lindsay, Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum, books I-X, Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxonii: e typographeo Clarendoniano, 1911).

Isidore, ed. by W M Lindsay, Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum, books XI-XX, Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxonii: e typographeo Clarendoniano, 1911).

Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae, ed. and trans. by Stephen A. Barney, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Judgement Day II, ed. trans. Caie, Graham D, *The Old English Poem 'Judgement Day II'* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000)

Juliana, ed. George Philip Krapp and Dobbie, Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936)

Kindschi, Lowell, 'The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS 32 and British Museum Additional 32246' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1955).

Maxims II, ed. Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (London: Routledge, 1942)

Medicina de Quadrupedibus, ed. De Vriend, Hubert Jan, *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de quadrupedibus*, Early English Texts Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1984)

Old English Meters of Boethius, ed by George Philip Krapp, *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, (ed), Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (London: Routledge, 1932)

The Paris Psalter, ed by George Philip Krapp, *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (London: Routledge, 1932)

Riddles, ed. George Philip Krapp and Dobbie, Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936)

Shippey (ed), *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1976)

Soul and Body I, ed. George Philip Krapp, *The Vercelli Book* (London: George Routledge, 1902)

Soul and Body II, ed. George Philip Krapp and Dobbie, Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936)

Vainglory, ed. George Philip Krapp and Dobbie, Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936)

Vercelli Homilies, ed. Scragg, D.G., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1992)

Volsunga Saga, ed. and trans. Byock, Jesse L, *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1990

The Wife's Lament, ed. George Philip Krapp and Dobbie, Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936)

Wonders of the East, ed., trans, Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscripts* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1985; Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003)

Secondary Sources

Abram, Christopher, 'New Light on the Illumination of Grendel's Mere', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 109.2 (2010), 198-216

Amundsen, Darrel W., 'Medieval Faith in Early Christianity', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 56.3 (1982), 326 – 350

Amundsen, 'The Discourses of Early Christian Medical Ethics' in *The Cambridge World History of Medical Ethics*, ed. By Robert B. Baker and Laurence B. McCullough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 202-210

Appleton, Helen, ‘The Role of Æschere’s Head’, *The Review of English Studies*, 68.285 (2017), 428–447

Attebery, Brian, Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula, in *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1992)

Baker, John, ‘Entomological Etymologies: Creepy-Crawlies in English Place-Names’, in *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia,* ed. by Michael D.J. Bintley and Thomas J.T. Williams (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), pp. 229-252

Banham, Debby, ‘The Old English Nine Herbs Charm’, in *Medieval Christianity in Practice,* ed. by Miri Rubin, Princeton Readings in Religions 36 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 189-193

Barley, Nigel, ‘Anglo-Saxon Magico-Medicine’, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford,* 3.2 (1972), 67-76

Bately, Janet, ‘The Alfredian Canon Revisited’, in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. by Timothy Reuter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 107 – 120

Battles, Paul, ‘Dying for a Drink: “Sleeping after the Feast” Scenes in Beowulf, Andreas and the Old English Poetic Tradition’, *Modern Philology,* 112.3 (2015), 435- 457

Blanton Whetsell, Virginia, *Signs of Devotion: the Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England,* 695- 1615 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007)

— ‘Tota Integra, Tota Incorrupta: The Shine of St. Æthelthryth as Symbol of Monastic Autonomy’, *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 32.2 (2002), 227-267

Blust, Robert, ‘The Origin of Dragons’, *Anthropos,* 95.2 (2000), 519-536

Boddington, Andy, *Raunds Furnells: the Anglo-Saxon Church and Churchyard,* English Heritage Archaeological report, no. 7 (London: English Heritage, 1996)

Bond, J M, 'Burnt Offerings: Animal Bone in Anglo-Saxon Cremations’, *World Archaeology,* 28.1 (1996), 76- 88

Bonjour, Adrien, ‘*Beowulf* and the Beasts of Battle’, *PMLA,* 72.4.1 (1957)

— ‘Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant: Or the *Beowulf* Dragon Debated’, *PLMA,* 68.1 (1953), 304-12

Boyd, Brian, ‘Archaeology and Human-Animal Relations: Thinking Through Anthropocentrism’, *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 46 (2017), 299-316

Boyle, L.E., ‘The Nowell Codex and the Poem of Beowulf’, in *The Dating of Beowulf,* ed. by Colin Chase, Toronto Old English Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp.23-32

Brown, A K, ‘The Firedrake in “Beowulf”’, *Neophilologus,* 64.3 (1980), 439-461

Brown, Carleton, ‘Beowulf and the Blicklng Homilies and Some Textual Notes’, *Modern Language Association,* 53.4 (1938), 905-916

Bruce-Mitford, Rupert, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial, Volume 2: Arms, Armour and Regalia,* with contributions by M. Bimson, D.F Cutler, K. East, S.E Ellis, A. Care Evans, C. Hicks, M. Hughes, W.A Oddy, M.S Tite, S.M Youngs and A.E.A Werner (London: British Museum Publications, 1978)

Buckberry, Jo and Cherryson, Annia, *Burial in Later Anglo Saxon England c.650-1100AD* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010)

Bugge, John, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal,* International Archives of the History of Ideas, series minor 17 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975)

Bynum, Caroline Walker, ‘Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women’, *Representations,* 11 (1985), 1-25

— *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity: 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)

Cameron, M. L., ‘Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Magic’, *Anglo-Saxon England 17* (1988), 191–215

— *Anglo-Saxon Medicine,* Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England vol. 7, ed. by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Carver, Martin, ‘Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves', in *Treasure in the Medieval West,* ed. By E Tyler (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp.25-48

— *Sutton Hoo: a Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context,* Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, no. 69 (London: British Museum Press, 2005)

Cavanaugh, William, Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 2008)

Cavell, Megan, ‘Arachnophobia in Early English Literature’, *New Medieval Literatures,* 18 (2018), 1-43

Cavell, Megan, ‘Constructing the Monstrous Body in Beowulf’, *Anglo-Saxon England,* 43 (2014), 155-181

Cavill, Paul, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1999)

Cesario, Marilina, 'Fyrenne Dracan in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *Textiles, Text, Intertext: Essays in Honour of Gale R. Owen-Crocker,* ed. by Maren Clegg Hyer and Jill Frederick (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), pp. 153-170

Charlesworth, James H., *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Chistianized* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2010)

Clement, Richard W., 'The Production of the Pastoral Care: King Alfred and his Helpers', in *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose,* ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 129-152

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses), in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25

Conquergood, Dwight, 'Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England: Performance and the Heroic Ethos', *Literature in Performance,* 1.2 (1981), 24-35

Crane, Susan, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain,* First Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013)

Crawford, 'Votive Deposition, Religion and the Anglo-Saxon Furnished Burial Ritual', *World Archaeology,* 36.1 (2004), 87-102

Cubitt, Catherine, 'Bishops, Priests and Penance in Late Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe,* 14. 1 (2006), 41 – 63

Darby, Peter, *Bede and the End of Time* (London: Routledge, 2012)

— *Bede's Eschatological Thought* (unpublished phd thesis, University of Birmingham, 2009) p. 194, in database of University of Birmingham eTheses Repository < https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/> [accessed July 2021]

Derrida, Jacques, *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* ed. by Marie Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)

Dictionary of Latin from Medieval British Sources <http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/Default.aspx> [accessed June 2020]

Dictionary of Old English Online <https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doe/> [accessed July 2021]

Dictionary of Old English: Corpus < https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doecorpus/> [accessed July 2021]

Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002)

Dumville, D. N. ‘Beowulf Come Lately: Some Notes on the Paleography of the Nowell Codex’, *Archiv,* 225 (1988), 49-63

Dunn, Marilyn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons c. 597-c.700: Discourses of Life, Death and Afterlife* (London: Continuum, 2009)

Edwards, Graham Robert, ‘Purgatory: ‘Birth’ or Evolution?’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 36.4 (1985),634-46

Ereshefsky, Marc, *The Poverty of the Linnaean Hierarchy: A Philosophical Study of Biological Taxonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Eriksen, Sarah Bienko, ‘Traversing the Uncanny Valley: Glámr in Narratological Space’, in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150-1400,* ed by Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd, The Northern Medieval World (Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp.89-108

Evans, Jonathan, ‘Medieval Dragon-lore in Middle-Earth’, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts,* 9.35 (1998), 175-191

Feldman, Thalia Phillies, ‘A Comparative Study of “Feond, Deofl, Syn and Hel in Beowulf”’, *Neuphilolohische Mitteilungen,* 88.2 (1987), 159-174

Flower, Robin, ‘The Script of the Exeter Book’, *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry,* ed. R.W. Chambers, Max Forster and Robin Flower (London: printed and published for the dean and chapter of Exeter Cathedral by P. Lund, Humphries and co., 1933) cited in Patrick W. Conner, ‘The Structure of the Exeter Book Codex. *Scriptorium,* 40.2 (1986), 233-242

Foxhall Forbes, Helen, ‘Diuduntur in Quattuor: the Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England’, *The Journal of Theological Studies,* 61.2 (2010), 659- 684

— ‘The Theology of the Afterlife in the Early Middle Ages, c.400-c.1100’, in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife,* ed. by Richard Matthew Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 153– 175

— *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016; 2013)

Freud, Sigmund, ‘The Uncanny’, in *The Uncanny,* ed and trans by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 155-189

Fry, D.K. ‘Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-scenes, *Neophilogus,* 53 (1968), 48-54

Gameson, Richard, ‘The Origin of the Exeter Book of Old English poetry’, *Anglo-Saxon England,* 25 (1996), 135-185

Garvey, Brian, *Philosophy of Biology* (Stocksfield: Accumen, 2007; London, New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.127-142

Gatch, Milton, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977)

Geake, Helen, 'The Control of Burial Practice in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. Carver (York: York Medieval Press, 2003) pp. 259-269

Godden, M. R., 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum,* 76.1 (2007), 1-23

Goguen, Joseph A., 'The Logic of Inexact Concepts', *Synthese,* 19.3/4 (1969), 325-373

Goldsmith, Margaret E., 'The Christian Perspective in Beowulf', *Comparative Literature,* 14.1 (1962), 71-90

Griffith, M.S., 'Convention and Originality in the Old English 'Beasts of Battle' Typescene', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 22 (1993), 179-199

Hadley, Dawn M and Buckberry, Jo, 'Caring for the Dead in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England,* ed. by Tinti (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), pp.121-147

Hall, Alaric, 'Calling the Shots: The Old English Remedy "Gif Hors Ofscoten Sie" and Anglo-Saxon 'Elf-Shot'', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 106.2 (2005), 195-209

— *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity,* Anglo-Saxon Studies 8 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007)

Harmean, M., Molleson, T.I., and Price, J.L., 'Burials, Bodies and Beheadings in Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries', *Bulletin of the British Museum of Natural History (Geology),* 35.3 (1981), 145–88

Hartman, Laura M., 'Consuming Christ: The Role of Jesus in Christian Food Ethics', *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics,* 30.1 (2010), 45-62

Hartney, Aideen M., *Gruesome Deaths and Celibate Lives: Christian Martyrs and Ascetics* (Exeter: Bristol Pheonix Press, 2005)

Healy, Tara Ann, 'Eall swylce þu cwæde': Translation and imitation in the Old English Judgement Day II', *Review of English Studies,* New Series (2020), 1-15

Hessels, Jan Hendrik, *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of the Leiden University* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906)

Hofmann, Petra, 'Infernal Imagery in Anglo-Saxon Charters' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Saint Andrews, 2008) pp.71, 63, in database of University of St. Andrews Thesis repository < https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/> [accessed June 2021]

Holloway, James, 'Material Symbolism and Death: Charcoal Burial in Later Anglo-Saxon England, in *Burial in Later AS England c.650-1100 AD,* ed. Jo Buckberry and Annia Cherryson, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), pp 83-92

Honegger, Thomas, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019)

Hume, Katherine, 'The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 3 (1974), 63-74

Irving, Edward B, 'The Nature of Christianity in Beowulf', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 13 (1984), 7-21

Jurasinski, Stefan, 'Caring for the Dead in The Fortunes of Men', *Philological Quarterly,* 86.4 (2007), 343-363

Kabir, Ananya Jahanara, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature,* Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Keynes, Simon and Lapidge, Michael, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983)

Kiernan, Kevin, 'The Beowulf Codex and the Making of the Poem', in *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (Michigan, University of Michigan, 1996), pp.171-278

— 'The Eleventh-Century Origin of Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript', in *The Dating of Beowulf,* ed. by Colin Chase, Toronto Old English Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 9-22

Kindschi, Lowell, 'The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS 32 and British Museum Additional 32246' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1955)

Klaeber, Frederick, trans by Paul Battles, 'The Christian Elements in Beowulf', *Old English Newsletter,* 24 (Kalamazoo, MI: The Medieval Institute, 1996)

Klein, T, 'Stonc æfter stane (Beowulf, 1.2288a): Philology, Narrative Context, and the Waking Dragon', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 106.1 (2007), 22-44

Klir, G. J., Yuan B, *Fuzzy Logic, and Fuzzy Systems: Selected Papers by Lotfi A. Zadeh,* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 1996)

Kuehn, Sara, *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011)

Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark, *Metaphors we Live By* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

Lakoff, George, ‘Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts’, *Journal of Philosophical Logic,* 2.4 (1973), 458-508

Lee, Christina, *Feasting the Dead: Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon Burial Rituals* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007)

LeGoff, Jacques, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984; 1986)

Lench, Elinor, ‘The Wife’s Lament: A Poem of the Living Dead’, *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* 1.1 (1970), 3-23

Lionarons, Joyce Tally, ‘Beowulf: Myth and Monsters’, *English Studies,* 77.1 (1996), 1-14

— ‘Sometimes the Dragon Wins’: Unsuccessful Dragon Fighters in Medieval Literature’, in *Essays on Old, Middle, Modern English and Old Icelandic in Honor of Raymond P. Tripp, Jr,* ed by L.C Gruber, M.C. Gruber, G.K Jember (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 2000), pp. 301-16

Lippincott, Louise W., ‘The Unnatural History of Dragons’, *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin,* 77.3334 (1981), 2-24

Luyster, Robert, ‘The Wife’s Lament in the Context of Scandinavian Myth and Ritual’, *Philological Quarterly,* 77.3 (1998), 243- 270

Mackie, W.S., ‘The Demon’s Home in Beowulf’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 37.4 (1938), 455-461

Magennis, Hugh, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Marafioti, Nicole, ‘Punishing Bodies and Saving Souls: Capital and Corporal Punishment in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in *The Haskins Society Jounral: Studies in Medieval History,* vol 20, ed by William North (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009), pp. 39- 57

Howe, Nicolas, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997)

Manning, Aubrey and Serpell, James, *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994)

Maring, Heather, *Signs that Sing: Hybrid Poetics in Old English Verse* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 2017)

Marshall, Joseph E., ‘Goldgyfan or Goldwlance: A Christian Apology for Beowulf and Treasure, *Studies in Philology,* 107.1 (2010),1-24

Mastanoja, Tauno F., ‘The Unnamed Woman’s Song of Mourning Over Beowulf and the Tradition of Ritual Lamentation, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 68.1 (1967), 1-27

McHugh, Susan, ‘Modern Animals: From Subjects to Agents in Literary Studies, *Society and Animals,* 17.4 (2009), 363-367

McKinley, Jacqueline, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham: Pt.8 The Cremations,* East Anglian Archaeology 69 (Dereham: Norfolk Archaeological Unit: 1994)

Meaney, Audrey L, ‘Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence,’ *Folklore,* 77.2 (1966), 105-115

— ‘The Practice of Medicine in England about the Year 1000’, *Social History of Medicine,* 13.2 (2000), 221-237

— 'Anglo-Saxon Pagan and Early Christian Attitudes to the Dead', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300,* ed. By M. Carver (York: York Medieval Press, 2003), pp. 229-241

— ‘Scyld Scefing and the Dating of Beowulf – Again’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library,* 71.1 (1989), 7-40

— ‘The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness’, in *Health Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture,* ed. By Campbell, Hall and Klausner, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto (Toronto: Macmillan Academic, 1992) pp. 12-33

— ‘Variant versions of Old English medical remedies and the compilation of Bald’s Leechbook’, *Anglo Saxon England,* 13 (1984), 235-268

Meaney, Audrey L, and Hawkes, S C, *Two Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Winnall, Winchester, Hampshire,* Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series, no. 4. (London: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 1970)

Meens, Rob, ‘Pollution in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of the Food Regulations in Penitentials’, *Early Medieval Europe,* 4.1 (1995), 3-19

— ‘The Uses of the Old Testament in Early Medieval Canon Law: the *Collectio Vetus Gallica* and the *Collectio Hibernensis*’, in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages,* ed. by Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.67-77

Meroney, Howard, ‘The Nine Herbs’, *Modern Language Notes,* 59.3 (1944), 157-160

Miller, Linda L., ‘Drythelm’s Journey to the Other World: Bede’s Literary Use of Tradition, *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* 2, 1 (1971), 3-15

Mitchell, Piers D., ‘Human Parasites in Medieval Europe: Lifestyle, Sanitation and Medical Treatment’, in *Fossil Parasites,* ed. by Kenneth de Baets and D. Timothy J. Littlewood, Advances in Parasitology, vol. 90 (London; Oxford; Waltham; San Diego: Academic Press, 2015), pp. 389-420

Mobley, R.W.L, ‘Did the Serpent Get it Right?’, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 39.1 (1988), 1-27

Moreira, Isabel, *Heaven’s Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Murphy, Trevor *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History: The Empire in the Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Nelson, Marie, ‘“Is” and “Ought” in the Exeter Book Maxims’, *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 45 (1981), 109-121

Neville, Jennifer, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

O’Brien O’Keeffe, Katherine, *Visible Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

— 'Heroic values and Christian ethics' *in The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Godden and Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 107-125

Ogden, Daniel, *Dragons, Serpents, and Slayers in the Classical and Early Christian Worlds: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Olsen, Karin, ‘The Lacnunga and its Sources: The Nine Herbs Charm and Wið Færstice Reconsidered’, *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 55.26 (2007), 23-31

Orchard, Andy, *Pride and Prodigies: the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscripts* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1985; Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003)

Osterloff, Emily, ‘Should we be Scared of British Snakes?’ <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/should-we-be-scared-of-british-snakes.html> [accessed 15 June 2022]

Otter, Monika, ‘The Temptation of St. Æthelthryth’, *Exemplaria*, 9.1 (1997), 139-163

Owen-Crocker, Gale R., *The Four Funerals in Beowulf* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Oxford English Dictionary <www-oed-com> [accessed 19 June 2022]

Pader, Ellen J., *Symbolism, Social Relations and the Interpretation of Mortuary Remains*, BAR British Series, 130 (Oxford: BAR, 1982)

Parker Pearson, Mark, 'The Powerful Dead: Archaeological Relationships Between the Living and the Dead' *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 3.2 (1993) 203-229

Patton, Paul, ‘Language, Power, and the Training of Horses’, in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. by Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 83-100

Penn, Kenneth and Brugmann, Birte, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Inhumation Burial: Morning Thorpe, Spong Hill, Bergh Apton and Westgarth Gardens*, East Anglian Archaeology, no. 119 (Dereham: Norfolk Museums Service, 2007)

Pettit, Kent, ‘The New Faith vs. The Undead: Christmas Showdowns, in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150-1400,* ed by Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd, The Northern Medieval World (Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp.227-244

Poole, Kristopher, 'Engendering Debate: Animals and Identity in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 57.1 (2013), 61-82

Pope, John C., ‘Beowulf 3150-3151: Queen Hygd and the Word “Geomeowle”’, *Modern Language Notes,* 70.2 (1955), 77-87

Porter, Roy, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to Present* (London: Fontana Press, 1999)

Porterfield, Amanda, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Rauer, Christine, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000)

Reid, H. Alistair, ‘Adder Bites in Britain’, *The British Medical Journal*, 2.6028 (1976), 153-156

Repko, Alan F., *Interdisciplinary research: process and theory,* third edition (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017)

Reynolds, Andrew, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Richards, J.D., 'The Significance of Form and Decoration of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Urns', *BAR British Series*, 166 (1987), 219-228

Richards, Richard A., *Biological Classification: A Philosophical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)

Roberts, Michael John, *The Spiders of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol 1 (Colchester: Harley Books, 1985)

Rosch, Eleanor, ‘Human Categorization’, in *Studies in Cross-Cultural Psychology,* vol.1, ed. Neil Warren, 2 vols (London: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 1-49

— ‘Principles of Categorization’, in *Cognition and Categorization,* ed by E. Rosch and B. B. Lloyd (Hillsdale, NS: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1977)

Salisbury, Joyce E., *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages,* 2nd edn (London; New York: Routledge, 2011); Poole, Kristopher, 'Engendering Debate: Animals and identity in Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Archaeology*, 57.1 (2013), 61-82

Sandner, David, 'Tracking Grendel: The Uncanny in *Beowulf', Extrapolation*, 40.2 (1999), 162- 177

Savran, G., 'Beastly Speech: Intertextuality, Balaam's Ass and the Garden of Eden', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament,* 19. 64 (1994), 33-55

Sawyer, John F.A., 'The Image of God, the Wisdom of Serpents and the Knowledge of Good and Evil', in *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden,* ed. By P. Morris, D. Sawyer (Sheffield: 1992) pp. 64- 73

Sayer, Duncan, 'Christian Burial Practice in the Early Middle Ages: Rethinking the Anglo-Saxon Funerary Sphere', *History Compass*, 11 (2013), 133-146

Schmidt, Gary D. *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Pres; London: Associated University Press, 1995)

Schulenburg, Jane Tibbetts, 'The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation', in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives,* ed. by Mary Beth Rose (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 29-72

Scott, Penelope J., 'Illness as a Burden in Anglo-Saxon England, *Neophilologus*, 104.4 (2017), 603-620

Scragg, D.G. 'The Compilation of the Vercelli Book, *Anglo-Saxon England,* 2 (1973), 189-207

— *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1989)

Semple, Sarah, 'Illustration of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 32 (2003), 231-245

— *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Shilton, H, 'The Nature of Beowulf's Dragon', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library,* 79.3 (1997), 67-78

Sofield, Clifford M., 'Living with the Dead: Human Burial in Anglo-Saxon Settlement Contexts', *Archaeological Journal,* 172:2 (2015), 351-388

Sowerby, Richard, *Angels in Early Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Speake, George, *A Saxon Bed Burial on Swallowcliffe Down: Excavations by F de M Vatcher*, Archaeological Report 10 (Unknown: English Heritage; Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England, 1989)

Spindler, R., Das altenglische Bussbuch, sog.Confessionale Pseudo-Egberti. Ein Beitrag zu den kirchlichen Gesetzen der Angelsachsen. Kritische Textausgabe nebst Nachweis der mittellateinischen Quellen, sprachlicher Untersuchung und Glossar (Leipzig, 1934)

Stanley, E.G., 'The Date of Beowulf: Some Doubts and No Conclusions', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. by Colin Chase, Toronto Old English Studies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 197-212

Steel, Karl, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages*, Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011)

Styler, Ian, *The Story of an English Saint's Cult: An Analysis of the Influence of St Æthelthryth of Ely, c.670- c.1540* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham 2019)

Sutton, N.M, Bates, N., Campbell, A., 'Canine Adder Bites in the UK: a Retrospective Study of Cases Reported to the Veterinary Poisons Information Service', *The Veterinary Record*, 169.23 (2011), 607-615

Swanton, Michael J. 'The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message: A Reconsideration', *Anglia*, LXXXII (1964), 269-290

Tatar, Maria M., 'The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny', *Comparative Literature*, 33.2 (1981), 167-182

Taylor, P.B., 'Heroic Ritual in the Old English Maxims', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 70. 3 (1969), 387-407

Thacker, Alan, 'The Making of a Local Saint', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.45-73

Thompson, Victoria, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge; Rochester: Boydell Press 2004)

— 'Memory, Salvation and Ambiguity: A Consideration of Some Anglo-Scandinavian Grave-Stones from York', in *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies*, ed. by Howard Williams (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2003), pp. 215-226

Tolkien, J.R.R, 'The Monsters and the Critics', in *The Monsters and the Critics: and Other Essays*, ed by Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983)

Tripp, Raymond P., 'Beowulf 3182b: Lofgeornost, "Most Eager to Praise"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 106.4 (2005), 425-442

Turner Camp, Cynthia, ‘The Temporal Excesses of Dead Flesh’, *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies,* 4.4 (2012), 416-426

Underwood, Richard, *Anglo-Saxon Weapons and Warfare* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 1999)

University College London, ‘Vertebrate Diversity’ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums static/obl4he/vertebratediversity/squamata.html> [accessed 16 June 2022]

Waldau, Paul, *Animal Studies: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Walls, Jerry L., *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Wang, D Y, Kumar, S, and Hedges, S B, ‘Divergence time estimates for the early history of animal phyla and the origin of plants, animals and fungi’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences,* 266, 1415 (1999), 163–171

Warburg, Michael, ‘Scorpion reproductive strategies, allocation and potential; a partial review’, *European Journal of Etymology,* 108, 2 (2011), pp. 173-181

Weil, Kari, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2012)

Weston, L.M.C, ‘The Language of Magic in Two Old English Metrical Charms’, *Neuphilogische Mitteilungen,* 86.2 (1985), 176-186

Williams, David M. and Ebach, Malte C., *Cladistics: A Guide to Biological Classification,* Third Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Williams, Howard, ‘A Well-Urned Rest: Cremation and Inhumation in Early Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Transformation by Fire: The Archaeology of Cremation in Cultural Context*, ed by Kuijt, Quinn & Cooney (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), pp. 93-118

— 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead: The Reuse of Prehistoric and Roman Monuments as Early Anglo Saxon Burial Sites, *Medieval Archaeology*, 41:1 (1997), 1-32

— *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

— 'Engendered Bodies and Objects of Memory in Final Phase Graves', in *Burial in Later Anglo-Saxon England c.650-1100AD,* ed. Jo Buckberry and Annia Cherryson (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), pp. 26-37

— 'Remains of Pagan Saxondom? - The Study of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites' in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (Leeds: The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), pp. 47-71

— *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003)

Wilson, Keith, 'Powerful Form and Potent Symbol: The Dragon in Asia, *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art,* 77.8 (1990), 286-323

Wolf, Carol Jean, 'Christ as Hero in 'The Dream of the Rood', *Neophilologische,* 71. 2 (1970), 202-210

Wolfe, Cary, 'Human, All Too Human: "Animal Studies" and the Humanities, *PMLA,* 124.2 (2009), 564-575

Woolf, Rosemary, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968)

Wright, Charles D. *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 106-174

Zacher, Samantha and Orchard, Andy, *New Readings in the Vercelli Book* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009)

Zadeh, Lofi A., 'Fuzzy Sets and Systems', in *Fuzzy Sets, Fuzzy Logic, and Fuzzy Systems: Selected Papers by Lotfi A. Zadeh,* ed. G. J. Klir, B. Yuan (Singapore: Wold Scientific Publishing, 1996), pp. 35-43