

**Vulnerable Bodies:
The Poetics of Protection in the Old English
Metrical Charms**

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Abstract

This thesis offers the first complete metrical and stylistic analysis of the twelve Old English metrical charms. The verse found in these texts is rife with apparent irregularities, and scholars have historically labeled them poor verse, or have neglected discussions of style in favour of anthropological and source studies. Those who have addressed the poetics of the charms have largely dismissed them as meaningless features meant only to hypnotise the listener. Yet this thesis argues the metrical charms are not arbitrary sound, but narrative verse, containing powerful imagery that invokes themes appearing elsewhere in the Old English literary corpus. They also feature significant rhetorical and ornamental features lauded as aesthetic achievements in other Old English verse.

Drawing on past scholarship on Old English style and merging close reading with rigorous metrical analysis, this thesis argues that the unusual metrical and stylistic features of the charms are not defects but a function of their genre, the substance of a meaningfully different Old English poetic style. This study explores the ways in which the charms' stylistic ornamentation, imagery, and word choice highlight their central ideologies and anxieties, and the ways in which supposed metrical 'irregularities' in fact serve aesthetic purposes and accommodate prescribed magical formulae. It invites us to reconsider the criteria by which we judge Old English verse, and to challenge dichotomies of 'correct' and 'incorrect' metre, rigorous 'classical' verse and 'decayed' late verse.

Stylometric analysis and close reading offer literary insight into the charms as well, and this thesis explores the ways in which the charms safeguard human individuals and communities against invasive agents. I argue that the charms equate disease, physical and spiritual dangers, and even falling victim to theft, with submission, defeat, or loss of control in intimate conflict with the Other. These texts seek to reinstate boundaries that have been violated — civilization and wilderness, inside and outside — by maintaining or restoring human bodies and spaces as inviolate wholes.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Exploring Stylometric Study with Charm 3	24
Chapter 2: Incursive Agents and the Penetrated Body in Charms 4, 7, and 12	52
Chapter 3: Harnessing Ambivalent Forces in Charm 2	124
Chapter 4: Feminine Patients, Practitioners, and Presences in Charms 6 and 8	172
Chapter 5: Cattle, Cursing and Christ in the Metrical Theft Charms	209
Chapter 6: Performing Christian Victory in Charms 1 and 11	237
Conclusion	278
Texts Edited with Translations	282
Selected Bibliography	302

Introduction

Early medieval English manuscripts are filled with remedies, personal prayers, incantations, and instructions for ritual acts designed to protect, heal, and make meaningful changes in the reality of their users, from restoring stolen cattle to curing fevers to ensuring safe travel.¹ These texts purport to act magically, collapsing the semiotic distinction between word and action to alter the external world in accordance with the wishes of their speakers. Of several hundred such performative texts, only twelve can be properly described as ‘metrical’ — that is, portions of the spoken incantations they contain can be scanned, however approximately, according to the rules of Old English verse. Although the so-called ‘metrical charms’ — a title bestowed on these incantations by Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie² — clearly contain verse, they are metrically highly unusual. Perhaps for this reason, no previous study has attempted a stylistic, metrical, and literary close analysis of these texts. In other words, the metrical charms have never been treated in a sustained way as Old English poems. Such a study, however, not only illuminates the difficult and enigmatic charms themselves, but also enhances our understanding of early medieval English ideas about the human body, the (super)natural landscape and its hostile inhabitants, and the place of humankind in the postlapsarian Christian cosmos. A metrical examination of these charms also offers new insight into the flexibility and multiplicity of Old English metre, and invites us to reconsider scholarly narratives of ‘poetic decay’ in the pre-Conquest period, together with the division of Old English poetry into skillful ‘classical’ verse and ‘degraded’ late verse. The study of the metrical charms is necessarily and simultaneously a study of early medieval poetics, medical

¹ For the purposes of the present study, the phrases ‘early medieval English’ and ‘early medieval England’ refer broadly to the period 600-1100 CE in areas of Britain in which speakers of Old English held cultural hegemony.

² E. V. K. Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (New York, 1942). The numbering of the charms (1-12) was also assigned by Dobbie, grouping them by the manuscripts in which they appear.

history, the history of personal devotion, and traditions of magical practice. The present thesis engages with all of these disciplines to offer the first stylometric analysis of the twelve metrical charms, and to demonstrate the aesthetic and functional value of these oft-maligned poetic texts.

What is a Charm?

A ‘charm’ is a ritual text designed for performance that includes a verbal (spoken or written) incantation, conjuration, or adjuration of some kind, intended to effect a change in reality and accomplish a particular purpose.³ The metrical charms as preserved in pre-Conquest English manuscripts are literary texts, but require oral recitation; it is entirely possible, but in no way provable, that they were transmitted orally before being committed to writing. Six of the twelve metrical charms are medical in nature: they seek to cure disease. A further five are agricultural, designed to recover stolen livestock, maintain beehives, and enhance the fertility of farmland. The remaining charm (‘Charm 11’ or ‘the Journey Charm’) protects its user from a variety of natural and supernatural threats on an undertaking of some kind. Their concerns are microcosmic, but the charms treat human concerns and injuries as symbolic of humanity’s greater struggle against the chaos and danger of a postlapsarian world.

Charms 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 appear in London, British Library, Harley MS 585, an early eleventh-century medical miscellany containing a set of translated Latin treatises generally referred to as the ‘Old English Pharmacopoeia’, and a collection of Old English remedies

³ J. Roper, *English Verbal Charms* (Helsinki, 2005), 15; L. Olsan, “The Inscription of Charms in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts”, *OT* 14 (1999), 401-19; D. C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania, 2006), 9; W. Nöth, “Semiotics of the Old English Charm”, *Semiotica* 19 (1977), 59-84.

scholars have titled *Lacnunga*.⁴ Charm 7 appears in London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D.xvii, a codex containing two different medical collections (*Bald's Leechbook*, which has two sub-divisions, and *Leechbook III*) probably copied at Winchester not long after the mid-tenth century, from a fair copy dating to the reign of King Alfred.⁵ The relatively large Old English medical corpus (500 surviving parchment leaves) consists of herbal recipes, prayers, and rituals. Its constituent texts are largely vernacular translations of late antique and early medieval Latin material, representing a wide-ranging amalgamation of received medical knowledge, but Old English medical translations only rarely acknowledge their Latinate source authors or seek to integrate explanatory frameworks like humoral theory.⁶ The medical

⁴ "Harley MS 585", Digitised Manuscripts, British Library, accessed 11/03/20, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_585, ff. 160r-163v, 167r-167v, 175r-176r, 180v-181r, 185r-185v. On this manuscript, see N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), no. 231; H. Gneuss and M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England Up to 1100* (Toronto, 2014), no. 421; M. A. D'Aronco, "The Transmission of Medical Knowledge in Anglo-Saxon England: The Voices of the Manuscripts", in *Form and Content of Instruction in Anglo-Saxon England in the Light of Contemporary Manuscript Evidence: Papers Presented at the International Conference, Udine, 6-8 April 2006*, ed. P. Lendinara et al. (Turnhout, 2007), 35-58. Citations from this text are taken from E. Pettit, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, 2 vols (Lampeter, 2001).

⁵ "Bald's Leechbook", Digitised Manuscripts, British Library, accessed 11/03/20, <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=6548>, ff. 125r-v. On this manuscript, see Ker no. 264; Gneuss and Lapidge no. 479; A. Meaney, "Variant Versions of Old English Medical Remedies and the Compilation of *Bald's Leechbook*", *ASE* 13 (1984), 235-68; C. E. Wright, ed., *Bald's Leechbook: British Museum Royal Manuscript 12D.xvii* (Copenhagen, 1955); R. S. Nokes, "The Several Compilers of *Bald's Leechbook*", *ASE* 33 (2004), 51-76. Citations from this text are taken from T. O. Cockayne, ed. and trans., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, 3 vols (London, 1864-6), but the text of Charm 7 is taken from Dobbie.

⁶ On early medieval English medicine and medical texts, see E. Kesling, *Medical Texts in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (Cambridge, 2020); D. Banham, "England Joins the Medical Mainstream: New Texts in Eleventh-Century Manuscripts", in *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent*, ed. H. Sauer et al. (Tempe, 2011), 341-52, "Dun, Oxa, and Pliny the Great Physician: Attribution and Authority in Old English Medical Texts", *SHM* 24 (2011), 57-73, and "A Millennium in Medicine? New Medical Texts and Ideas in England in the Eleventh Century", in *Anglo-Saxons: Studies Presented to Cyril Roy Hart*, ed. S. Keynes and A. P. Smyth (Dublin, 2006), 230-42; M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge, 1993), "Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Magic", *ASE* 17 (1988), 191-215, "The Sources of Medical Knowledge in Anglo-Saxon England", *ASE* 11 (1982), 135-55, and "Bald's Leechbook: Its Sources and Their Use in its Compilation", *ASE* 12 (1983), 153-82; S. Pollington, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plant Lore, and Healing* (Ely, 2008); J. Riddle, *Medieval Medicine: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 2011); J. N. Adams and M. Deegan, "Bald's Leechbook and the *Physica Plinii*", *ASE* 21 (1992), 87-114; C. H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England* (London, 1967) and "Some Notes on Anglo-Saxon Medicine", *MH* 9 (1965), 156-69; L. E. Voigts, "Anglo-Saxon Plant Remedies and the Anglo-Saxons", *Isis* 70 (1979), 250-68; J. F. Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times: Two Lectures Delivered Before the Royal College of Physicians of London, June 23 and 25, 1903* (Oxford, 1904). Cf. W. Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study in History, Psychology, and Folklore* (London, 1963); J. H. G. Grattan and C. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated Specifically from the Semi-Pagan Text 'Lacnunga'* (London, 1952); and S. Rubin, *Medieval English Medicine* (London, 1974), who argue early medieval English medicine is unscholarly and degenerate. On humoral theory, cf. C. Doyle, "Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Disease: A Semantic Approach" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2017).

texts also contain numerous English remedies without identifiable Latin sources. These comprehensive collections are practical and symptom-focused, apparently designed for use by specialist practitioners rather than compiled out of pure scholarly interest.⁷ The manuscripts may have been accessible to both monks and educated lay physicians, but were certainly elite productions, made at central scriptoria, their use probably restricted to monasteries and courts.⁸ If popular or folk medicine influenced the creation of the *Leechbooks* and *Lacnunga*, it is difficult to trace in these scholarly productions, and the medical metrical charms are, in their extant form, a part of this sanctioned elite knowledge.

The remaining metrical charms appear in the margins or prefatory and concluding material of religious codices. Charms 8, 9, 10, and 11 were written into the large margins of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41, a copy of the Old English version of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*.⁹ The margins contain a broad range of texts, including numerous charms, a fragment of *Solomon and Saturn I*, homilies, martyrologies, and liturgical excerpts. The manuscript seems to have served as an archive and commonplace book for a small, southern religious centre in the eleventh century; the marginalia scribe evidently sought to create a collection of texts designed for the spiritual and material protection of both the

⁷ Banham, "Dun", 68; Pollington, 70-71; Voigts, 254, 260; B. Brennessel *et al.*, "A Reassessment of the Efficacy of Anglo-Saxon Medicine", *ASE* 34 (2005), 183-95; M. L. Cameron, "Bald's Leechbook and Cultural Interactions in Anglo-Saxon England", *ASE* 19 (1990), 5-12.

⁸ On early medieval English medical practitioners, see Cameron, *Medicine*, 20-22; Banham, "Dun"; A. Meaney, "The Practice of Medicine in England in About the Year 1000", *SHM* 13 (2000), 221-37; D. Banham and C. Voth, "The Diagnosis and Treatment of Wounds in the Old English Medical Collections: Anglo-Saxon Surgery?", in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. L. Tracy and K. DeVries (Leiden, 2015), 153-74; S. Rubin, "The Medical Practitioner in Anglo-Saxon England", *JRCGP* 20 (1970), 63-71; A. van Arsdall, "Medical Training in Anglo-Saxon England: An Evaluation of the Evidence", in *Form and Content of Instruction in Anglo-Saxon England in the Light of Contemporary Manuscript Evidence: Papers Presented at the International Conference, Udine, 6-8 April 2006*, ed. P. Lendinara *et al.* (Turnhout, 2007), 415-34.

⁹ "CCCC MS 41", Parker Library on the Web, accessed 11/03/20, <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/qd527zm3425>, pp. 182, 206-7, 350-53. Ker, no. 32; Gneuss and Lapidge, no. 39. Citations from Dobbie.

religious community and the lay community to whom they offered pastoral care.¹⁰ Charm 12 appears in the blank space at the end of a Winchester-produced religious collection, a set of commentaries on the Psalms (London, British Library, Royal MS 4 A.xiv).¹¹ Charm 1 was added at some point to London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A.vii, a tenth-century copy of the Old Saxon *Heliand*.¹² The inclusion of charms in these texts is unsurprising: many early medieval English religious books contain prefatory or marginal material including computus, incantations, medical and agricultural remedies, exorcisms, prayers, and rituals employing psalms and other religious texts for practical purposes.¹³ Pastoral care was an essential function of all church establishments, including monastic ones, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and these collections bridge the gap between public liturgy and personal practice, providing ‘womb-to-tomb security’ for both literate users (clergy, physicians, monks) and their lay patients and congregants.¹⁴ The metrical charms, which themselves contain large amounts of explicitly Christian material, were evidently considered appropriate for use by the liturgically-literate.

¹⁰ S. L. Keefer, “Margin as Archive: The Liturgical Marginalia of a Manuscript of the Old English Bede”, *Traditio* 51 (1996), 147-77; K. L. Jolly, “On the Margins of Orthodoxy: Devotional Formulas and Protective Prayers in Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 41”, in *Signs on the Edge: Space, Text and Margin in Medieval Manuscripts*, ed. R. H. Bremmer and S. L. Keefer (Paris, 2007), 135-84; R. J. S. Grant, *Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41: The Loricas and the Missal* (Amsterdam, 1978); L. Olsan, “The Marginality of Charms in Medieval England”, in *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. J. A. Kapáló *et al.* (Budapest, 2013), 135-64.

¹¹ “Royal MS 4 A.xiv”, Digitised Manuscripts, British Library, accessed 11/03/20, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_4_A_XIV, f. 106v. Gneuss and Lapidge no. 455; Ker no. 250. Citations from Dobbie.

¹² “Cotton MS Caligula A.vii”, Digitised Manuscripts, British Library, accessed 11/03/20, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Caligula_A_VII, ff. 176r-178r. Ker, no. 137; Gneuss and Lapidge, no. 308. Citations from Dobbie.

¹³ F. Heinzer, “Holy Text or Object of Display? Functions and Guises of the Psalter in the Middle Ages”, *BLR* 21 (2008), 37-47; P. Pulsiano, “The Prefatory Material of London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius E. xviii”, in *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts and Their Heritage*, ed. P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne (Aldershot, 1998), 85-116; E. Solopova, “The Liturgical Psalter in Medieval Europe”, in *Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Conflict and Convergence*, ed. S. E. Gillingham (Oxford, 2013), 89-104; M. J. Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter* (Turnhout, 2014), 164-7. See also C. Arthur, ‘Charms’, *Liturgies and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2018).

¹⁴ On pastoral care, see J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), 452; F. Tinti, ed., *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2005), 1-17. On ‘womb to tomb security’, see Heinzer, 40.

Traditional studies of the charms have treated them as survivals of English paganism, but these texts are clearly sanctioned incantations and sanctioned ritual, a productive application of Christian belief.¹⁵ There is no indication that these charms were once pagan texts that have been ‘Christianized’ in their current form; it is impossible to ‘recover’ a pre-Christian text from a poem copied down in the eleventh century with any degree of empirical confidence. Many scholars have suggested instead that the charms are ‘syncretic’ texts, representing a blend of Christian practice and Anglo-Germanic folk belief.¹⁶ However, several hundred years after the conversion and in elite manuscript texts, any such ‘survivals’ are indistinguishable from ordinary elements of early medieval English Christian culture.¹⁷ The charms’ antagonists — elves, dwarves, supernatural disease agents emerging from wild spaces and burial mounds — might be particular to early medieval England, but are consistently and easily treated as postlapsarian demons in a Christian cosmos. The metrical charms belong to a broad grouping of mainstream Christian remedies, and there is nothing to suggest they were considered significantly heterodox.

¹⁵ On the charms as Christian practice, see D. E. Gay, “On the Christianity of Incantations”, in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. J. Roper (Basingstoke, 2004), 32-46; J. Paz, “Magic That Works: Performing Scientia in the Old English *Metrical Charms* and Poetic *Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*”, *JMEMS* 45 (2015), 219-43; R. M. Liuzza, “Prayers and/or Charms Addressed to the Cross”, in *Cross and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies in Honor of George Hardin Brown*, ed. K. L. Jolly *et al.* (Morgantown, 2007), 276-320; K. L. Jolly, “Tapping the Power of the Cross: Who and For Whom?”, in *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. C. E. Karkov *et al.* (Woodbridge, 2006), 58-79. Works that assume the charms are pagan include Cockayne, *Leechdoms*; Grattan and Singer, *Magic*; Rubin, *Medicine*; F. Grendon, “The Anglo-Saxon Charms”, *JAF* 22 (1909), 105-237; A. R. Skemp, “The Old English Charms”, *MLR* 6 (1911), 289-301; G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague, 1948); S. O. Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old English Poetry* (New York, 1989); as well as numerous other studies cited throughout this thesis.

¹⁶ J. D. Niles, “Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), 126-46; T. D. Hill, “The Rod of Protection and the Witches’ Ride: Christian and Germanic Syncretism in Two Old English Metrical Charms”, *JEGP* 111 (2012), 145-68; D. Banham, “The Old English Nine Herbs Charm”, in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. M. Rubin (Princeton, 2009), 189-93; L. K. Arnovick, *Written Reliquaries: The Resonance of Orality in Medieval English Texts* (Amsterdam, 2006), 89-90, 104; E. Stürzl, “Die christlichen Elemente in den altenglischen Zaubersegen”, *Sprache* 6 (1960), 75-93; L. A. Garner, “Anglo-Saxon Charms in Performance”, *OT* 19 (2004), 20-42; Pollington, 21. K. L. Jolly has written extensively on the charms and while some of her earlier work (*Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* [Chapel Hill, 1996] and “Anglo-Saxon Charms in the Context of a Christian Worldview”, *JMH* 11 [1985], 279-93) asserts the syncretism of these texts, her more recent work (e.g. “Tapping”, “Margins”) treats them as mainstream Christian practices.

¹⁷ A. Meaney, “Extra-Medical Elements in Anglo-Saxon Medicine”, *SHM* 24 (2011), 41-56; V. M. Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2012), 38-40.

The most recent study of Old English charms, Ciaran Arthur's 2019 monograph '*Charms*', *Liturgies and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England*, suggests instead that Old English remedies and rituals are not only thoroughly Christian texts, but in fact liturgical ones, because some of these texts are copied alongside the liturgy or contain liturgical and scriptural quotations.¹⁸ However, while the metrical charms certainly represent permissible Christian ritual and were available to ecclesiastical performers, to call these texts 'liturgical' is arguably to stretch the definition of 'liturgy' itself. These texts are not scripts for public worship, but rituals for personal use. They do not constitute a regularly-performed office or religious service.¹⁹ Moreover, many of the metrical charms do not contain liturgical quotations or references, and even those charms that gesture towards liturgical material also contain self-evidently non-liturgical material: phrases commonly found in heroic poetry, traditional incantatory formulae found in other charms in the antique and medieval periods, or translations of Latin medical material. The manuscripts in which they are written — medical codices, Bede's *Historia*, religious commentaries — are certainly Christian collections, but not liturgical ones in the strict sense. Rather than treat the charms as 'liturgical', I argue that we should approach them as part of a vast 'penumbra' of paraliturgical texts permissible in the early medieval English church for practical devotion.²⁰ Early medieval English religious offices, medical texts, prayers, and practical Christian rituals can be thought of as circles in

¹⁸ Arthur follows H. Gittos (*Liturgy, Architecture and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* [Oxford, 2013]) in arguing for a broad definition of 'liturgy'. Gittos also suggests the charms are liturgical ("Researching the History of Rites", in *Understanding Medieval Liturgy: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. H. Gittos and S. Hamilton [Farnham, 2015], 13-37).

¹⁹ For this definition of 'liturgy', see J. Black, "The Divine Office and Private Devotion in the Latin West", and E. B. Vitz, "The Liturgy and Vernacular Literature", both in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, 2nd ed., ed. E. A. Matter and T. J. Heffernan (Kalamazoo, 2005), 45-71, 503-63.

²⁰ Vitz, 505; Olsan, "Marginality", 145; Jolly, "Margins", 140, and "Tapping", 61-73; Liuzza, "Prayers", 319. Some scholars attempt to distinguish between prayers and charms (see, for example, L. M. C. Weston, "The Language of Magic in Two Old English Metrical Charms", *NM* 86 [1985], 176-86; L. Bragg, "The Modes of the Old English Metrical Charms", *TC* 16 [1992], 3-23; Roper, *Charms*, 16) but there is a heavy overlap between these genres (noted in R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* [Cambridge, 1989]; R. Fisher, "Writing Charms: The Transmission and Performance of Charms in Anglo-Saxon England" [unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield, 2011]).

an overlapping generic Venn diagram. The charms are compatible with, occasionally influenced by, and conceptually and codicologically adjacent to the liturgy, but are themselves ‘a heterogenous lot’, as Lisa Weston puts it.²¹ The metrical charms represent a composite category of text, and each charm consists of a different mixture of liturgical, scriptural, or devotional references, religious and heroic poetry, and traditional magical formulae with a probable oral history.

The twelve metrical charms vary in register, tone, content, and the implied practitioners for which they are intended, and only certain subsets of the charms can be considered to be textually related to one another. Yet they do nonetheless form a loose corpus, bound by their similar semiotic functions, a shared worldview, their mix of presumably traditional and obviously literate material, and the simple fact that they all contain alliterating verse where hundreds of other Old English remedies, rituals, and incantations do not. Scholars of charm studies often note that the magical effect of an incantation depends on oral performance and repetitive patterning, on the use of particular sound-play and language.²² The language of the metrical charms is intended to accomplish a specific purpose, and therefore its form is relevant to its practical project. The present thesis subjects this language to stylistic and metrical analysis for the first time. Before embarking upon such a study, however, it will be beneficial to examine the features of normative Old English verse, and discuss the ways in which the charms both adhere to and deviate from that standard.

The Metre of the Charms

Although the field of Old English metrical studies is populated by mutually exclusive

²¹ Weston, “Language”, 176.

²² E.g. J. Roper, “Towards a Poetics, Rhetorics, and Proxemics of Verbal Charms”, *Folklore* 24 (2003), 7-49; J. M. Foley, “Epic and Charm in Old English and Serbo-Croatian Oral Tradition”, *CC* 2 (1980), 71-92.

theories of scansion, certain governing principles of Old English verse can nevertheless be determined with some certainty.²³ Old English poetic metre depends on the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables: some bear full stress (/), others are without stress (x), and some bear secondary or tertiary stress (\). Two short, open syllables can function metrically as one long, stressed syllable, a phenomenon referred to as resolution (↷). Stress falls on the stem syllable of Old English words. Nouns, adjectives, full semantic adverbs, and non-finite verbs are almost always stressed. Proclitics (prefixes, prepositions, articles, some adverbs and conjunctions, possessive pronouns) are almost always unstressed. Particles (finite verbs, some adjectives and adverbs) sometimes bear stress and sometimes do not. Particles clustered at the beginning of a clause usually do not bear metrical stress, but when removed from this clause-initial position, they usually do, a regularity referred to as Kuhn's Law.²⁴

The basic unit of Old English poetry is the verse or half-line, which most often consists of four or more syllables and has four metrical 'positions', that is, lifts (stressed syllables and resolved stresses) and drops (one or more unstressed syllables). Certain verses with more than four positions are permitted as hypermetrics.²⁵ Up to two unstressed syllables can precede the two main stresses of a metrical type that ideally or usually begins with a stressed syllable; 'anacrusis' is the term given to these unstressed syllables. Anacrusis longer than two syllables, depending on its length and the arrangement of the subsequent lifts and

²³ On these principles, see D. G. Scragg, "The Nature of Old English Verse", in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), 55-70; J. Terasawa, *Old English Metre: An Introduction* (Toronto, 2011); E. G. Stanley, *In the Foreground: Beowulf* (Cambridge, 1994), 120-21, 128-32.

²⁴ H. Kuhn, "Zur Wortstellung und -betonung im Altgermanischen", *BGSL* 57 (1933), 1-109.

²⁵ M. E. Hartman, "The Form and Style of Gnomonic Hypermetrics", *SMP* 1 (2014), 68-99; T. A. Bredehoft, "The Three Varieties of Old English Hypermetric Versification", *NQ* 248 (2003), 153-6; A. J. Bliss, "The Origin and Structure of the Old English Hypermetric Line", *NQ* 217 (1972), 242-8.

drops, creates either a hypermetric verse or a metrical irregularity.²⁶ Two verses, connected by alliteration and with a metrical caesura between them, make up the Old English long line. Generally, the first stressed syllable in the first half-line (the a-verse) must alliterate, and the second may alliterate. In the second half-line (the b-verse), the first stress must alliterate and the second generally should not alliterate. Single half-lines do exist in Old English poetry and may be employed for aesthetic effect.²⁷

The system of Old English poetic scansion with the highest descriptive validity — that is, the system that accounts for the greatest number of verses in the Old English corpus in the greatest detail — is that put forward by Eduard Sievers and elaborated by Alan Bliss.²⁸ Sievers–Bliss remains the standard system of scansion for Old English poetry, has led to the discovery of numerous metrical regularities, and allows for, as R. D. Fulk puts it, ‘very little ambiguity ... [and] great subtlety’.²⁹ Even those metrical scholars who propose entirely different systems of scansion admit to the descriptive power and internal cohesion of the

²⁶ T. Cable, “Constraints on Anacrusis in Old English Meter”, *MP* 69 (1971), 97-104; Bredehoft, “Varieties”, 155; Hartman, “Hypermetrics”, 75; E. Kyte, “On the Composition of Hypermetric Verses in Old English”, *MP* 71 (1973), 160-65.

²⁷ A. J. Bliss, “Single Half-Lines in Old English Poetry”, *NQ* 216 (1971), 442-9. See *Christ and Satan* ll. 145a, 204a, 312a, etc.; *The Battle of Maldon* l. 172a; *Daniel* l. 288a; *Elene* l. 22a. All citations of Old English poetry, unless otherwise noted, are from G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, eds, *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, 6 vols (New York, 1931-53).

²⁸ E. Sievers, *Altgermanische Metrik* (Halle, 1893); A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1967). T. Cable (*The Meter and Melody of Beowulf* [Urbana, 1974] and *The English Alliterative Tradition* [Philadelphia, 1991]) also expands on the Sieversian system, but his syllabic restrictions on Old English verse (which describe *Beowulf* well) do the charms a particular disservice, as these texts contain numerous expanded drops. J. C. Pope (*The Rhythm of Beowulf: An Interpretation of the Normal and Hypermetric Verse-Forms in Old English Poetry*, rev. ed. [New Haven, 1966]) draws on Sieversian metre but assumes that isochrony is at work in Old English verse, which cannot be conclusively demonstrated. H. Momma (*The Composition of Old English Poetry* [Cambridge, 1997]) draws attention to the contribution of syntax to an essentially Sieversian model of metre. The existence of resolution (R. J. Pascual, “Sievers, Bliss, Fulk, and Old English Metrical Theory”, in *Old English Philology: Studies in Honour of R. D. Fulk*, ed. L. Neidorf et al. [Woodbridge, 2016], 17-33; R. D. Fulk, “Early Middle English Evidence for Old English Meter: Resolution in *Poema Morale*”, *JGL* 14 [2002], 331-55) demonstrates that Sievers’ four-position rule is essentially correct.

²⁹ R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, 1992), 54. For regularities discovered through Sievers, see L. Neidorf and R. J. Pascual, “Nicolay Yakovlev’s Theory of Old English Meter: A Reassessment”, *Neophilologus* (forthcoming).

Sieversian system.³⁰ Bliss' expansion of Sievers permits 'light' three-position verses in certain patterns, an allowance with which some scholars disagree but which is essential to the scansion of the metrical charms and other unusual Old English poetry.³¹ I therefore use Sievers–Bliss to analyse the charms: pointing out the ways the charms do and do not hold to this 'standard' metrical model situates them in relation to other Old English poems, provides a clear account of their metrical features, and puts forward an analysis widely accessible to scholars of Old English literature as well as metre. Where necessary, I point out the controversial features (e.g. foot division and its correlation, or lack thereof, with word boundaries; the scansion of alliterating undisplaced finite verbs) and inadequacies of Sievers–Bliss, but the system paints a broadly accurate picture of Old English metrical structure.

Rival theories do not satisfactorily account for significant regularities in Old English metre. Geoffrey Russom's word-foot theory, for example, considers a line to consist of two feet, each one aligned with an Old English word, and treats certain mid-verse drops as extrametrical anacrusis.³² Yet Edwin Duncan has demonstrated that Old English metre is sensitive to drop expansion: the unstressed syllables within a line are not, in fact, extrametrical.³³ Thomas Bredehoft's theory of late Old English verse is so non-restrictive as to be empirically unsustainable; his system of scansion can be made to describe almost any text, including, as Eric Weiskott has shown, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*.³⁴ Most recently, Nicolay Yakovlev has proposed that Old English metre is morphologically

³⁰ T. A. Bredehoft, *Early English Metre* (Toronto, 2005), 17; B. R. Hutcheson, *Old English Poetic Metre* (Cambridge, 1995), 31; N. Yakovlev, "The Development of Alliterative Metre from Old to Middle English" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 2008), 26, 33.

³¹ For disagreement on light verses, see Cable, *Melody*, 21; Yakovlev, 53; Pascual, "Sievers", 21.

³² G. R. Russom, *Old English Meter and Linguistic Theory* (Cambridge, 1987).

³³ E. Duncan, "Weak Stress and Poetic Constraints in Old English Verse", *JEGP* 92 (1993), 495-508.

³⁴ Articulated in Bredehoft, *Metre, and Authors, Audiences, and Old English Verse* (Toronto, 2009). See E. Weiskott, *English Alliterative Verse: Poetic Tradition and Literary History* (Cambridge, 2016), 72.

invariable, rather than accentual.³⁵ Yet linguistic prosody determines Old English metrical patterns — varying the placement of the same word in a verse can change its stress — so the same morphemes do not always bear or fail to bear stress.³⁶ Even Yakovlev (and Weiskott, who seeks to demonstrate the validity of Yakovlev’s system) admits that Old English verse must have some accentual features.³⁷ Yakovlev also suggests that alliteration is inessential to the Old English long line, but as Duncan’s study of expanded drops demonstrates, and as numerous other studies of Old English metre acknowledge, alliteration in fact determines stress and provides the essential structure of the Old English long line.³⁸ Even the highly unusual metrical charms do not disregard alliteration as a principle, and those lines that lack regular cross-caesura alliteration generally feature assonance, rhyme, or verse-internal alliteration that compensates for the absence, suggesting an awareness of cross-caesura alliteration as structurally essential. Yakovlev’s scansion of hypermetrics is highly flexible; as a result, a handful of lines in the charms that are irregular in Sievers–Bliss would be considered regular by Yakovlev, but this is due to his expansive definition of the hypermetric verse rather than the descriptive validity of morphological metre.³⁹

Sievers suggests that non-hypermetric Old English verses fall into five basic metrical types, and indeed the vast majority of Old English verses conform to these metrical patterns:

Type A: / x / x (e.g. *Beowulf* l. 11a, *gomban gyldan*)
 Type B: x / x / (e.g. *Dream of the Rood* l. 1a, *ic swefna cyst*)
 Type C: x / / x (e.g. *Beowulf* l. 4a, *oft Scyld Scefing*)

³⁵ Yakovlev, 81.

³⁶ See Neidorf and Pascual.

³⁷ Yakovlev, 82; Weiskott, 26. Another work that seeks to support Yakovlev is I. Cornelius, *Reconstructing Alliterative Verse: The Pursuit of a Medieval Meter* (Cambridge, 2017).

³⁸ R. J. Pascual, “Oral Tradition and the History of English Alliterative Verse”, *SN* 89 (2017), 250-60; Cable, *Melody*, 67. All metrical systems except Yakovlev’s acknowledge the structural importance of alliteration in determining scansion.

³⁹ The following verses in the charms scan in Yakovlev and not Sievers–Bliss: Charm 1 ll. 12a, 37a; Charm 2 l. 22b. The following b-verses would scan in Yakovlev’s system if they were a-verses: Charm 2 l. 45b; Charm 8 l. 2b; Charm 11 ll. 1b, 37b. Some hypermetrics in the charms are so unusual as to defy even Yakovlev’s expansive system (e.g. Charm 4 ll. 23-4; Charm 9 l. 14b).

Type D1: // \ x (e.g. *Beowulf* l. 613a, *cwen Hroðgares*)
 Type D2: // x \ (e.g. *Beowulf* l. 998a, *eal inneward*)
 Type E: / \ x / (e.g. *The Wanderer* l. 36b, *Wyn eal gedreas*)

Bliss expands these five basic types to cover a wide variety of metrical arrangements.

Sievers' types C, D, and E are consistently used throughout the corpus to mark rhetorical high points, moments of narrative drama or thematic importance, and exclamatory, punctuating clauses.⁴⁰ This trend suggests that early medieval English poets did, in fact, perceive a difference between the regular trochaic and iambic patterns of A and B verses and the clashing and falling stress patterns (rare in normal speech) of C, D, and E types.⁴¹ Bliss accounts for hypermetric lines in significant detail, across two major types: hypermetrics with more than two fully-stressed syllables, and hypermetrics with permitted long anacrusis.⁴² Hypermetrics also seem to be used for aesthetic purposes, slowing down the pace of the verse for high-detail narration with dignity and emphasis.⁴³

Given this correlation of metre with poetic effect, and the fact that alliteration and metrical stress seem to link words semantically and thematically in the Old English long line, it is clear that early medieval English poets were not merely concerned with structural alliteration in their composition.⁴⁴ Indeed, numerous scholars have amassed significant evidence that the following poetic techniques were used for rhetorical effect by early

⁴⁰ Scragg, 62-4. See for example *Beowulf* l. 11b; *The Wanderer* ll. 23-5, 42-4; *Christ III* ll. 1269-71; *Cædmon's Hymn* l. 1b; *Christ III* ll. 877b; *The Battle of Maldon* ll. 42-3, 130b, 230, 309-10; *Daniel* ll. 362-80; *Judith* ll. 142-8; *The Seafarer* ll. 19-22, 58-61. Sievers' five types are listed in descending order of commonality. The use of C, D, and E types varies by text: *Daniel*, *Exodus*, *Elene*, and *Judith* range from 33-40% C/D/E types, while *Judgment Day II* has only 4.2%. See T. Cable, "Metrical Style as Evidence for the Date of *Beowulf*", in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase (Toronto, 1997), 77-82; Momma, 19.

⁴¹ Cable, *Melody*, 72.

⁴² Bliss, *Metre*, 129-32.

⁴³ Hartman, "Hypermetrics", 73, 97; Terasawa, *Introduction*, 47; C. B. Hieatt, "*Judith* and the Literary Function of Old English Hypermetric Lines", *SN* 52 (1980), 251-7; M. D. Coker, "*The Dream of the Rood* and the Function of Hypermetric Lines", *NQ* 66 (2019), 8-19.

⁴⁴ R. Quirk, "Poetic Language and Old English Metre", in *Early English and Norse Studies Presented to Hugh Smith in Honour of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. A. Brown and P. Foote (London, 1963), 150-71; R. A. Lewis, "Old English Poetry: Alliteration and Structural Interlace", *LS* 6 (1973), 196-205 and "Plurilinear Alliteration in Old English Poetry", *TSL* 16 (1975), 598-602; A. Orchard, "Re-Reading *The Wanderer*: The Value of Cross-References", in *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J. E. Cross*, ed. T. N. Hall *et al.* (Morgantown, 2002), 1-26.

medieval English poets, listed here for convenience in no particular order:⁴⁵

- extra alliteration: three alliterating syllables in a half-line, cross alliteration (ABAB) across the long line, transverse alliteration (BAAB) across the long line
- plurilinear alliteration: two or more long lines in a row alliterating on the same letter
- enjambed alliteration: a non-alliterating stressed syllable in the preceding line sets the alliteration for the subsequent line
- use of poetic vocabulary, especially compound nouns and *hapax legomena*, and collocations
- assonance and echoing
- rhyme
- paronomasia
- anaphora
- envelope patterns, parallelism, and other forms of structured repetition
- variation
- polyptoton (repetition of words with a shared root) and homeoteleuton (repetition of word endings)

These features are used to highlight particular words and ideas, compare and contrast images, draw attention to themes, emphasize dramatic moments, and highlight sections in structural poetic designs. Some scholars dismiss these features as irrelevant because they occur

⁴⁵ See for example A. Orchard, "Artful Alliteration in Anglo-Saxon Song and Story", *Anglia* 113 (1995), 429-63; F. Leneghan, "Making the Psalter Sing: The Old English *Metrical Psalms*, Rhythm and *Ruminatio*", in *The Psalms and Medieval English Literature: From the Conversion to the Reformation*, ed. T. Atkin and F. Leneghan (Cambridge, 2017), 173-207; H. Bennett, "Extra Alliteration as a Stylistic Device in *Beowulf*" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brown University, 1980); N. L. McFadyen, "Reading Between the Lines: Patterns of Alliteration in Old English Poetry", in *Literary and Historical Perspectives of the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 1981 SEMA Meeting*, ed. P. W. Cummins *et al.* (Morgantown, 1982), 148-55; S. B. Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (London, 1972), 50-54; A. C. Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (New York, 1935); E. M. Tyler, *Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England* (York, 2006), 38-103, 132; Quirk, 151-60; Scragg, 62-8; R. A. Lewis, "Alliteration and Old English Metre", *MÆ* 42 (1973), 119-30, "Plurilinear", and "Poetry"; D. Cronan, "The Poetics of Poetic Words in Old English", in *Old English Philology: Studies in Honour of R. D. Fulk*, ed. L. Neidorf *et al.* (Woodbridge, 2016), 256-75; C. B. Heatt, "Alliterative Patterns in the Hypermetric Lines of Old English Verse", *MP* 71 (1974), 237-42; H. Pilch, "Syntactic Prerequisites for the Study of Old English Poetry", *LS* 3 (1970), 51-61; A. Riedinger, "The Old English Formula in Context", *Speculum* 60 (1985), 294-317; J. M. Hill, ed., *On the Aesthetics of Beowulf and Other Old English Poems* (Toronto, 2010); R. F. Leslie, "Analysis of Stylistic Devices and Effects in Anglo-Saxon Literature", in *Stil- und Formprobleme in der Literatur: Vorträge des VII Kongresses der Internationalen Vereinigung für moderne Sprachen und Literaturen in Heidelberg*, ed. P. Böckmann (Heidelberg, 1959), 129-36; R. Frank, "Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse", *Speculum* 47 (1972), 207-26; J. Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto, 2008); M. J. Toswell, "Polyptoton in Old English Texts", in *Early English Culture and Meter: The Influence of G. R. Russom*, ed. M. J. Toswell and L. Brady (Kalamazoo, 2016), 111-30; E. R. Kintgen, "Echoic Repetition in Old English Poetry, Especially *The Dream of the Rood*", *NM* 75 (1974), 202-23; M. Cornell, "Varieties of Repetition in Old English Poetry, Especially in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*", *Neophilologus* 65 (1981), 292-307; J. Ehrstine, "Patterns of Sound in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *RSSW* 33 (1965), 151-62; E. G. Stanley, "Rhymes in English Medieval Verse: From Old English to Middle English", in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. E. D. Kennedy *et al.* (Cambridge, 1988), 19-54; M. Griffith, "Extra Alliteration on Stressed Syllables in Old English Poetry: Types, Uses, and Evolution", *ASE* 47 (2018), 69-176.

irregularly, but verse ornamentation is by its nature irregular: ornament highlights particular poetic moments when used judiciously, and not all lines have the same semantic and poetic value.⁴⁶ Style itself is meaningful deviation from usual linguistic or poetic forms. Patterns of ornamental alliteration appear in poems widely considered to be of high aesthetic merit, apparently acting as a form of aural punctuation; they are unlikely to be errors or accidents.⁴⁷ A poet could not produce, for example, the virtuosic alliterative repetitions of *The Phoenix* ll. 460-80 by failing to pay attention:

flyhð yfla gehywlc,
 grimme gieltas for Godes egsan,
 glædmod gyneð þæt he godra mæst,
 dæda gefremme; þæm biþ Dryhten scyld,
 in siþa gehwane sigora Waldend,
 weruda Wilgiefa. Þis þa wyrta sind,
 wæstma blede þa se wilda fugel
 somnað under swegle side ond wide
 to his wicstowe, þær he wundrum fæst
 wið niþa gehwam nest gewyrceð.
 Swa nu in þam wicum willan fremmað
 mode ond mægne meotudes cempan
 mærdða tilgað; þæs him meorde wile
 ece ælmihtig eadge forgildan.

To assume that extra alliteration and other ornamental devices were irrelevant to Old English poets and their audiences is to assume that a poet's choice of words is entirely random — an insupportable view — and that early medieval English audiences would be somehow unable to pick up on the kind of echoing that even young children enjoy in nursery rhymes.⁴⁸ Indeed, we assume that those who read or heard Old English poetry picked up on the repetition of initial consonants in structural alliteration, and it would be difficult for an audience so attuned to ignore non-structural alliteration. Rafael Pascual has recently demonstrated that Old

⁴⁶ Orchard, "Alliteration", 431. For dismissals of ornamental alliteration, see for example R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork, and J. D. Niles, eds, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th ed. (Toronto, 2008), clxi; R. B. LePage, "Alliterative Patterns as a Test of Style in Old English Poetry", *JEGP* 58 (1959), 434-41.

⁴⁷ Orchard, "Alliteration", 434. See, for example, *Beowulf* ll. 1, 39, 1400; *The Dream of the Rood* ll. 24-7; *Juliana* ll. 345-50; *Elene* ll. 61-75; *The Phoenix* ll. 460-81.

⁴⁸ Noted in D. Donoghue, *How the Anglo-Saxons Read Their Poems* (Philadelphia, 2018), 35; Griffith, "Alliteration", 88.

English metre was designed to enable audiences to follow alliterative patterns across the long line; Daniel Donoghue has explored the myriad ways in which early medieval English audiences with differing levels of poetic competence could have internalized the conventions of verse.⁴⁹ Metre and ornament were designed to be noticed. It follows, too, that lines that do not adhere to the general rules of Old English verse would have been noticeable to a medieval audience because they violate expectation, and this kind of poetic disruption can be, and arguably was, used in Old English poetry for aesthetic effect.⁵⁰ Metre is therefore an essential tool for Old English literary analysis, an element of poetic style and, in some cases, representative of conscious choices made by poets. Very few studies have ever used metrical scansion as a tool for drawing literary conclusions, but metrical analysis makes stylistic and literary analysis more rigorous, thorough, and precise.⁵¹

If style is meaningful difference, then stylometric analysis has something particular to offer texts like the metrical charms. Most studies that comment on their metre treat the charms as poor verse, badly composed and incorrectly transmitted.⁵² Even Judith Vaughan-Sterling, the first scholar to lay out an argument for the charms' aesthetic merit, considers the

⁴⁹ Pascual, "Tradition", 256-8; Donoghue, *Poems*, 5. See also Quirk, 150-2; Griffith, "Alliteration", 88.

⁵⁰ Quirk, 155-6; Griffith, "Alliteration", 137; J. D. Niles, "Editing Beowulf: What Can Study of the Ballads Tell Us?", *OT 9* (1994), 440-67 [450-52]. Examples of unusual lines arguably used for poetic effect include *Wulf and Eadwacer* ll. 3, 8, 17, 19; *The Riming Poem* l. 77; *Christ and Satan* ll. 145, 204; numerous lines in *Maxims I* and *II* cited in Bliss, "Half-Lines", 444; *Solomon and Saturn I* ll. 108-26 and the subsequent transition to prose (text in D. Anlezark, ed. and trans., *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* [Woodbridge, 2009]).

⁵¹ For studies of Old English verse style that do not attempt to draw literary conclusions, see D. Donoghue, *Style in Old English Poetry: The Text of the Auxiliary* (New Haven, 1987); C. E. Karkov and G. H. Brown, eds, *Anglo-Saxon Styles* (New York, 2003); D. G. Calder, ed., *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style* (Berkeley, 1979). C. B. Pasternack (*The Textuality of Old English Poetry* [Cambridge, 1995], 63-5) briefly uses metrical analysis in a stylistic and literary close reading, but is a rare example. This dearth of studies is noted in R. J. Pascual, "The Study of Old English Metrical Style", in *The Study of Style: Essays in English Language and Literature in Honour of José Luis Martínez-Dueñas*, ed. M. A. M. Lombardo (Granada, 2019), 29-39.

⁵² E.g. M. Nelson, *Structures of Opposition in Old English Poems* (Amsterdam, 1989), 49, and "Wordsige and Worsige: Speech Acts in Three Old English Charms", *LS 17* (1984), 57-66; Hill, "Rod", 155; Storms, *passim*; G. W. Abernethy, "The Germanic Metrical Charms" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1983), 15; Pollington, 221; T. Beechy, *The Poetics of Old English* (Farnham, 2010), 113. The vast number of emendations to the texts proposed by their various editors also testifies to this approach.

charms to be only ‘related’ to verse.⁵³ The metrical charms contain lines with patterns unattested in any system of metrical scansion; they favour both lines with expanded drops and irregularly long anacrusis, and verses that have fewer than four positions — exhibiting, as Jonathan Roper notes, ‘both sub-metricity and hyper-metricity’.⁵⁴ The charms include lines without regular cross-caesura alliteration,⁵⁵ lines that alliterate on the second stressed syllable of the b-verse, and lines that do not adhere to Kuhn’s Laws. The charms also feature more end-stopping and less enjambment than many other Old English poems — that is, the ends of lines are more likely to coincide with the ends of clauses or sentences, an effect of the charms’ generally straightforward, non-elaborative syntax.⁵⁶ Yet, remarkably, these irregularities almost always occur without any accompanying deficiencies in sense, grammar, or syntax: we do not have evidence to suggest that the charms’ inventive metre is a sign of textual corruption, and therefore we cannot reasonably dismiss or emend their metrical features.⁵⁷ Equally importantly, despite their moments of irregularity, the majority of lines in the metrical charms can be scanned, and many of them use formulae, collocations, and compounds found in other Old English poetry, as well as particular poetic techniques like variation. They are undoubtedly verse texts. The charms contain significant ornamental

⁵³ J. A. Vaughan-Sterling, “The Anglo-Saxon ‘Metrical Charms’: Poetry as Ritual”, *JEGP* 82 (1983), 186-200. See also P. Tornaghi, “Anglo-Saxon Charms and the Language of Magic”, *Ævum* 84 (2010), 439-64.

⁵⁴ Roper, “Poetics”, 11. Many verses in the charms can be scanned in Sievers–Bliss either as as A types with irregular anacrusis or as regular hypermetrics. I have scanned them as hypermetrics and labelled them as ‘hypermetric A’ types throughout.

⁵⁵ When cross-caesura alliteration is lacking, it is technically not possible to say for certain that two verses belong together as a long line. However, nowhere else in the Old English corpus do two single half-lines appear in a row. There are almost never any signs of lacunae (which would suggest missing b-verses) in the non-alliterating lines in the charms. More importantly, lines without cross-caesura alliteration often exhibit compensatory ornamentation that binds the two verses together, suggesting that the poet conceived of the half-lines as constituting a poetic unit. I therefore scan lines without cross-caesura alliteration as long lines. Scansion of such lines is necessarily conjectural without alliteration as a guide.

⁵⁶ J. Roper, “The Metre of the Old English Metrical Charms”, in *Oral Charms in Structural and Comparative Light: Proceedings of the Conference of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming 27-29 October 2011, Moscow*, ed. T. Mikhailova *et al.* (Moscow, 2011), 116-21.

⁵⁷ On the importance of only emending where sense or grammatical deficiencies occur, see Niles, “Editing”, 451-2.

features lauded as aesthetic achievements in other texts: extra alliteration, rhyme, assonance, homeoteleuton, polyptoton, echoing, repetitive rhetorical structures, parallelism, and a profusion of C, D, and E types. This high level of stylistic complexity precludes us from dismissing the charms as ‘bad poetry’.

As early as 1983, Vaughan-Sterling argued that the charms should be analysed as literary texts, but very few studies have heeded her call. Those scholars who examine the charms’ stylistic ornamentation generally conclude these texts are ‘unthinking’, ‘drowsy’, and meaningless nonsense, whose poetic features serve only to hypnotize the patient into submission and enact the placebo effect.⁵⁸ Yet the metrical charms are not arbitrary sound, but narrative verse, describing characters (however elusive) and plots (however brief) characterized by dramatic conflict. They contain powerful, if enigmatic, imagery that conveys meaning and invokes themes, concerns, and anxieties that appear in other Old English poetry and in the prose texts of the Old English medical corpus. In the most detailed (though still preliminary) studies of the charms’ metre to date, Roper concludes that ‘producing significant sound’ is more important for the charms than both referential meaning and metre.⁵⁹ As this thesis will demonstrate, however, the charms’ ornamentation serves not only to generate aesthetic effects but also to highlight their central themes, ideologies, and concerns. The use of extra alliteration, repetition, heavy and hypermetric lines, rhyme, assonance, and other kinds of poetic patterning emphasize the narrative importance of, and connections between,

⁵⁸ Nelson, “Wordsige”, 63; Weston, “Language”, 185; V. Symons, “Doing Things with Words: Language and Perception in Old English Riddles and Charms”, in *Sensory Perception in the Medieval West*, ed. S. Thomson and M. D. J. Bintley (Turnhout, 2016), 123-40; H. D. Chickering, “The Literary Magic of *Wið Færstice*”, *Viator* 2 (1971), 83-104; N. Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington, 1976), 124-6; S. O. Glosecki, “Blow These Vipers From Me: Mythic Magic in the Nine Herbs Charm”, in *Essays in Old, Middle, Modern English and Old Icelandic: In Honor of Raymond P. Tripp Jr.*, ed. L. C. Gruber *et al.* (Lampeter, 2000), 91-123; Beechy, *Poetics*, 86, and “Bind and Loose: Aesthetics and the Word in Old English Law, Charm, and Riddle”, in *On the Aesthetics of Beowulf and Other Old English Poems*, ed. J. M. Hill (Toronto, 2010), 43-63. The text cited by Beechy as an example of ‘nonsense’ is in fact Old Irish (H. Meroney, “Irish in the Old English Charms”, *Speculum* 20 (1945), 172-82).

⁵⁹ Roper, “Metre”, 118, and “Poetics”, 11.

agents, actions, and concepts, while the charms' imagery and word choice bear relevant poetic connotations and connect the charms aesthetically to other Old English poetic texts.

Roper's suggestion that the production of significant, magical, or aesthetically-pleasing sound is more important than regular metre, however, is a useful one. The present thesis demonstrates that the metrical 'irregularities' of the charms consistently appear in three kinds of locations within the verse. Irregular lines appear in the charms at moments of dramatic transition, such as the introduction of a new antagonist, or a change of focus or scene. Irregular half-lines also occur in lists and other plurilinear rhetorical devices, accommodating repetition, variation, and other poetic structures at the expense of metrical strictness. Perhaps most importantly, metrical irregularities appear in lines which employ magical formulae found in the charms' ancient, medieval, and modern Indo-European analogues. These formulae are evidently traditional and non-random, and their use in a given charm text is apparently essential to practical function. Roper notes that 'any old abracadabra' made up by the performer rarely suffices as a magical ritual, because the incantation has to be perceived as effective: the charm must use the right formula, the 'correct', prescribed magic words, to distinguish itself from everyday non-magical speech and maintain the legitimacy of a speech act.⁶⁰ In the metrical charms, then, the use of proscriptive formulae is generally more important than strict poetic regularity. Function takes precedence over metre, and practical purpose determines stylistic expression. Other Old English poems exhibiting significant metrical irregularities have been shaped by outside pressures, such as translation from Latin (e.g. the *Metrical Psalms*) or prose versification (the *Metres of Boethius*).⁶¹ The

⁶⁰ Roper, "Poetics", 17-18.

⁶¹ On the *Metrical Psalms*, see Leneghan, "Rhythm". On the *Metres of Boethius*, see M. Griffith, "The Composition of the *Metres*", in *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine, 2 vols (Oxford, 2009), I, 80-134.

main pressure shaping the charms is their need to conform to the demands of a functional ritual, and target certain beings, injuries, and illnesses effectively.

Emily Thornbury has recently proposed the existence of ‘sub-dialects’ in the Old English verse corpus, stylistically distinct modes of poetic composition identifiable in clusters of texts. She suggests that poems that do not strictly adhere to the type of metre found in *Beowulf* are not necessarily deficient or unskilled, but rather belong to a different poetic dialect and respond to a different set of stylistic exigencies.⁶² Though we cannot confidently ascribe to the metrical charms the geographic proximity and interpersonal influence found in Thornbury’s other sub-dialects, these twelve poems are united by milieu and — perhaps more importantly — by their extra-poetical purpose. Their stylistic ‘dialect’ is one of metrical flexibility and impressionism mandated by function: the charms’ poetic language must accommodate traditional formulae, incantatory rhetorical structures, and a plethora of ornamental flourishes that enhance the texts’ performative power and magical effectiveness. Scholars have often suggested in passing that the charms might constitute a different mode of Old English verse to that found in *Beowulf*, but an unrefined, ‘not very metrical’, ‘loose and rambling’ mode that represents ‘the death of normal rules’.⁶³ However, while the charms’ poetic features are closely related to those of the rest of the corpus, they are different enough to be meaningful; the language of deficiency, violation, and failure is here inaccurate and prejudicial. As this thesis will demonstrate, the poetic mode of the metrical charms is unusual in the Old English corpus, but consistently stylistically compelling.

⁶² E. V. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2014), 199-238. See also Weiskott, 43-6.

⁶³ Paz, 226; Roper, “Metre”, 118; Nelson, *Structures*, 49; Tornaghi, 462; Pollington, 221; Hill, “Rod”, 155; Griffith, “Alliteration”, 149-50; K. Malone, “The Old English Period (to 1100)”, in *A Literary History of England*, ed. A. C. Baugh, 4 vols (London, 1948), I, 1-105 [39].

Some scholars have identified a similarly flexible style in demonstrably late Old English verse, defined by non-Sieversian scansion patterns, few C, D, and E types, a freer distribution of unstressed syllables and anacrusis, final stress alliteration, an increase in rhyme, a reduction of secondary stress, the use of less poetic vocabulary and variation, and an increase in end-stopped lines with shorter clauses.⁶⁴ The charms share most, but not all, of these features; many of the charms use poetic vocabulary and variation, and all the charms have a notably high number of C, D, and E types. The charms are often end-stopped, but that feature has been used to date them early as well as late: both the late *Battle of Maldon* and the probably early *Widsið* show a preference for end-stopping.⁶⁵ The charms in their extant forms cannot be confidently dated late given the amount of evidently traditional material they contain, and we cannot assume, as Bredehoft does, that the charms were composed when they were first written down.⁶⁶ Nor can the charms in their extant forms be confidently dated early. The prescriptiveness of charm language does not mean these poems were not altered, combined with other texts, shortened or lengthened, and adjusted in a variety of ways during the course of their transmission, and indeed Charms 5 and 10 (discussed in Chapter 5) demonstrate the ways in which fixed language can create two different texts. The charms represent only a flexible and accommodating mode of verse that existed alongside ‘classical’ metre — certainly in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but likely earlier as well. This thesis

⁶⁴ Donoghue, *Poems*, 157; Thornbury, 231; Bredehoft, *Metre*, 7-10.

⁶⁵ G. M. Logsdon (“Maldon, Brunanburh, Finnsburh Fragment, and Finnsburh Episode: An Inquiry into Tradition and Alternative Styles in Old English Poetry” [unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, 1989], 249-73), Roper (*Charms*, 36), and Malone (“Period”, 39, and “Plurilinear Units in Old English Poetry”, *RES* 19 [1943], 201-4) suggest the charms’ end-stopping is a sign that they are pre-classical verse. Donoghue (*Poems*, 157) notes end-stopping in *Maldon* and *Widsið*. I. Lindquist (*Galdrar de gamla germanska trollsångernas stil, undersökt i samband med en svensk runinskrift från folkvandringstiden* [Gothenburg, 1923]) proposes that the charms exhibit a pan-Germanic charm metre, but these claims are refuted by Roper (“Metre”, 119-20) and F. Ohrt (“Om Galdersange”, *DS* 23 [1923], 186-9 and “Om Merseburgformlerne some Galder”, *DS* [1938], 125-37). K. Schneider (“Zu den ae. Zaubersprüchen *Wið Wennum* und *Wið Wæterælfadle*”, *Anglia* 87 [1969], 282-302; “Die Strophischen Strukturen und heidnisch-religiösen Elemente der ae. Zauberspruchsgruppe ‘wið beofðe’”, in *Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Theodor Spira*, ed. H. Viebrock and W. Erzgräber [Heidelberg, 1961], 38-56), attempts to find Old Norse metrical forms in the charms.

⁶⁶ Bredehoft, *Metre*, 152-4.

challenges the oft-made, somewhat circular argument that late Old English verse is metrically ‘deficient’ and that ‘deficient’ verse is necessarily late.

A stylometric analysis of the charms not only demonstrates their aesthetic value, but also elucidates their enigmatic content and highlights their central themes. The charms are all concerned with protecting human individuals, communities, and spaces, both conceptual and literal, from incursion by predatory nonhuman forces. These forces are visualized as invasive, physically aggressive agents, sometimes coded as sexually violative. Falling victim to disease or theft is equated with submission, defeat, and loss of control, and the charms express an anxiety over the ‘breaking open’ of the body that can also be found elsewhere in Old English literature. The charms reinstate boundaries, restore human bodies to inviolate wholeness, and harness monstrous forces to operate against one another in a striking interpretation of the magical principle of sympathy: ‘like affects like’.⁶⁷

The present study offers stylometric analyses of all twelve charms, arranged thematically. Chapter 1 investigates the short, enigmatic Charm 3 to introduce the charms’ core themes and concerns. Chapter 2 examines those charms that are particularly concerned with the threat posed to the body by incursive agents (4, 7, and 12), while Chapter 3 uses Charm 2 to illustrate the ideological potency of the principle of sympathy. Chapter 4 explores the gendered elements of the charms’ understanding of the dangerous (super)natural world and their consequences for the female patients and entities found in Charms 6 and 8. Chapter 5 turns to the theft charms (5, 10, and 9) to examine the ways in which the charms seek to expel ‘traitors’ from the human community, and Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with the two most ideologically ambitious charms in the corpus. While the majority of the metrical charms police the boundary between humanity and a dangerous, anti-Christian (super)natural,

⁶⁷ On the principle of sympathy in OE charms, see Nöth, 64-7.

Charms 1 and 11 attempt to eradicate that hostility entirely by asserting the prelapsarian power of mankind over the world, enabled by the power of the victorious Christ. Both of these charms treat quotidian, specific, individual suffering, and strive to ensure the survival of Christian humanity at large; their multivalence illuminates the way the early medieval English understood their place in the natural world, in salvation history, and in the divine plan of the cosmos.

Chapter One

Exploring Stylometric Study with Charm 3

The nine verse lines of Charm 3 are among the most enigmatic in the Old English corpus, and of all the metrical charms, this text is perhaps the most resistant to interpretation. It is therefore the ideal text with which to begin this study: a stylometric analysis of Charm 3 not only asserts the charm's poetic value, but in fact clarifies some aspects of its opaque action, demonstrating the extent of the insights such analysis can offer. This chapter will argue that Charm 3 exemplifies themes that unite the loose corpus of the metrical charms: illness is identified with the aggressive, sometimes sexually-coded, invasion of the human body by alien assailants. In the face of such an existential threat, the charmer harnesses monstrous forces to operate against these equally-monstrous disease agents, and such coercion of ambivalent actors occurs alongside the invocation of Christian allies for mankind. The manuscript witness of Charm 3 also evinces a unique level of obvious scribal intervention, including the use of superscript.¹ The scribe has modified the text so as to render it both more specific and more effective for a putative patient. The nature of these changes, however, coupled with the irregularity of several lines in the charm, suggests what will be conclusively demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 5: that the language of the metrical charms is in many cases prescriptive, and metre and alliteration yield both to function and to narrative drama. Reading the charms as poetry, examining both their individual metrical features and their thematic and imagistic resonances with other Old English texts, illuminates both the charms' unusual style and the anxieties over the vulnerability of the human body that occur throughout early

¹ P. A. Shaw, "The Manuscript Texts of 'Against a Dwarf'", in *Writing and Texts in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. A. R. Rumble (Cambridge, 2006), 96-113. The hand of the superscript additions appears visually to be the same hand as that of the main scribe, and Ker (no. 231) and Gneuss and Lapidge (no. 421) do not mention another hand appearing on these folios.

medieval English literature.

Charm 3 in Context

Charm 3 is preserved on ff. 167r-167v of Harley MS 585, as part of the remedy collection *Lacnunga*. The manuscript contains three charms for *dweorh*, the other two of which are prose rituals involving the writing of letters and Christian symbols on the patient's arms. The metrical charm requires both significantly more involved ritual action and the recitation of an incantation that is, for all its irregularities, clearly in verse. The prose instructions indicate that the metrical charm is to be sung (*singan*), and both prose and verse refer to the spoken lines as a *galdor* [incantation, song, poem].² The lack of punctuation or capitalization demarcating verse and prose is not unusual for the other charms in Harley 585, nor for Old English poetry more broadly.³ The fact that the text of Charm 3 switches from lines that cannot be metrically scanned to lines that can is significant, and the content is sufficient to mark the transition between instruction and speech.⁴ The scribe has also made superscript additions to the text: the main text of the charm in line 4b reads *þa ongunnan hi(m) þa colian* [then they began to cool themselves], but the scribe has written the letters *ðali* in superscript between *him* and *þa*, and written a *u* directly above the *a* of *þa*, suggesting a substitution of the former vowel for the latter. The resulting line reads *þa ongunnan hi(m) ða liþu colian* [then the limbs began to cool themselves]. Similarly, in line 7b, the original text seems to

² *Galdor* means 'song' or 'poem' in *Fates of the Apostles* l. 107; *Vainglory* l. 3. *BT* and *DOE* offer *fit*, *ged*, and *leop*, along with *galdor*, as terms meaning 'poetry' or 'poem'. For all database abbreviations, see Bibliography.

³ T. A. Bredehoft, "The Boundaries Between Verse and Prose in Old English Literature", in *Old English Literature in its Manuscript Context*, ed. J. T. Lionarons (Morgantown, 2004), 139-72; Donoghue, *Poems*, 2, 5, 52. See for example *Cædmon's Hymn*, which was certainly understood by early English readers as verse, but is undifferentiated from the prose text in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 10 f. 100r. See also Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 279B f. 112v and Cambridge, University Library MS Kk 3.18 f. 72v, which begin the poem with a capital letter but do not otherwise distinguish it from the prose, and CCC 41 p. 322, which uses capitals to indicate both the start of the poem and the resumption of prose. See further K. O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse* (Cambridge, 1990), 23-46.

⁴ Bredehoft, "Boundaries", 149.

have read *bis adlegaderian*, but the scribe has altered the line to read *bis ðæm adlegan derian* — a complicated line discussed below. These changes subtly adjust the meaning of the lines in question, but it is notable that they change the actual language of the charm very little. They are not, for example, formulaic scribal substitutions of the kind noted in other texts by Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe.⁵

Previous scholarship on Metrical Charm 3 has largely focused on identifying its actors and defining the ailment it treats.⁶ Most scholars agree that the word *dweorh* likely refers to a high fever (tertian malaria, typhus, or similar), which could involve convulsions and delirium.⁷ *Dweorg* glosses *febris* [fever] in the late Old English *Peri didaxeon*, a translation of the Latin *Pseudo-Petrocellus Salernitanus Practica*; the Latin *febriunt* [are feverish] is rendered as *he riþaþ swylce he on dueorge sy* [he shakes as if he were in (suffering from) a dwarf].⁸ The Old English *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* also includes a reference to *dweorg*, and a partial Latin translation of the Old English text gives the title of the remedy in question as *ad fugandam febrem* [for chasing away a fever].⁹ The naming of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus — fifth-century saints saved from martyrdom by falling into a miraculous sleep

⁵ E.g. O’Brien O’Keeffe, 39-40.

⁶ Grendon, 215; Skemp, 294-5; Storms, 167-73; Grattan and Singer, 162-3; A. Meaney, “The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness”, in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. S. D. Campbell *et al.* (Basingstoke, 1992), 12-33; C. Doyle, “*Dweorg* in Old English”, *QI* 9 (2008), 99-117; K. E. Lynch, “The *Wip Dweorh* Charms in MS Harley 585: A Union of Text and Voice”, in *The Genesis of Books: Studies in the Scribal Culture of Medieval England in Honour of A. N. Doane*, ed. M. T. Hussey and J. D. Niles (Turnhout, 2012), 51-68; B. R. Hutcheson, “*Wið Dweorh*: An Anglo-Saxon Remedy for Fever in its Cultural and Manuscript Setting”, in *Secular Learning in Anglo-Saxon England: Exploring the Vernacular*, ed. L. S. Chardonnens and B. Carella (Amsterdam, 2012), 175-202.

⁷ Storms, 171; Meaney, “Causes”, 19; Pettit, II, 174; Doyle, “*Dweorg*”, 115; Hutcheson, “*Dweorh*”, 177; Shaw, 101. Cockayne’s assertion that the charm is for a wart is based on a misreading of *dweorh* as *weorh*.

⁸ M. Löweneck, ed., *Peri Didaxeon: Eine Sammlung von Rezepten in englischer Sprache aus dem 11/12 Jahrhundert* (Erlangen, 1896), 30; *DMLBS* s.v. “*Febris*”, “*Febrire*”.

⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 130 f. 86v. The title *ad verrucas tollendas* [for removing warts] is given to this remedy in the Latin version of the *Medicina* most closely aligned with the putative exemplar for the Old English text, but H. J. de Vriend (ed., *The Old English Medicina de Quadrupedibus* [Tillburg, 1972], 50-51, 88) notes the title has been incorrectly transposed from a different recipe, and the Old English version must have been taken from an exemplar with the correct title. All citations from the *Herbarium* and the *Medicina* are taken from H. J. de Vriend, ed., *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus* (London, 1984).

— and the use of Eucharistic wafers also appear in other Old and Middle English charms for fever.¹⁰

In the context of Charm 3, however, the word *dweorh* most likely refers to both a fever and a disease-causing supernatural being. A runic inscription on a Norfolk lead plaque or amulet reading *Dead is dwerg* [the dwarf is dead], with a scratched drawing of a face, suggests that dwarfs were understood as predatory creatures in the eighth and ninth centuries.¹¹ *Dweorg* glosses *nanus*, *pigmaeus*, and *pumilio* in the eighth century-Corpus and ninth-century Épinal-Erfurt glossaries, the late-tenth or early-eleventh century Cotton Otho E.i glossary (a partial copy of the mid-tenth century Cleopatra A.iii glossary), and other minor glossaries; the term was thus still used to refer to a humanoid creature in word-lists contemporary with the copying of *Bald's Leechbook* and Harley 585.¹² Previous scholars have noted that the phrase *on dueorge* in the twelfth-century *Peri didaxeon* would be inappropriate if referring to a creature, and suggest that by this point the term no longer indicates a supernatural being.¹³ This process, however, was evidently incomplete in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the term would at least connote a supernatural agent to an eleventh-century reader. Indeed, Charm 3 itself refers to two non-human creatures. Moreover, spasmodic and delirious symptoms in Old English medical texts are consistently linked with the

¹⁰ For charms, see W. Bonser, “The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Anglo-Saxon and Later Recipes”, *Folklore* 56 (1945), 254–6; for the legend of the Seven Sleepers in early medieval England, see H. Magennis, ed., *The Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers* (Durham, 1994).

¹¹ J. Hines, “The Dwarf is Dead”, *BA* 157 (2017), 52–7. A likely transliteration of an eighth-century Norse inscription on a skull fragment from Ribe includes the phrase *ok dverg unninn* [and the dwarf is defeated]. See J. McKinnell *et al.*, *Runes, Magic and Religion: A Sourcebook* (Wien, 2004), 50; Hines, 57. Cf. M. MacLeod and B. Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects* (Woodbridge, 2006), 25.

¹² *DOE* s.v. “Dweorg”. The relevant editions are J. H. Hessels, ed., *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 144* (Cambridge, 1890); J. D. Pfeifer, ed., *Old English Glosses in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary* (Oxford, 1974); M. Voss, “Altenglische Glossen aus MS. British Library, Cotton Otho E.i”, *AAA* 21 (1996), 179–203; L. Kindschi, “The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS 32 and British Museum MS Additional 32246” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1955); J. Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar: Text und Varianten* (Berlin, 1966).

¹³ Doyle, “Dweorg”, 117; Cameron, *Medicine*, 152–3.

malevolent influence of supernatural beings, including *ylfe* [elves] and *deofles* [demons]. Illnesses including *feondseocnes*, *deofolseocnes*, *ælfside*, *ælfsoġoða*, and *feondes costunga* [the temptations of a demon] — the remedies for which make use of exorcistic elements, suggesting the perceived reality of these disease agents — are grouped in the *Leechbooks* with conditions involving convulsions, insanity, or frenzy (e.g. *bræcseocnes*, *wedenheorte*, *ungemynde*, *monapseocnes*, *gewitseocne*).¹⁴ In context, therefore, Charm 3 seems to be directed against a sentient agent.

Arguably the most prominent model of disease adhered to by the Old English medical texts and identified by scholars is an external-internal one: the body is entered by alien matter or forces, often understood or described as an adversarial entity.¹⁵ The causes of disease named in the Old English medical texts enter the flesh from without: *wyrmas* [worms], including *inwyrmas* [inward-moving worms] and *smeawyrmas* [creeping/penetrating worms], are mentioned over a hundred and fifty times in the medical texts, and *attor* [venom] is another frequently-named cause of illness.¹⁶ Yet the Old English medical texts also reveal a more specific, persistent anxiety over the violent and intentional breaking-open of the body through intimate contact with the inhuman other, as the numerous remedies attributing ailments to demonic and elvish influence attest. In such convulsive or delirious illnesses, the patient implicitly surrenders bodily control to an alien force. The disease-causing creatures named in these remedies are both internal and external: they do not necessarily dwell in the patient's flesh and manipulate his actions in the traditional manner of demonic possession, a

¹⁴ *Leechbook I*, ff. 51v-54r; *Leechbook III*, ff. 120r-121r, 122v, 123v-127r. Meaney, "Causes", 25; Jolly, *Religion*, 145; P. Dendle, *Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon England* (Kalamazoo, 2014), 93-9. On these diseases, see *DOE s.v.* "Bræcseoc"; *BT s.v.* "Wedenheort".

¹⁵ N. Barley, "Anglo-Saxon Magico-Medicine", *JASO* 3 (1972), 67-76; S. Künzel, "Concepts of Infectious, Contagious, and Epidemic Disease in Anglo-Saxon England" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2018), 62; P. Dendle, "Plants in the Early Medieval Cosmos: Herbs, Divine Potency, and the *Scala Natura*", in *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden*, ed. P. Dendle and A. Touwaide (Woodbridge, 2008), 47-59; Meaney, "Causes", 14; Thompson, 132.

¹⁶ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, Cameron Number B21, "Wyrm-", "Att-".

concept for which there is insufficient evidence in the Old English medical texts, but they are still able to access, invade, and control a victim's body.¹⁷ The ailment referred to as *feondseocnes* and *deofolseocnes* [fiend- or devil-sickness] is defined in the *Leechbooks* as *þonne deofol þone monnan fede oððe hine inan gewealde mid adle* [when a devil nourishes a man or controls him within with disease].¹⁸ This quasi-possession is apparently a profound violation of its victim: the verb *fedan* connotes the rearing of young and the fattening of livestock, suggesting a loss of agency and self-possession.¹⁹ Other supernatural beings, including *ylfe*, assault patients in various ways, including shooting them with projectiles or causing unspecified internal pains — that is, by breaching the external boundaries of the body.²⁰ Charm 3 explores a theme echoed throughout the Old English medical corpus: humans are vulnerable to being entered and dominated through contact with the inhuman, and to be diseased is to submit to the power of another.

Despite the evidence that a *dweorh* is a fever-causing creature, some scholars have argued that Charm 3 is a remedy for the attack of a 'nightmare', apparently referring to an ill-defined creature who causes frightening dreams.²¹ The only evidence for a similar ailment in the Old English corpus is the existence of a creature referred to as a *mære*. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, however, the *mære* is an exclusively female supernatural being who commits sexual acts with, and/or physically crushes, an unwilling human victim, rather than

¹⁷ Dendle, *Possession*, 100, 143-4. Cf. those who argue Charm 3 addresses indwelling possession (Grendon, 115-7; Storms, 64; Barley, 69; Pettit, II, 175). Following convention, I generally refer to anonymous or hypothetical patients, charm-users, scribes, and composers with singular male personal pronouns, though the possibility of female users and composers should not be discounted. The extant Old English medical texts, as discussed in Chapter 4, were intended for largely male audiences and privilege the treatment of male patients.

¹⁸ *Leechbook I*, f. 51r; *Leechbook III*, f. 126r.

¹⁹ *DOE s.v.* "Fedan".

²⁰ For example, *Leechbook I*, f. 53v; *Leechbook III*, ff. 123v-125r.

²¹ Grattan and Singer, 163; Bonser, *Background*, 166; Niles, "Survivals", 136; M. Nelson, "An Old English Charm Against Nightmare", *GN* 13 (1982), 17-18; S. O. Glosecki, "Stranded Narrative; Myth, Metaphor and the Metrical Charm", in *Myth in Early Northwest Europe*, ed. S. O. Glosecki (Tempe, 2006), 47-70 [65].

using said victim as a steed for travel.²² Charm 3’s emphasis on the *inspidenwiht*’s bridle and the transformation of its victim into a horse, as well as the use of masculine pronouns for the creature itself, suggest the charm does not refer to a *mære*.²³ The existence of the *mære* does, however, inform our understanding of Charm 3. *Leechbook I* and *Leechbook III* name this being and her sexualized assault (‘riding’ her victim) as a medical ailment. Indeed, the *mære* is associated in these texts with other feminine, erotic, or deviant disease-agents — among others, *leodrunan* [witches], *nihtgengan* [night-walkers], and *þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð* [those people the devil has intercourse with].²⁴ The incurative model of illness treated in the Old English medical texts evidently permits, in some cases, the conceptual equation of illness and sexual assault. The *mære*’s ‘riding’ of her victims and the ‘riding’ of the *inspidenwiht* are the only mentions of ‘riding’ as a cause of illness in the Old English medical corpus.²⁵ The *inspidenwiht*’s use of another being as a steed may thus have connoted an act of erotic aggression for an early medieval English audience. The actions of the *wiht* in Charm 3 certainly imply violence, an exertion of dominance over a submissive victim, and enforced animality.

To fully parse this enigmatic text, however, we must engage in a close reading and stylometric analysis of the charm. Such a study illuminates both Charm 3’s obscure narrative and the early medieval English understandings of disease, monstrosity, and sexuality that animate it, and sets out the terms for subsequent readings of the metrical charms as a corpus.

²² C. R. Batten, “Dark Riders: Disease, Sexual Violence, and Gender Performance in the Old English *Mære* and Old Norse *Mara*”, *JEGP* (forthcoming). See also A. Hall, “The Evidence for *Maran*, the Anglo-Saxon ‘Nightmares’”, *Neophilologus* 91 (2007), 299-317; C. Raudvere, *Föreställningar om maran i nordisk folketro* (Stockholm, 1993), and “*Mara trað hann*”, in *Nordisk Hedendom*, ed. G. Steinsland (Odense, 1991), 87-102.

²³ Witches turn their victims into steeds in Scandinavian witch-ride narratives (see R. Kvideland and H. K. Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* [Oslo, 1991], 183-7), but this concept is unattested in early medieval England. Cf. D. E. Gay, “Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm 3, Against a Dwarf: A Charm Against Witch-Riding?”, *Folklore* 99 (1988), 174-7.

²⁴ *Leechbook I*, ff. 5r-5v, 52v-53r; *Leechbook III*, f. 110v-111v.

²⁵ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, Cameron Number B21, “Ride”, “Rida-”.

Stylistic Analysis

Charm 3 begins, like many of the metrical charms, with a line that is both narratively dramatic and metrically unusual:

x x / \ x / x x /
Hēr cōm ingangan²⁶ inspidenwiht.²⁷ d|E

If the line is to alliterate, stress must fall twice on the word *in*; alliteration on the same word across a long line is rare. Although most prefixes generally do not bear alliteration, *in* is an exception. In the a-verse, it seems to be a locative adverb, which can bear metrical stress, modifying the verb phrase *com gongan*.²⁸ In the b-verse, it is presumably a similar adverb or a stressed adverbial prefix denoting internality.²⁹ Reading *in spidenwiht* as a prepositional phrase renders the verse grammatically nonsensical, while taking *inspidenwiht* as a whole-verse compound results in the otherwise-unattested construction *adverb+noun+noun*.

Stressed locative *in* can modify participles (e.g. *insittendra*), indicating that *spiden* may be a verb participle modifying, in turn, the noun *wiht*, yielding a regular E-type stress pattern and suggesting the possible word division *inspiden wiht*.³⁰

In is a common word, but the alliteration here is unlikely to be incidental: it creates a

²⁶ I have followed Pettit in printing *ingangan* as one word. The word is divided in the manuscript by the end of the written line (f. 167v). Elsewhere in the Old English corpus, *ingangan* appears five times, but *in gangan*, with no additional words between the preposition and gerund, does not appear. (*DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Ingangan”, “In gangan”.) I have also followed Pettit, Hutcheson, and Shaw in printing *inspidenwiht* as one word. There are no spaces between the elements *in*, *spiden*, and *wiht* in the manuscript, and we cannot parse it further without certainty as to its meaning.

²⁷ My scansion of *inspidenwiht* is one of two possible. It is a matter of debate whether, when stress is transferred to a prefix (*in*) in an Old English compound, any stress remains on the stem (*spi-*). Bliss treats the stem as metrically unstressed, and would scan the line as I have done (type 3E1). If secondary stress were to remain on the stem, the line would have the patten / \ x / (type 3E2) with suspended resolution.

²⁸ *DOE s.v.* “Ingangan” suggests that *in* can be read as either adverb or prefix.

²⁹ See *DOE s.v.* “In-”, d.1, for *in* as stressed adverbial prefix denoting internality or inward movement with nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, and d.5 for *in* as a stressed adverbial prefix with verbs and participles. See for example Riddle 46, l. 6, *insittendra*; *Solomon and Saturn II*, l. 278, *insceaft*; *Beowulf* l. 1774, *ingenga*. In all these cases, *in* bears the alliteration of the line.

³⁰ Shaw, 104; Hutcheson, “Dweorh”, 186-7.

generally regular Old English long line, and the aural echo between *ingangan* and *inspiden* would have been apparent to an audience accustomed to catching repeated initial sounds. The repetition of *in* also serves a semantic purpose: this line focuses on the creature's entrance into the space of the charm, and highlights the text's preoccupation with penetration and invasion. The fever — and thus the charm's ensuing narrative action — occurs within the patient's flesh, and the *inspidenwiht*'s emphatically inward movement highlights the boundary-crossing involved. Indeed, the repetition of the phrase *com ingangan* to describe the entrance of another creature in line 5 unifies these two inhuman actors and demonstrates the charm's fixation on supernatural access to the scene and to the patient. Notably, line 1 also consists of a light D type and an E type, creating an appropriately dramatic opening to the charm and an appropriately dramatic entrance for one of the text's major players.

The meaning of the term *inspiden* is contested. Emendations suggested by Cockayne (*spider* [spider]), Grattan and Singer (*inwriðen* [all swathed]), and Stuart (*unspedig* ['wretched' in Stuart's translation, though more properly 'unproductive, without means']) are problematic for a variety of reasons.³¹ Cockayne's emendation has been popular with scholars, but the word does not exist in Old English; we should expect **spipre*.³² There are numerous words for 'spider' in Old English, including *attorcop*, *gongelwæfre*, and *hunta*, but **spipre* and **spider* are notably absent. Moreover, the scribe took great care to correct the letter in question to *n*, erasing a previous letter (f. 167v). Grattan and Singer suggest *inwriðenwiht* believing that the charm deals with an incubus, who appears in the form of a corpse swathed in grave-clothes.³³ This emendation requires four scribal errors in a single

³¹ Cockayne, III, 42; Grattan and Singer, 162; H. Stuart, "'Spider' in Old English", *Parergon* 18 (1977), 37-42.

³² Shaw, 103; Pettit, II, 187. M. Cavell ("Arachnophobia and Early English Literature", *NML* 18 (2018), 1-43 [n. 70]) points out that in *Leechbook I*, f. 53v, *BT* emends the word *swipra* to *spipra*, supposedly a form of **spipre*. In fact, the remedy compares a hunting-spider (*hunta*), which is 'stronger' (*swipra*), to another, weaker spider.

³³ Grattan and Singer, 162.

word, employs an unattested participle derived from an unattested verb (**inwriðan*), and introduces the concept of a ‘corpse-incubus’ for which no evidence exists in the Old English corpus. Stuart’s suggestion of *unspedig* is inappropriate given the immediate display of strength and dominance performed by the creature in question. Her emendation also requires both double dittography and scribal substitution of vowels, a series of significant and repeated visual and orthographical errors or intentional changes in a single word. Stuart’s argument assumes that the charm’s copiers did not pay close attention to the content they wrote down, and indeed Leonard Neidorf has recently put forward evidence that the scribes of *Beowulf* sought to correct orthographic forms in individual lexemes and often disregarded the sense of the text.³⁴ Neidorf, however, does not examine accretive texts or explore the work of scribes whose emendations border on composition. While it is possible that *inspiden* is a meaningless word resulting from scribal error and ignorance, the fact that the scribe of Charm 3 made a non-orthographic emendation to line 4 — adding the word *lipu* in superscript, thereby clarifying the line’s meaning and introducing ornamental alliteration — suggests that this particular scribe was engaging with his exemplar on a semantic level, and therefore that the carefully-corrected word *inspiden* held meaning for him.

Hutcheson proposes emendation to *inswiden*, either a voiced iteration of the attested Old English participle *swiðen* [strengthened], or the voiced participle of a hypothetical Old English verb **swiðan* [to burn], cognate with Old Norse *sviða* and Old High German *swidan*.³⁵ The scribal error of *p* for wynn occurs in both poetry and prose, and indeed the scribe of ff. 179r-190v of the *Lacnunga* (Hand C) made this same error when copying Charm 6, so it is certainly possible that the scribe of Charm 3 (Hand A, ff. 130r-179r) made a similar

³⁴ L. Neidorf, *The Transmission of Beowulf: Language, Culture, and Scribal Behavior* (Ithaca, 2017). Cf. O’Brien O’Keeffe, 4-5.

³⁵ Hutcheson, “Dweorh”, 186-7; *BT* s.v. “Swiðan”.

mistake.³⁶ If this were the case, **inswidenwiht* would mean either ‘a creature strengthened within’ or ‘a creature burning within’. Heat imagery is thematically appropriate for a charm against fever, whether the *inspidenwiht* is the disease-agent or an adversary whose ‘burning’ nature equips it to attack a similarly burning fever. Neither interpretation immediately clarifies the creature’s nature, but both readings emphasize its strength and chime with the displays of inexorable power depicted in the charm’s opening lines.

It may be that the meaning of *inspiden* is simply unrecoverable — but at least one element of this difficult word or set of words is clear. The being is a *wiht*. The term ostensibly means ‘creature’ or, more specifically, ‘humanoid creature’, but it is used in poetry almost exclusively for monstrous, evil, or bizarre entities.³⁷ *Wiht* glosses *phantasma* in the Lindisfarne and Rushworth Gospels, and, elsewhere, *satiri* and *fauni* — sexually-aggressive beings associated with *incubi* and the *mære*.³⁸ Whatever its precise nature, the *wiht* of Charm 3 is inhuman, menacing, and violative.

Lines 2-4a can be scanned as a hypermetric cluster:

x x x x \acute{x} x / x x x x x / x / x
 Hæfde hi(m) his haman on handa, cwæð þæt þū his hæncgest wære.
 / x x x / x x / x x x x x x x / x / x
 Leg[d]e þē his tēage an swēoran. Ongunnan hi(m) of þæm lande līþan.
 x x x x x x / x / x x x x x x \acute{x} / \ x
 Sōna swā hȳ of þæm lande cōman þā ongunnan hi(m) ðā liþu cōlian.³⁹

³⁶ Hutcheson, “Dweorh”, 186. See for example, among others, *Beowulf* ll. 2814, 2854; *Battle of Maldon* l. 61; Erfurt Glossary s.v. “Woedeberge/Poediberge”, noted in A. Hall, “Madness, Medication — and Self-Induced Hallucination? Elleborus (and Woody Nightshade) in Anglo-Saxon England, 700-900”, *LSE* 44 (2013), 43-69. E. V. Thornbury suggests it appears in *Christ and Satan* l. 7 (“Christ and Satan: ‘Healing’ Line 7”, *ES* 87 [2006], 505-10). For Charm 6, see Texts Edited.

³⁷ *BT* s.v. “Wiht”. For example, *Beowulf* ll. 120, 3038; *Resignation* l. 51; Charm 2, l. 41.

³⁸ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Wiht”.

³⁹ Fulk’s ‘Rule of the Coda’ (*History*, 197) posits that the metrical pattern /xx can only exist in the onset of a half-line, when the two unstressed syllables become an expanded drop. The coda ‘favors a one-to-one correspondence between syllables and metrical positions’ (Pascual, “Sievers”, 25), so the unstressed syllable following the last full stress receives ictus. Line 4b can thus be scanned as I have done here. I generally follow this rule throughout the thesis.

Lines 2a-4a are regular hypermetrics in Sievers–Bliss scansion. As discussed in the Introduction, hypermetric lines slow down the verse pacing to allow for high-focus, emphatic narration. These hypermetric lines — which effectively accommodate numerous pronouns — allow the charm to detail a series of complex interactions between creature and victim. The thorough, swift elaboration of the creature’s attack suggests that each action is essential to the narrative. The cluster is punctuated by a D-type verse with six syllables of anacrusis — an irregularity disallowed in ‘classical’ Old English verse. Here, however, this irregular anacrusis allows for the same flexibility of diction and proliferation of particles permitted by the preceding hypermetric verses, as well as emphasis on the rapidity of the action (*sona ... þa*) and the echoing repetition of the phrase *ongunnan him*.

These lines certainly describe an act of sexually-inflected violence and power exchange, but the meanings of essential words employed here are contested. While *teage* [tie, band] likely refers to traces or a harness in this context, the word *haman* has occasioned debate: several scholars have suggested that the term is a form of *hama* [covering, skin], used to force a shape-change on the creature’s victim.⁴⁰ A skin (*hamr*) is occasionally used for shape-shifting in fantastical or mythological Old Norse texts, but there are few extant Old English narratives that involve explicit shape-changing.⁴¹ Indeed, the Old English and Anglo-

⁴⁰ Niles, “Survivals”, 136; Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 186-7.

⁴¹ An exception is the *Prose Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*, which describes a transformation combat between the Pater Noster and the devil. *Solomon and Saturn I*. 151 also describes devils disguising themselves with a *feðerhama* [feather-covering, plumage], which may indicate shapeshifting. For Old Norse shape-changing, see for example *Þrymskviða* st. 17 (all citations of eddic poetry taken from Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds, *Eddukvæði*, 2 vols [Reykjavík, 2014]); *Völsunga saga* ch. 8, ed. and trans. R. G. Finch (London, 1965); *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 26, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1904); *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda v. 2*, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík, 1943-4). Some scholars read *Wulf and Eadwacer* as a shape-shifting narrative or episode in a narrative involving shape-changing, but the evidence is not definitive (for such readings, see S. Daniëlli, “Wulf, Min Wulf: An Eclectic Analysis of the Wolf Man”, *Neophilologus* 91 [2007], 505-24; W. Schofield, “Signý’s Lament”, *PMLA* 17 [1902], 265-95; R. North, “Metre and Meaning in *Wulf and Eadwacer*: Signý Reconsidered”, in *Loyal Letters: Studies in Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry and Prose*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald [Groningen, 1994], 29-54; A. Bouman, “*Leodum is minum*: Beadohild’s Complaint”, *Neophilologus* 33 [1949], 103-13). R. P. Tripp Jr. suggests that the dragon of *Beowulf* was once the human Heremod, but this view has not been widely accepted (*More About the Fight with the Dragon: Beowulf 2280b-3182: Commentary, Edition and Translation* [Lanham, 1983]).

Latin versions of many shape-changing narratives seek to remove or minimize the element of transformation. Metre 26 of the *Metres of Boethius*, for example, discussing Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men, labels these narratives *leasum spellum* [lying tales], and declares that even the authors of such false narratives know that men's minds cannot be transformed by magic.⁴² Early medieval English visual depictions of Weland the smith portray him as building a flying contraption to escape his captors, while the Old Norse *Völundr*, by contrast, seems to transform himself into a bird.⁴³ Ælfric includes in his *Lives of Saints* a narrative from the *Vitae Patrum* in which a sorcerer's supposed transformation of a woman into a mare is revealed to be a mere illusion.⁴⁴ Even the *Liber Eliensis* — an Anglo-Norman cultural product completed after 1154 — makes it clear that Queen Ælfþryð's supposed transformation into a horse is nothing more than a delusion of perception, which a holy abbot can see through.⁴⁵

Early medieval English literary texts and artifacts thus demonstrate a marked discomfort with shape-shifting narratives. To read Charm 3 as a narrative of forcible shape change is to rely on numerous assumptions about the use of skins and belief in supernatural physical transformations for which little evidence exists. Charm 3 is, however, demonstrably a text about riding. The suggestion by the *DOE* that *haman* means 'bridle' and is an early form of the Middle English *hame* [draught-horse collar] is therefore a likely solution, and

⁴² *Metres of Boethius*, Metre 26, ll. 1-2, 73-5, 94-5, 100-4. Citations from Godden and Irvine.

⁴³ Weland is depicted wearing a flying device on several Northumbrian stone crosses. The Franks Casket depicts either Weland or his brother strangling birds, presumably to build a similar device. See L. Webster, *The Franks Casket* (London, 2012), 31-44; J. T. Lang, "Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England", *YAJ* 48 (1976), 83-94; L. Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout, 2012), 20-21. Cf. *Völundarkviða* st. 29.

⁴⁴ "Item Alia" l. 474. Citations from W. W. Skeat, ed. and trans., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed By the English Church*, 2 vols. (London, 1966).

⁴⁵ A. Davies, "Witches in Anglo-Saxon England: Five Case Histories", in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Manchester, 1989), 41-56. The text of the *Liber* reads: *per fantasias enim et artem magicam, velut in equinum animal versa, putabatur intuentibus esse equa et non mulier* [indeed, through imagination and magic craft, just as if (she were) changed into a horselike animal, she was believed by onlookers to be a horse and not a woman]. Text from E. O. Blake, ed., *Liber Eliensis* (London, 1962), 127.

both the *haman* and the *teage* are certainly used to enforce animality on the creature's victim.⁴⁶ This bridling imagery also belongs to a nexus of 'binding' and 'loosing' metaphors associated with disease in Old English texts. Illness is depicted as placing metaphorical 'bonds' on a person in several poems, including *Andreas*, *Guthlac B*, and *Christ III*, and the laying of traces, bands, or harnesses onto a victim seems to draw on this understanding of sickness as involving oppression and restriction.⁴⁷ Charm 3's iteration of this theme is unusual, as 'bridling' specifically does not appear elsewhere as a metaphor for disease in the Old English corpus.⁴⁸ It is precisely the charm's deviations from normal poetic imagery, however, that point to its major concerns: this text inflects the apparently common idea of 'a disease that binds' with a particular kind of animality and sexuality.

The metrical features of lines 2-4 emphasize these anxieties. Striking ornamental alliteration in line 2a (*Hæfde him his haman on handa*) would have been audible to the charm's audience. *Hæfde* is an undisplaced, prosaic finite verb and does not bear the primary alliteration of the line; therefore it probably does not bear metrical stress. It does ensure, however, that five out of six words alliterate in the a-verse. The structural emphasis on (*hæfde*), *haman*, *handa*, and *hæncgest* provides a concise summary of the line's action, highlighting the creature's power and creating a sense of inevitable causation. The fact that the creature bears a bridle leads directly to the creation of its 'steed', suggesting that the bridle itself, and the declarative words of the *wiht*, are all that is necessary to force its victim into submission.

The undisplaced finite verb *leg[d]e* in line 3a, however, does bear the alliteration of

⁴⁶ DOE s.v. "Hama"; OED s.v. "Hame".

⁴⁷ *Andreas* ll. 577-81; *Guthlac B* ll. 881-8; *Christ III* ll. 1349-58. See M. Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature* (Toronto, 2016), 195-218.

⁴⁸ Cavell, *Weaving*, 265.

the line, and therefore must bear metrical stress. Griffith has demonstrated that alliteration on undisplaced finite verbs indicates violent or rapid action.⁴⁹ Line 3a draws the audience's attention to the creature's actions and lends them force. The sense of danger builds across this long line. While b-verses do not usually permit double alliteration, line 3b's *lande lipan* emphasizes the creature's departure, with its victim, from known territory. The use of double alliteration in the off-verse in other related charm texts — including the vast majority of the Old English metrical charms and, notably, Merseburg Charm 2 — suggests such ornamentation may be a feature of charms designed for performance, rather than an error or accident.⁵⁰ Line 4, like line 3, features structural alliteration on *l*, creating a plurilinear unit within the hypermetric cluster. Such alliteration conceptually links the departure from the land with the cooling of the limbs, an effect enhanced by the repetition of *ongunnan* and *lande*, and the echoing of *lipan* and *lipu*. Aural ornamentation of this kind can be attributed to deliberate poetic design rather than accident: paronomasia appears throughout the Old English corpus, particularly in poems considered aesthetically sound and in highly ornamented passages.⁵¹ Repetition of *ongunnan him*, similarly, appears in *The Dream of the Rood*, and the use of repeated initial phrases is common throughout the corpus.⁵² Again, this poetic linking creates a sense of causation: the limbs begin to cool precisely because the creature takes its victim away from the land. Line 4 also exhibits cross-alliteration, further

⁴⁹ M. Griffith, "Alliterating Finite Verbs and the Origin of Rank in Old English Poetry", in *Old English Philology: Studies in Honour of R. D. Fulk*, ed. L. Neidorf et al. (Woodbridge, 2016), 103-21. See for example *Battle of Finnsburg* ll. 1-4; *Solomon and Saturn II* ll. 402-7; *The Panther* ll. 58-62.

⁵⁰ For example, Charm 2 ll. 10, 22, 34; Charm 4 ll. 11, 14; Charm 5 l. 1; Charm 6 ll. 1-3; Charm 7 l. 4; Charm 9 ll. 2, 11; Charm 11 l. 18; Charm 12 l. 12; Merseburg Charm 2 ll. 3, 8 (text in W. Braune, ed., *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, 10th ed. [Halle, 1942], 80).

⁵¹ For example, *Dream of the Rood* l. 25; *Exodus* ll. 42, 463; *Elene* ll. 68, 70-71, 75, 582-4, 776-82, 1120-24; *The Seafarer* l. 121; *The Phoenix* ll. 461-2, 479.

⁵² *Dream of the Rood* ll. 65-7. See Charms 2 (*wið þa*), 4 (*þis þe to bote*), 5/10 (*Crux Christi*), and 6 (*þis me to bote*); Merseburg Charms 1 (*suma*) and 2 (*thu biguol*). See also *The Wanderer* ll. 80-84, 92-6; *Gifts of Men* ll. 30-109; *Fortunes of Men* ll. 10-92; *Juliana* ll. 473-94; *Elene* ll. 131-7; *Dream of the Rood* ll. 139-42; *Hávamál* st. 69.

linking the creature's departure (*lande coman*) with the cooling that follows (*lipu colian*); this final phrase is given special emphasis by D-type scansion, and is the culmination both of the unusually anacrusic half-line and of the hypermetric cluster as a whole. The scribe's superscript addition of *lipu* allows for this plethora of climactic poetic effects (cross alliteration, D-type scansion) and thus may show a degree of sensitivity to poetic ornament. The scribe also adjusts the text's meaning to focus on the body of the patient: a vague pronoun (*þa*) is abandoned in favor of a specific reference to limbs (*lipu*). These lines overall feature a significant amount of assonance — on *a* and *æ* in line 2, on *e* in the phrase *leg[d]e þe*, and on *o* in *coman ... colian*. The overall effect of this tissue of connected sound in lines 2-4 is to create an impression of swift, inexorable violence between two beings. The scribe takes care to emphasize that the climactic result of this violence is a change that takes place in flesh. Again, the charm's unusual formal features are not incidental: hypermetrics and ornamental alliteration clarify causal links in this rapid action sequence.

The interpretation of these lines depends upon who the *inspidenwiht* is, and whom it is assaulting. Several scholars argue that the *inspidenwiht* is itself the agent of illness, identical with the dwarf of the title, and that it rides the patient to cause the ailment in question.⁵³ Such an interpretation is bolstered by the treatment of the *mære*'s riding as a disease in *Leechbooks I* and *III*, as well as the apparent existence of disease-causing, supernatural siblings in other Old English medical recipes and several Scandinavian and German runic amulets.⁵⁴ If this interpretation is accepted, then these opening lines offer a straightforward depiction of disease as violation. Illness is a consequence of being conquered

⁵³ Skemp, 294; Grattan and Singer, 163; Nelson, "Nightmare", 17; Gay, "Witch-Riding", 174; Niles, "Survivals", 136.

⁵⁴ The OE remedy *Wið Cyrnel* refers to nine sisters (Harley 585 f. 182r); the wen of Charm 12 has a brother (l. 4). For amulet texts, see R. Simek, "Elves and Exorcism: Runic and Other Lead Amulets in Medieval Popular Religion", in *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell*, ed. D. Anlezark (Toronto, 2011), 25-52.

by a malignant supernatural creature. In this reading, the assault of the *wiht* brings the patient close to death: the image of limbs and flesh cooling is used elsewhere in Old English poetry to describe corpses.⁵⁵ The sister's intercession complicates the interaction. Given that she is evidently an inhuman creature linked to the *inspidenwiht* and the dwarf of the title, and that (in this reading) the dwarf is not in any danger, she has little reason to intercede on behalf of, or grant protection to, the patient. The sister is somehow turned against her sibling by the charmer, who, rather than calling on a straightforwardly benevolent force, harnesses or coerces one monster to combat another. The speaker deploys supernatural creatures against each other rather than against the patient's flesh, a dramatic manifestation of the principle of sympathy.⁵⁶

Yet this interpretation does not account for all of the text's elements, and indeed the charm's stylometric features indicate that a different reading should be sought. If the patient is the creature's victim, the switch from second-person singular (l. 2) to third-person plural pronouns (ll. 3-4) is unaccounted for: there is no obvious reason that the text should suddenly begin to refer to the patient, into whose ears the charm is being spoken, in the third person. Perhaps more importantly, the cooling of limbs is the stylistic and metrical climax of the hypermetric action of lines 2-4; it is incongruous that the culmination of a fever-creature's assault should be any kind of 'cooling'. The charm could invoke any number of images to convey mortal danger that were not also reminiscent of an antidote to febrile illness, and the ornamental and metrical emphasis given to this image suggests its thematic centrality.

Another interpretation proposed by several scholars, which accounts for some of these difficulties, is that the second-person pronoun refers to the dwarf rather than the patient, and

⁵⁵ For example, *Guthlac B* ll. 1307-8; *Rune Poem* ll. 91-3; *Elene* ll. 881-2; *Dream of the Rood* l. 72.

⁵⁶ See Nöth, 66-7.

that the *inspidenwiht* rides the dwarf away from or out of its victim's flesh.⁵⁷ In this reading, the sister is forced to intercede by the threat to the dwarf, her sibling, and the phrase *lipu colian* becomes polysemous, referring to both the death of the dwarf and the breaking of the patient's fever. The dwarf is addressed as *pu* while it is influencing or inside the patient, and in the third person once it has been removed from the patient's body. The charmer thus combats one inhuman, dangerous creature by harnessing or coercing two others. This reading also renders the common editorial emendation of MS *lege* (second person singular imperative) to *legde* (third person singular indicative) unnecessary in line 3. The scribe has written the line as a command; if this is not an error, it orders the referent of *pu* (here, the dwarf) to submit to being bridled and removed. The magical mechanism is a plausible one: some early Christian texts refer to exorcists 'bridling' (*compescere*) demons to remove them from a patient.⁵⁸ For this reading to make sense, however, we must assume that the dwarf can be addressed through the patient's ears. Given the minimal evidence for indwelling possession as a recognized ailment in Old English medical texts, such an assumption is tenuous. The invasive nature of early medieval English disease-creatures, however, makes it possible that the point of contact between the dwarf and its victim is significant enough that the dwarf can be addressed by the charmer through the patient. The patient's body is thus exceptionally vulnerable to incursion, but so is the dwarf's. The dwarf's penetration of the patient must be undone through reciprocal violation.

Previous critics of this charm have not discussed the possibility that *pu* refers to the patient — thus avoiding the question of possession — while the third-person pronouns of lines 3-4 refer to the *inspidenwiht* and the dwarf. In many early Christian exorcistic rituals,

⁵⁷ Grendon, 215; Storms, 169; Pettit, II, 175.

⁵⁸ A. A. R. Bastiaensen, "Exorcism: Tackling the Devil By Word of Mouth", in *Demons and the Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity*, ed. N. Vos and W. Otten (Leiden, 2011), 129-42.

the influence of supernatural beings is negated by making the patient's body unpleasant or difficult to occupy or control.⁵⁹ I suggest, then, that in lines 2-3a, the *inspidenwiht* rides the patient to force out the dwarf's influence. In lines 3b-4, once the dwarf has withdrawn from the patient, the *wiht* forcibly removes it from the land to destroy it, hence the change of pronouns. Again, the 'cooling' would refer to both the healing of the patient and the death of the dwarf, causing the sister's intercession, and the unamended command (*lege*) of line 3 would order the patient to submit to being bridled to enact the cure. This reading also accounts for the parallel between the laying of an object, presumably the eucharistic wafers, around the patient's neck in the prose instructions and the laying of traces on the victim's neck in the verse charm. Placing the wafers around the patient's neck is clearly meant to advance the cure; it is poetically and magically congruous if the laying-on of reins does the same. This reading accounts for all of the text's features, though it does divide the action in lines 2-4 into two separate assaults, which is an uncertain interpretation. As in other readings of the charm, monsters are made to act against one another, but here 'like affects like' in a more profound way: one invasion of the patient is combatted by another. The penetrability of the human body is used to the healer's advantage. Inviting the *inspidenwiht* to take control of the patient's flesh removes the dwarf.

All of these interpretations are necessarily speculative. We lack the cultural and historical context to exactly decipher the action of the charm or precisely identify its characters. More important than the specifics of any one interpretation, however, is the fact that in every reading of the charm, the same themes and anxieties recur. The charmer harnesses malevolent supernatural forces to work against one another. Bodies, both human and inhuman, are vulnerable to assault, and such incursion is the substance of illness. Even

⁵⁹ Meaney, "Causes", 17; Grendon, 115; Bastiaensen, 139.

the referent-less pronouns of lines 2-4, which make interpretation difficult, may be poetically significant. Beowulf's wrestling with Grendel is marked by similar pronominal confusion; it is difficult to determine who is seizing whom.⁶⁰ The impression is not of specific action, but of chaotic bodily contact. In Charm 3's action sequence, focused precisely on such contact and on the penetrability of flesh, ambivalent pronouns may intentionally complicate the action to create a broad impression of physical conflict and dissolved bodily boundaries between individual beings.

In the wake of this violence, another actor enters the scene, in a line that is an exact syntactic parallel to line 1:

x x / \ x / x / x
 Pā cōm ingangan dēores sweostar. d|A (l. 5)

Deor [beast, animal] usually refers to quadrupeds, but a malevolent disease-agent could reasonably be referred to as a wild animal, literally or metaphorically. The 'beast' is almost certainly synonymous with either the dwarf or the *wiht* — more likely the dwarf, as the threat posed to it by the *wiht* in the most probable readings of the charm provides a prompt for the intercession of the inhuman 'sister'. The sister and the *inspidenwiht* perform identical actions; the fact that the sister's entrance precedes the procurement of a cure for the patient again suggests that the *inspidenwiht*'s acts are in some way curative as well, despite its evidently monstrous nature. The use of the phrase *com gangan* may, indeed, have monstrous connotations: we can compare these lines with the more celebrated advance of Grendel on Heorot, which features a 'threefold repetition' of the verb *com*, in the second instance as part of the verb phrase *com ... gongan*.⁶¹ The phrase also describes the entrance of a monstrous

⁶⁰ *Beowulf* ll. 748-90. See A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge, 2003), 82, 109, 189, 195.

⁶¹ *Beowulf* ll. 702b, 710a, 711a, 720a. See Orchard, *Companion*, 189-91; M. Lapidge, "Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror", in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honour of Jess B. Bessinger Jr.*, ed. H. Damico and J. Leyerle (Kalamazoo, 1993), 373-402.

creature in Riddle 52 (and of a man apparently seeking to sexually dominate a woman in Riddle 82).⁶² *Com gangan* also connotes otherworldly or intense power when applied to heroes, describing Daniel striding into Nebuchadnezzar's hall to interpret the king's dreams, as well as Beowulf's first approach to Heorot, his miraculous return to the hall with Grendel's head, and his triumphant arrival at Hygelac's court.⁶³

Line 5 does not alliterate, an incongruity that would have drawn the attention of an audience attuned to structural alliteration. Indeed, the sister's entrance is both metrically and narratively disruptive, as she interrupts the *wiht*'s actions to (presumably) intercede for the dwarf and offer the patient a permanent cure. The assonance of *deor* and *sweo-*, emphasizing the sister's supernatural nature, may aurally compensate to some degree for the loss of alliteration. More importantly, however, the syntactic correspondence of lines 1 and 5 suggests that the echo between the lines and perhaps the phrasing itself (*adverb + com ingangan*) is important to the charm's structure or function, and such noticeable parallelism apparently takes precedence over strict alliterative regularity. Indeed, these two lines divide the charm into roughly equal structural sections — first a description of violence, then one of intercession and resolution:

x x / x x / x / x /
 Pā geændade hēo 7 āðas swōr **B|B**

x x x x x / \ x ^úx x x / x
 ðæt nǣfre þis ðǣ(m) ādlegan derian ne mōste, **d|A**

x x x x / x x ^úx / x
 ne þǣm þe þis galdor begytan mihte, **a|C**

x x x x / x x ^úx / x
 oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cūþe. **a|C** (ll. 6-9)

⁶² All riddle citations from A. Orchard, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Riddle Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, forthcoming), following Orchard's numbering.

⁶³ *Daniel* ll. 149-51, 735-6; *Beowulf* ll. 324, 1642, 1644, 1973-4.

The passage is self-referential and expounds on its own effectiveness: the charmer's words are the sister's words, who swears (using a poetic formula, *aðas swor*) by the same incantation that the charmer is now employing to recount her oath.⁶⁴ The charmer's speech is, simultaneously, the performance of the promise and its fulfillment. This kind of quotation appears in numerous medieval European charm texts, and consistently serves to enhance the speaker's magical authority.⁶⁵ The concluding sequence of auxiliaries (*moste ... mihte ... cuþe*) ties the lines together, connecting the contractual binding of the supernatural illness (*motan*, to be obliged) with the obtainment of the incantation by those with either the basic ability to encounter the text in written or spoken form (*magan*, to be able) or the specialist skills required to enact the performance itself (*cunnan*, to know how).

The scribe has added several superscript modifications to lines 7-8. The original text, without superscript, seems to have read *ðæt næfre þis adlegaderian ne moste / þæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte*. Shaw suggests the crux *adlegaderian* should be parsed as *adlegaderian* — *adleg* being a poetic compound for 'funeral pyre flame' that appears only in *The Phoenix*, here a metaphor for fever, and *aderian* being a rare form of the common verb *derian* [to harm] that appears only in the Old English translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*.⁶⁶ The two lines as a whole would then read, 'that this funereal flame (fever) must never be a harm to the one who is able to obtain this charm', if we assume that *aderian*, like *derian*, can take the dative (*þæm*). The scribe, however, evidently read the crux as *adlega derian* [harm the sick person], two far more common words, and accordingly added a dative ending and article, and a negative preposition in the subsequent line to adjust the overall grammar. The scribe appears not to have fully understood his text, but his emendation was not necessarily

⁶⁴ On *aðas swor*, see Vaughan-Sterling, 196.

⁶⁵ See, among others, the *Super Petram* and *Ague* charm-types in Roper, *Charms*.

⁶⁶ *DOE* s.v. "Ad-lig", "Aderian"; Shaw, 101.

automatic and unthinking, especially given that it required a grammatical adjustment of the subsequent clause. He seems, rather, to have sought to make the charm comprehensible and therefore more usable, and his chosen emendation, as in line 4, focuses the text's attention on the ailing body of the patient. It is noteworthy, too, that while the scribe accidentally altered some of the line's semantics, he did not change its overall meaning (that the patient never be harmed). Indeed, he changed the material text of the charm — the letters that appear on the page — very little, made no visible deletions of language, and preserved the forms *adleg* (even if as a homonym) and *derian*. The scribe of Charm 3 was clearly an interventionist copier, but stopped short of making changes that would significantly alter, for example, the sound of the line when spoken. As Roper notes, charm language is flexible within limits: magical texts generally rely on the correct iteration of prescribed, formulaic, or otherwise fixed language for their efficacy.⁶⁷ Faced with an incomprehensible text, the scribe adjusts rather than alters. He demonstrates a certain amount of respect for and seeks to preserve the written and aural qualities of the line. As we will see throughout the corpus of the metrical charms, metrical regularity is often subordinated to the text's practical purpose. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the persistent elevation of traditional form over metrical strictness is even clearer in the other metrical charms, which employ identifiable magical formulae that appear in numerous medieval charm texts across multiple languages. Line 7, like line 5, lacks cross-caesura alliteration in both its 'original' and emended forms.⁶⁸ This line was composed by a poet, and edited by a scribe, for whom cross-caesura alliteration and strict metricality were secondary concerns. The use of the rare form *adleg* appears to take precedence over metrical regularity, and we can speculate on the poetic benefits and mystifying power of such

⁶⁷ Roper, "Poetics", 17-18.

⁶⁸ Shaw (101) asserts that *adleg* and *aderian* would alliterate across the caesura, but the verb prefix *a-* never bears metrical stress and therefore cannot alliterate.

unusual and vivid language.

The charm's verse section concludes with two C-type b-verses, as well as repeated alliteration on *galdor* and the rare verb *ongalan* [to speak a *galdor*]. *Galdor* is a difficult term perhaps best translated as 'secret knowledge transmitted verbally'; it is used (infrequently, in verse) as a positive term in Christian contexts and (repeatedly, in prose penitentials and homilies) as a negative term indicating heathen practice and malicious magic.⁶⁹ Charm 3's eleventh-century audience would likely have been sensitive to this ambiguity. This particular *galdor*, as spoken by the charmer, is a Christian weapon deployed against an existential threat, but it is also an incantation extracted from a monstrous being. Like affects like: the charm itself is an ambivalent defense made to operate against a greater danger. The parallel diction and metre of lines 8-9 (*ne þæm þe þis galdor ... oððe þe þis galdor; begytan mihte ... ongalan cuþe*) concludes the charm with an authoritative poetic unit. Indeed, *Beowulf* similarly concludes with two metrically-parallel long lines.⁷⁰

Scholarly discussion of Charm 3 rarely considers its prose instructions and concluding line, but they form a legitimizing Christian frame for the verse, and address the same themes and anxieties expressed in the poetry. The final declaration *Amen Fiað* serves as authoritative punctuation, sanctioning all that came before it.⁷¹ The initial instructions employ the names of the Seven Sleepers, Ephesian saints who were walled up inside a cave by the pagan emperor Decius. God preserves them by placing them in a deathlike sleep. The saints awaken hundreds of years later, when the stones are removed during the reign of the Christian emperor Theodosius, who declares their survival to be a miracle. The anonymous Old English

⁶⁹ Arthur, 'Charms', 21-64; *DOE* s.v. "Galdor".

⁷⁰ *Beowulf* ll. 3181-2. C. B. Kendall (*The Metrical Grammar of Beowulf* [Cambridge, 1991], 8-9) notes numerous ornamental effects in these final lines.

⁷¹ Arnovick, 3.

version of the legend is a flexible rendering of the anonymous Latin *Passio Septem Dormientium*, popular throughout Europe in the early medieval period.⁷² Ælfric also discusses the narrative three times in his *Catholic Homilies*, drawing on both the anonymous *Passio* and Gregory of Tours' *Passio Septem Dormientium apud Ephesum*.⁷³

Ælfric's homilies, both Latin versions of the narrative, and the anonymous Old English legend all emphatically state that the story of the Seven Sleepers is proof of the doctrine of bodily resurrection, considered orthodox Christian belief from the second century onward.⁷⁴ This doctrine, as stated by the Old English anonymous legend, is *þæt ealle men on Domes dæg sceolon arisan mid þam ylcan lichaman þe gehwa ær her on life leofode* [that all men on Doomsday must arise with their same bodies, in which each one lived before during (their) life].⁷⁵ Not only will the soul be resurrected on Judgment Day, but the body will arise whole and recomposed from the grave. These 'resurrection bodies' are glorified, holy, and perfected. According to Old English verse and prose texts discussing Judgment Day, when the dead rise, their bodies will become like transparent glass.⁷⁶ Vercelli Homily IV states that their resurrected flesh will take on the beauty of *lilian 7 rosan ... golde 7 seolfre 7 swa þam deorwyrðestan gemcynne 7 eorcnanstanum ... he glitenað swa steorra, 7 lyht swa mone, 7*

⁷² H. Magennis, *Legend*, 4-6, "The Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers and its Latin Source", *LSE* 22 (1991), 43-56, and "Ælfric and the Legend of the Seven Sleepers", in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, 1996), 317-33. For the anonymous *Passio* text, see P. M. Huber, "Beitrag zur Visionsliteratur und Siebenschlaferlegende des Mittelalters, I Teil: Text", *BJhGM* (1902-3), 39-78.

⁷³ Ælfric's texts are in P. Clemoes, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series* (Oxford, 1997), 307-12; Magennis, "Ælfric", 322; M. Godden, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series* (Oxford, 1979), 247-8. See also P. H. Zettel, "Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in BL MS Cotton Nero E.i, CCC MS 9, and Other Manuscripts" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 1979), 191-2. Gregory's *Passio* can be found in B. Krusch and W. Levison, eds, *Passiones Vitaeque Sanctorum Aevi Merovingici et Antiquiorum Aliquot*, 7 vols (Hannover, 1896-1920), VII, ii, 757-69.

⁷⁴ E. Honigmann, "Stephen of Ephesus and the Legend of the Seven Sleepers", *PS* (1953), 125-68; C. W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995), 10-11. See Krusch and Levison, 767, ll. 6-8; Huber, 76, ll. 13-14; Magennis, *Legend*, ll. 733-4; Magennis, "Ælfric", 322; Godden, 247, ll. 220-22.

⁷⁵ Magennis, *Legend*, ll. 326-7.

⁷⁶ See for example *Christ C* ll. 1281-2; Blickling Homily X, in R. Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century From the Marquis of Lothian's Unique MS AD 971* (London, 1880), 109.

beorhtaþ swa sunna þonne hio biorhtust bið scinende [lilies and roses ... gold and silver and like the most precious gems and pearls ... it glistens like stars, and gleams like the moon, and shines like the sun when it is shining brightest].⁷⁷ In the Old English legend, the Sleepers, too, are described as having faces *swilce rose and lilie*, and shining like the sun, when they awaken; they are made of physically transcendent flesh.⁷⁸ Ælfric, in his second homily on the Sleepers, takes care to note that *heora nebwlitu scean swa swa sunne* [their countenances shone like the sun].⁷⁹ The resurrection bodies of the Seven Sleepers are an essential part of the legend in the early medieval English imagination. Charm 3 must, therefore, invoke this element of the narrative when using these saints' names.

The verse portion of Charm 3 is concerned with vulnerable bodies, flesh that can be assaulted and penetrated. The prose instructions offer an antidote to such vulnerability by invoking saints whose bodies are inviolable, indestructible, more like jewels and stars than flesh. The writing of these names on Eucharistic wafers — that is, the resurrected, eternal body of Christ — is a double statement of belief in the perfected immortal body. Eucharistic wafers are used in two other remedies in the Old English medical corpus: one against a *dworh* (that is, *dweorh*) and one for *gedrif* [fever], the latter of which also names the Seven Sleepers.⁸⁰ The resurrection bodies of Christ and his disciples apparently counteract, specifically, the supernatural incursion inherent in febrile illnesses. The fact that a virgin — a person whose body is inviolate — delivers these double symbols of transcendent flesh to the

⁷⁷ Vercelli Homily IV ll. 158-60, in D. G. Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts* (Oxford, 1992), 87-107. For discussion, see Thompson, 188-90.

⁷⁸ Magennis, *Legend*, ll. 717, 754.

⁷⁹ Godden, 247, ll. 215-16.

⁸⁰ The remedy for *dworh* is in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley Auct. 7.3.6, f. 1. The remedy for *gedrif* is in Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library, MS Q.5, final flyleaf.

patient in Charm 3 only compounds this effect.⁸¹ The verse charm's anxieties over the vulnerability of the human body are counteracted by a Christian insistence that such vulnerability is a temporary state for the faithful.

Previous scholarship has not explored this thematic relationship between the verse and prose of Charm 3's manuscript witness. Rather, several scholars have argued that the two were not originally related — because the verse section contains no explicit Christian references — and may have been accidentally combined.⁸² There is, however, nothing remotely pagan or anti-Christian about the verse. We cannot confirm circulation of the Seven Sleepers legend in England before the late tenth century; either the entire charm was composed in its present form at the end of the tenth century, or the prose frame was added at this time to an older verse incantation.⁸³ If such a redaction took place, in light of the thematic appropriateness of the pairing of prose and verse, it was likely not an erroneous conflation but an artful and intentional merging of texts. The resulting charm is a sophisticated and complete magical remedy well-suited to eleventh-century England, offering multiple antidotes to the problem of fleshly fragility.

Charm 3 thus seeks to protect an individual patient, to reestablish the correct boundaries of the human body, and to wage war on behalf of Christian humanity against malevolent forces that seek to inappropriately enter the flesh. The charm's ornamental features serve to emphasize these central aims, and the text's 'irregular' verses in fact complement its narrative structure and support its magical function. Charm 3's concerns

⁸¹ Several other medical remedies employ virgins (e.g. Harley 585 f. 189r; *Leechbook III* f. 118v), suggesting the importance of bodily purity. Many Old English and Anglo-Latin religious texts are concerned with virginity, from Aldhelm's *Carmen de uirginitate* to Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. Strong Marian devotion also marked early medieval English Christian practice (see further M. Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* [Cambridge, 2002].)

⁸² Doyle, "Dweorh", 107; Grattan and Singer, 163; Storms, 167; Shaw, 107-8.

⁸³ On circulation of the Seven Sleepers, see Magennis, *Legend*, 5.

preoccupy the metrical charms as a corpus — and stylometric features, both regular and irregular, bow to pragmatic function and poetic theme in all twelve of these unique texts. To explore these concerns further and examine in particular the figure of the malevolent supernatural agent, this study now turns to the three charms most concerned with disease-causing beings: Charms 4, 7, and 12.

Chapter Two

Incursive Agents and the Penetrated Body in Charms 4, 7, and 12

Metrical Charms 4, 7, and 12 offer particularly vivid iterations of the invasive disease agents found in Charm 3 and other Old English remedies. While Charms 4 and 7 use battlefield imagery to portray illness as a martial conflict, in which the patient has suffered a (temporary) defeat to weapon-bearing supernatural warriors, Charm 12 depicts illness as a result of unwanted colonization of the body by a disease-agent that seeks to establish its own malevolent parody of domestic space in the patient's flesh. All three charms seek magical effectiveness through verbal exhaustiveness. Charm 4 defends the patient against a broadly-defined range of dangerous shooters, establishing its own effectiveness against all aggressors in all parts of the body; Charm 7 seeks to prevent all possible ways in which wounds or skin lesions might worsen; Charm 12 brings multiple modes of shrinkage and diminishment to bear on the disease-agent to ensure its annihilation. Perhaps most importantly, however, all of these exhaustive endeavours are enacted in lines that are profoundly metrically irregular by the standards of 'classical' Old English verse. In almost every case, these irregular lines contain a traditional magical formula — demonstrable as such because it appears in multiple other Indo-European charms from antiquity through the medieval period — that does not fit neatly within the bounds of the Old English metrical line. Reiteration of the most 'correct' and 'effective' magical formulae is self-evidently relevant to the charms' practical project, and metre repeatedly bends to function. The unusual poetics of these three charms are in fact eminently suited to their genre. This chapter begins with an analysis of Charm 4, *Wið færstice*, before turning to the shorter, but no less dramatic, Charms 7 and 12.

Charm 4 in Context

Charm 4 appears on ff. 175r-176r of Harley 585, set off from the surrounding prose by a new line of text and a particularly large capital.¹ The poem is the only metrical charm to have received explicit praise, albeit qualified, from scholars for its poetic features; Kemp Malone famously referred to it as ‘a little masterpiece of its kind’.² Indeed, Charm 4 makes use of, but also deviates from, the principles of Old English poetics in ways that emphasize its central themes, clarify its action, and serve both practical and aesthetic purposes. Its irregular lines accommodate numerous formulae; its exhaustive magical mode accounts for the simultaneous vividness and generality of its narrative. Charm 4, like Charm 3, is concerned with sexualized supernatural aggression against the body and seeks to harness ambivalent forces to the charmer’s advantage. The text draws on a culturally-familiar nexus of imagery to dramatize the patient’s illness without restricting the charm’s effectiveness to certain assailants or limiting its use to specific contexts.

The charm is evidently intended for a broad medical purpose. *Færstice* is best translated as ‘a sudden or dangerous puncture, stab, or thrust’.³ *Stice* refers nonspecifically to any kind of sharp pain, as attested by the existence of paired *Leechbook* remedies for *instice* [internal pain] and *stice butan innoðe* [pain outside the internal organs].⁴ *Stice* is also, at least in the charm text, synonymous with *gescot* [a shot, projectile, arrow, dart, spear] apparently wielded by a variety of supernatural agents and literalized as a *lytel spere* [little spear].

¹ This layout led Cockayne (III, 52) and Grattan and Singer (174) to separate prose and verse into two separate remedies. I follow Storms (142), Dobbie (122), and Pettit (II, 216, 259) in presenting prose and verse together, because they treat the same ailment and the initial prose clarifies the charm’s final instruction.

² Malone, “Period”, 42. See also Pettit, II, 213; Pollington, 229.

³ *DOE s.v.* “Færstice”; *BT s.v.* “Fær”, “Stice”. The usual translation ‘stitch’ does not convey the severity of the ailment, which threatens the patient’s life (l. 20).

⁴ *Leechbook II* f. 63r; *DOE s.v.* “Innoð”. Attempts to define *stice* as a specific ailment are therefore unnecessary. Cf. Grendon, 165; Storms, 160; Pollington, 456; Jolly, *Religion*, 143; J. Richardson, “*Hlude wæran hy: Syncretic Christianity in the Old English Charm Wið Færstice*”, *MQ* 42 (2001), 21-45 [39].

Gescot appears elsewhere in the Old English medical corpus as a livestock ailment and evidently also refers to internal pain in those remedies.⁵ The use of exorcistic ritual elements in *gescot* remedies (and, in one case, a direct mention of *ylfe*) suggests that ‘shot’ was consistently understood to be the result of a projectile assault by a malevolent aggressor.⁶ Charm 4 certainly envisions internal pain as the result of a battlefield defeat, in which the spear-injured patient is temporarily overcome by a troop of monstrous fighters. The naming of multiple possible agents in Charm 4 is not vague but multipurpose: the assault on the patient could have come from any supernatural quarter. The medical texts’ penchant for referring to disease-agents in literal or physical terms, as discussed in Chapter 1, suggests that Charm 4’s ‘spear’ and its shooters were not conceived of as metaphorical; the projectile may be invisible or insubstantial, but represents a literal penetration of the patient’s flesh.⁷ Indeed, even if the ‘spear’ is purely metaphorical, such a metaphor still attests to a cultural concept of disease as invasion.

Belief in projectile intrusion as a cause of illness is at least as old as Apollo’s arrows of plague. More immediately relevant to Charm 4 are the charms that remove ‘shot’, often described as small iron weapons made by witches, attested across Scandinavia and eastern

⁵ *Leechbook I* f. 58r; *Leechbook II* f. 106r; Harley 585 f. 171r, 183r; T. Davidson, “Elf-Shot Cattle”, *Antiquity* 30 (1956), 149-55. Cockayne (II, 291) and N. Thun (“The Malignant Elves: Notes on Anglo-Saxon Magic and Germanic Myth”, *SN* 41 [1969], 378-96 [385]) argue that shot is ‘bloat’, a ruminant disease, but Old English medical texts ascribe *gescot* to horses, which are not ruminants (see A. Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* [Oxford, 1981], 110).

⁶ Many scholars ascribe all *gescot* to elves (e.g. Pettit, II, 254; Bonser, *Background*, 158; Jolly, *Religion*, 143-4; Pollington, 456; Thun, 385), but A. Hall has demonstrated (“Calling the Shots: The Old English Remedy *Gif hors ofscoten sie* and Anglo-Saxon ‘Elf-shot’”, *NM* 106 [2005], 195-209) that *gescot* is implicitly ascribed to a number of supernatural agents, including, but not limited to, elves.

⁷ Hall (“Shots”, 202-6) and K. E. Olsen (“The *Lacnunga* and its Sources: The *Nine Herbs Charm* and *Wið Færstice* Reconsidered”, *RCEI* 55 [2007], 23-31) suggest the spear is metaphorical. On the likelihood of the charm’s literality, see E. G. Stanley, “Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Penitent’s Prayer*”, *Anglia* 73 (1955), 413-66 [421-2].

Europe.⁸ The Old Norse *Bandamanna saga*, too, attributes a character's sudden internal pain to an invisible arrow shot from a mountain — the location to which the spear is banished in the metrical charm.⁹ The popular Hiberno-Latin *Lorica of Laidcenn*, well-known in early medieval England, defends the body against demons' *flanas* [arrows].¹⁰ Charm 4 thus seems to be an Old English iteration of a widespread medieval concern with disease-causing supernatural weaponry, perhaps particularly associated with witches and wilderness spaces.

Descriptions of dangerous supernatural projectiles, however, also appear across the Old English and Anglo-Latin corpus, suggesting that Charm 4 belongs to a nexus of incursive martial imagery particularly favoured by early medieval English authors. In several Old English poems, devils injure the soul with the arrows and darts of sin, recalling the 'fiery darts of the wicked one' of Ephesians 6:16.¹¹ In *Christ II*, mankind must guard against the demonic *færscyte* [sudden shot] that penetrates *under banlocan* [into the body], while in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, a nobleman's tormenting pain is caused by devils stabbing iron weapons into his head and feet, which then work their way inwards towards his chest.¹² Whether these various projectiles are literal or figurative, these texts indicate a pervasive concern with the invasion of the body and the maintenance of fleshly integrity. Indeed, two Old English texts attest to a belief in literal, magically-empowered darts capable of causing

⁸ For analogues, see G. Sandmann, "Studien zu Altenglischen Zaubersprüchen" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Münster, 1975), 224-5; B. Halpern and J. M. Foley, "The Power of the Word: Healing Charms as an Oral Genre", *JAF* 91 (1978), 903-24; Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 28; Pollington, 458; Thun, 381; Davidson, 153; Bonser, *Background*, 161; Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, 164-8. The modern Icelandic word for 'devil' is *andskoti* [one who shoots against].

⁹ *Bandamanna saga* ch. 12, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1936).

¹⁰ *Lorica of Laidcenn* l. 32 (text in Pettit).

¹¹ *Beowulf* ll. 1741-4; *Guthlac B* ll. 1141-5; *Juliana* ll. 468-72. On shooting imagery in early medieval England, see M. Atherton, "The Figure of the Archer in *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon Psalter", *Neophilologus* 77 (1993), 653-7.

¹² *Christ II* ll. 766-9. Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Book 5, ch. 13, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969); T. Miller, ed., *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book 5, ch. 13, 2 vols (London, 1963). The Latin uses the word *uomeres* [ploughshares]; the OE has *hondseax* [daggers]. Colgrave and Mynors (500-01) note the similarity between this incident and Charm 4.

death. A charter dated 963-75 CE, recording the exchange of lands between Bishop Æthelwold and the nobleman Wulfstan Ucceca, notes that the land in question was forfeited by a widow and her son, after they *drifon serne stacan on Ælsie Wulfstanes feder* [drove an iron pin into Ælfsige, Wulfstan's father].¹³ A *morð* ['that which causes death'] was afterwards removed from the widow's chamber, presumably referring to an object representing Ælfsige's body, into which the pin was driven. The phrase *on Ælsie*, however, suggests that this assault is so powerful that she might as well have been stabbing the man's own flesh. The *Old English Penitential* also prohibits driving a pin or stake (*drife stacan*) into another person to cause death.¹⁴ These texts suggest a genuine early English belief, contemporary with the copying of Harley 585, that projectiles could be directed by a witch or supernatural agent to injure and kill victims. Charm 4 thus participates in a culturally-relevant nexus of ideas and imagery surrounding 'shot', though it is unique in its vivid depiction of such 'shot' as specifically martial. The identities of its named combatants, however — riders, women, smiths, gods, elves, witches — have been the subject of a vast amount of scholarly debate.

The figures who ride over a *hlæw* [burial mound] in the opening lines of Charm 4 are certainly malevolent: burial mounds and barrows have persistently negative cultural connotations throughout the early medieval English period.¹⁵ Some scholars have suggested these riders are the *ese* [?gods] of lines 21-3, and read them as identical to the Old Norse

¹³ A. J. Robertson, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1956), 68-9; Davies, 49-51. Pettit (II, 222), Pollington (56-7), and Glosecki (*Shamanism*, 126) note this charter as an analogue for Charm 4.

¹⁴ Canon no. 44.13.01. All penitential citations from A. J. Frantzen, ed. and trans., "Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database", accessed 08/12/19, <http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/index.php>.

¹⁵ S. Semple, "A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England", *WA* 30 (1998), 109-26. On early medieval English use of burial mounds as cemeteries and execution sites, see H. Williams, "Monuments and the Past in Early Anglo-Saxon England", *WA* 30 (1998), 90-108; A. Reynolds, "Burials, Boundaries, and Charters in Anglo-Saxon England: A Reassessment", in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. S. Lucy and A. Reynolds (London, 2002), 171-94, and "The Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries", in *Death and Burial in Medieval Europe*, ed. G. de Boe and F. Verhaeghe (Zellik, 1997), 33-41. For Old Norse references to sacrifices at barrow burials and mounds as dwelling places for revenants, see *Kormáks saga* ch. 12, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík, 1939); *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 31, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík, 1935); *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* ch. 18, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1936).

Æsir or as members of the ‘Wild Hunt’ of Óðinn.¹⁶ There is not, however, enough evidence to link the riders to the god Woden or Óðinn, or indeed to the Old Norse *Æsir* as a divine pantheon: evidence for worship of these gods in England even in the pre-Christian period is scarce, and the charm’s late date of preservation precludes the presence of meaningful pagan elements.¹⁷ The *ese* of Charm 4 are malevolent disease agents rather than divinities, perhaps better translated as ‘superhuman beings’. These riders also cannot belong to the so-called Wild Hunt because it is, as Ronald Hutton has persuasively demonstrated, a post-medieval scholarly construct.¹⁸

The charm text itself suggests that the riders are the *mihtigan wif* [mighty women] of line 6.¹⁹ The phrase *hy gyllende garas sændan* [lit. ‘they screaming spears sent’] is syntactically ambiguous, suggesting that both the women and the spears they hurl are ‘screaming’ and therefore connected to the *hlude* [loud] riders.²⁰ The verb *ridan* also has a partial echo in the verb *beræddon*, used of the mighty women in line 6. Identifying the *wif* with the riders also serves as a poetic ‘elaboration’ of the opening lines: if the riders are not the *wif*, their role in the charm’s central conflict (the wielding of the ‘little spear’) is less certain.²¹ It is notable, then, that the patient’s temporary defeat comes at the hands of

¹⁶ S. R. Hauer, “Structure and Unity in the Old English Charm *Wið Færstice*”, *ELN* 15 (1978), 250-57; H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth, 1964), 148; Pettit, II, 232; Grendon, 214; Pollington, 475.

¹⁷ A. Meaney, “Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence”, *Folklore* 77 (1966), 105-15.

¹⁸ R. Hutton, “The Wild Hunt and the Witches’ Sabbath”, *Folklore* 125 (2014), 161-78. The mid-twelfth-century account of a demonic riding group in the Peterborough Chronicle (text in C. Clark, ed., *The Peterborough Chronicle 1070-1154*, 2nd ed. [Oxford, 1970], entry for 1127) belongs to a ‘penitential host’ narrative type that Hutton identifies as emerging post-1100 CE, characterized by resentment of aristocratic corruption (167), and is therefore unlikely to provide a meaningful analogue for Charm 4.

¹⁹ Olsen, “Sources”, 28; Pettit, II, 218; A. Meaney, “Women, Witchcraft, and Magic in Anglo-Saxon England”, in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Manchester, 1989), 9-40 [16]; A. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender, and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007), 113; M. Doskow, “Poetic Structure and the Problem of the Smiths in *Wið Færstice*”, *PLL* 12 (1976), 321-6 [324].

²⁰ Pettit, II, 240.

²¹ Doskow, 323.

feminine assailants. Combat is the male activity *par excellence* in Old English poetry, and these spear-throwing women are engaged in gender transgression by definition. As in Charm 3, the text's action is shaped by gendered and sexual drama: an aggressively masculinized group of women seeks to penetrate the patient's body with arguably phallic weaponry.

Thematically similar depictions of armed, supernatural females riding in groups and engaging in combat appear in medieval German and Old Norse texts. Regino of Prüm's ninth-century *De ecclesiasticis disciplinis* and Burchard of Worms' eleventh-century *Corrector* both condemn women who believe they ride out at night in tumultuous nocturnal processions led by goddesses, battle one another, and kill human victims.²² Numerous Old Norse texts describe female beings called *valkyrjur* and *disir*, semantically broad terms that are difficult to define and often seem to overlap.²³ *Disir*, in various texts, are female deities, beings associated with childbirth, protective figures whose anger or disregard indicates impending death, and armoured women who ride out in groups, bearing weapons; in one case, a group of mounted *disir* kill a man with spears.²⁴ *Valkyrjur* are often depicted as groups of mounted and armed women. In some texts, they have battle-related names, determine

²² Regino, *De ecclesiasticis disciplinis et religione christiana*, 364, *PL* vol. 132; Burchard, *Decretum*, 961, 973-4, *PL* vol. 140. See also V. I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1991), 122; Pettit, II, 239; Hutton, 172.

²³ *CV* s.v. "Dis", "Valkyrja". Scholars have long attempted to define *disir* and *valkyrjur*, but the evidence is difficult to interpret. For a summative study, see M. Egeler, *Walküren, Bodbs, Sirenen: Gedanken zur religionsgeschichtlichen Anbindung Nordwesteuropas an den mediterranen Raum* (Berlin, 2011). For various proposed definitions, see T. Gunnell, "The Season of the *Disir*: The Winter Nights and the *Disablót* in Early Scandinavian Belief", *Cosmos* 16 (2000), 117-49; R. Simek, "Goddesses, Mothers, *Disir*: Iconography and Interpretation of the Female Deity in Scandinavia in the First Millennium" and L. P. Andersen, "On Valkyries, Shield Maidens, and Other Armed Women in Old Norse Sources and Saxo Grammaticus", both in *Mythological Women: Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz, 1922-1997*, ed. R. Simek and W. Heizmann (Wien, 2002), 93-123, 291-318; J. T. Lionarons, "Disir, Valkyries, Völur and Norns: The 'Weise Frauen' of the *Deutsche Mythologie*", in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. T. A. Shippey (Tempe, 2005), 271-98; J. Quinn, "The Gendering of Death in Eddic Cosmology", in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives*, ed. A. Andrén *et al.* (Lund, 2006), 54-7; A. H. Krappe, "The Valkyries", *MLR* 21 (1926), 55-73.

²⁴ *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* ch. 24, ed. S. Nordal (Reykjavík, 1933); *Víga Glúms saga* ch. 6, ed. Valdimar Ásmundarson (Reykjavík, 1897); *Sigrdrífumál* st. 10; *Grimnismál* st. 53; *Atlamál* st. 27-8; *Reginismál* st. 25; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* st. 15-16; *Krákumál* st. 29 in *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*; *Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa* ch. 32, in *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1938); *Þiðrandi þátrr ok Þórhalls*, in *Flateyjarbók*, ed. S. Nordal, 4 vols (Akraness, 1944-5).

victory in combat, or choose which of the slain men on the battlefield will be taken to *Valhöll*.²⁵ In other texts, they are relatively-human women who marry human men,²⁶ and in still others they are monsters associated with witches and giants.²⁷ None of these supernatural women can be said to appear in Charm 4: these female riders are never associated with disease, there is no evidence for belief in a processional goddess in early medieval England, and the Old English word *wælcyrige* — not mentioned in Charm 4 — relates only uncertainly to the Old Norse *valkyrja*.²⁸ While *wælcyrige* glosses the names of the Furies, the Gorgons, and Bellona, goddess of war, Wulfstan also uses it to refer to human witches.²⁹ These Scandinavian and German images therefore do not gloss Charm 4, but do indicate the currency of concepts of dangerous female riders in the medieval North Atlantic. The charm seems, again, to be an Old English iteration of a widespread medieval European idea. All of these supernatural women are amorously defined, and Charm 4 does not seek specificity: the mighty women are not given identities, and the repeated word *hægtes(se)*, like *wælcyrige*, is semantically broad, glossing terms for human women, Furies, and the Fates.³⁰ What emerges in Charm 4 is not a portrait of a specific being or retelling of a specific narrative, but the poetic deployment of an established image-type associated with threatening femininity,

²⁵ For themes associated with *valkyrjur*, see Egeler, 474-5. Battle-names and an association with Óðinn appear in *Völuspá* st. 30; *Grímnismál* st. 36; *Sigrdrífumál*, prose. *Valkyrjur* determine victory or choose the slain in *Sigrdrífumál*, prose; *Darraðarljóð* in *Brennu-Njáls saga* ch. 157, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík, 1954); *Hákonarmál* in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* ch. 36, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols (Reykjavík, 1941-51). They serve alcohol in *Valhöll* in *Eiríksmál* in *Fagrskinna* ch. 8, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (Reykjavík, 1985); *Grímnismál* st. 36.

²⁶ *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, prose; *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, prose; *Sigrdrífumál*, prose.

²⁷ *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* st. 38; Bergen Runestick B257 (text in McKinnell *et al.*, 131-2; MacLeod and Mees, 34-5).

²⁸ *Contra*, for example, Ellis Davidson, *Gods*, 64; Pollington, 52; Hauer, 253; Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 116; Sandmann, 81; Olsen, “Sources”, 28; J. Crawford, “Evidences for Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England”, *MÆ* 32 (1963), 99-116; H. Damico, *Beowulf’s Wealththeow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison, 1984), 45; R. North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1997), 105; Hill, “Rod”, 161; Richardson, 32-43.

²⁹ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Wælcyr-”, “Walkyr-”.

³⁰ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Hægtes”; Meaney, “Women”, 16-17. Synonymity between two Old English gloss words cannot be assumed even when they gloss the same lemmata.

violent death, and the transgression of normative boundaries.

The text also names *ylfe* among its numerous agents — another word with broad semantic range. Charm 4 uses the collocation *ese ... ylfe*, cognate with the common Old Norse collocation *æsir ... álfar* [gods and elves].³¹ The pairing is formulaic and seems to reflect alliterative demands rather than any kind of parity or shared divinity between *æsir* and *álfar*; the latter word seems, on the whole, to indicate ‘all supernatural beings outside the central pantheon’.³² The fact that the Norse collocation encompasses all supernatural entities may explain its appearance in Charm 4, which defends the patient against every potential ‘shooter’. It is also notable, however, that *álfar* are treated by many Old Norse texts as monsters, sexual predators, and — in the case of several amuletic inscriptions — disease agents.³³ The Old English *ylfe* are not only similarly difficult to define, but also similarly ambivalent in their cultural connotations.³⁴ The word glosses names for classical nymphs and appears in the term *ælfscinu* [wondrously/superhumanly beautiful].³⁵ Yet *ylfe* are also

³¹ *Lokasenna* st. 2, 13, 30; *Grímnismál* st. 4; *Hávamál* st. 159-60; *Þrymskviða* st. 7; *Völuspá* st. 49; *Fáfnismál* st. 13; *Skírnismál* st. 7, 17-18.

³² *Álfar* seems to refer to ‘all supernatural beings aside from the *æsir*’ in *Þrymskviða* st. 7; *Völuspá* st. 49; *Fáfnismál* st. 13; *Skírnismál* st. 7, 17-18; *Sigrdrífumál* st. 18. For this definition of *álfar*, see Ármann Jakobsson, “Beware of the Elf: A Note on the Evolving Meaning of *Álfar*”, *Folklore* 126 (2015), 215-23. Cf. T. A. Shippey, “Alias Oves Habeo: The Elves as a Category Problem”, in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm’s Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. T. Shippey (Tempe, 2005), 157-86. T. Gunnell (“How Elvish Were the *Álfar*?”), in *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T. A. Shippey*, ed. A. Wawn et al. [Turnhout, 2007], 111-30) suggests the *álfar* and the *vanir* are identical, followed by Hall, *Elves*, 127. *Álfar* seems to be used as a synonym for *vanir* in *Lokasenna*’s prose introduction, *Grímnismál* st. 5, and *Hávamál* st. 159. However, *álfar* and *vanir* are referred to as separate groups in *Skírnismál* st. 17-18; *Vafþrúðnismál* st. 39; *Alvissmál* throughout; *Sigrdrífumál* st. 19; *Völuspá* st. 24, 49. For a refutation of the *álfar/vanir* link, see Ármann Jakobsson, “The Extreme Emotional Life of *Völundr* the Elf”, *SS* 78 (2006), 227-54.

³³ *Buslubæn* st. 3 in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*; Runestick B257; *Þiðriks saga af Bern*, ed. H. Bertelsen, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1905-11), 319-22. Arguably *Völundr* of *Völundarkviða* (st. 11, 14, 31) is a dangerous elf; see Ármann, “*Völundr*”, 241. On amulets, see Simek, “Elves”, 43.

³⁴ Hall (*Elves*) considers *ylfe* to be a distinct category of being, but the Old English record is sparse; see Ármann, “Beware”, 221. Though many scholars (e.g. Pettit, II, 236; Bonser, *Background*, 158; Grattan and Singer, 60) assume that elves are tiny sprites, the use of the OE noun to gloss terms for nymphs and the ON noun in kennings for humans suggest *ylfe* are humanlike (Hall, *Elves*, 28; Gunnell, “Elvish”, 129). See also K. L. Jolly, “Elves in the Psalms? The Experience of Evil from a Cosmic Perspective”, in *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell* ed. A. Ferreiro (Leiden, 1998), 19-44.

³⁵ *DOE* s.v. “Ælfscyne”; *BT* s.v. “Scin”; M. Griffith, ed., *Judith* (Exeter, 1997), 110. Cf. H. Stuart, “The Meaning of OE *ælfsciene”, *Parergon* 2 (1972), 22-6. The term may have negative connotations: it describes Judith as she beholds Holofernes and Sarah when Abraham pretends she is his sister (*Judith* l. 14; *Genesis A* ll. 1822, 2729).

straightforwardly treated as monstrous and demonic across the entirety of the medical corpus and in several other early medieval English texts.³⁶ In Old English remedies, elves and elf-caused illnesses are treated with exorcistic rituals and elements, and associated with demons, convulsive, delirious, or febrile symptoms, and feminine or sexual threats like the *mære*.³⁷ Like the *mihtigan wif*, the elves of Charm 4 represent a broad category of incursive agents.

The remaining figures of central importance in Charm 4 are the smiths of lines 11-14. The question of whether some or all of the seven smiths are allies or antagonists of the charmer has occasioned considerable debate.³⁸ The text suggests that all seven smiths are antagonists. The charm's repeated exorcistic refrain, clearly intended to operate against the charmers' enemies, follows each naming of the smiths, just as it follows each description of the female combatants.³⁹ There is no suggestion that the refrain changes in tone or purpose. The verbal parallels between lines 11a (*Sæt smið*) and 14a (*Syx smiðas sætan*) suggest all the smiths are allied with one another, while the single smith's *lytel iserna* [little one of iron weapons] and the six smiths' *wælspera* [slaughter-spears] recall the 'shot' itself, referred to as *isenes dæl* and *lytel spere*.⁴⁰ The first seventeen lines of the charm, then, identify the malevolent agents responsible for the patient's pain, and the incantatory final nine lines enact the cure — an almost exact 2:1 division. Though some scholars suggest the smiths are

³⁶ See for example *Beowulf* ll. 111-14 and a prayer in London, British Library, Royal MS 2 A.xx f. 45v that addresses Satan as an *ælf* (see Thun, 380; Jolly, *Religion*, 145; Hall, *Elves*, 72).

³⁷ *Leechbook I* ff. 51v-54r; *Leechbook III* ff. 120r-121r, 125v-127r; Harley 585 ff. 137r-138r. On elves in the medical texts, see Jolly, *Religion*, 134-8, 152, 164; Dendle, *Possession*, 99; Meaney, "Causes", 18; Thun, 390; Hall, *Elves*, 99-109; S. Závoti, "Blame it on the Elves: Perception of Illness in Anglo-Saxon England", *SPELL* 28 (2013), 67-78; J. McGowan, "Elves, Elf-shot and Epilepsy: OE *ælfadl*, *ælfside*, *ælfsogeþa*, *bræccōþu*, and *bræcseoc*", *SN* 81 (2009), 116-20.

³⁸ Storms (145), Chickering (100), and Grendon (214) argue all seven smiths are the charmer's allies. Hauer (255) and Skemp (290) argue the single smith is an ally while the six are enemies. Doskow (323) and Olsen ("Sources", 29-30) argue all seven are enemies.

³⁹ Doskow, 325.

⁴⁰ Skemp (290) and Chickering (100) suggest that the single smith's *seax* provides a necessary grammatical antecedent for the *seax* in the final prose instruction, but *þæt* is the neuter form of the definite article and does not require an antecedent.

identical with the ‘elves’ of ll. 21-4,⁴¹ *ese*, *ylfe*, and *hægtessan* are all named as wielders of shot, which is also described as *hægtessan geweorc* [the work of witches]. Any of these dangerous agents could conceivably be the ‘smiths’ of the charm’s penetrative weaponry. The charm generally suggests two groups at work: female assailants riding out into battle, and smiths who sit at their forges rather than engaging in physical conflict. Both of these categories of antagonist, however, could be described by all three terms put forward in lines 21-4. Whatever category of being the riders and their weapon-forgers belong to — whatever threat, out of the many that press in on humanity from all sides, they represent — the charmer is equipped to defeat them.

Indeed, ‘solving’ Charm 4, parsing the exact identities of all its various participants, is not necessary to a productive interpretation of the text, and may be insensitive to the charm’s own breadth and flexibility. The charm’s generality does not mean it is thematically opaque or that it lacks narrative, as Howard Chickering has suggested.⁴² Charm 4 offers a vivid depiction of armed conflict with transgressive agents, followed by the provision of a victorious, stylized cure. Even if the text does not refer to a specific narrative attested elsewhere, Charm 4 itself tells a clear story about the fight for bodily integrity in the face of an existential, incursive threat. The text also invokes a broader cultural narrative about invasive illness, and draws on images found in Old English literature and its relevant analogues: dangerous supernatural women, a tumultuous battle, the violent return of an

⁴¹ Doskow (326), Hall (*Elves*, 113-14), and Skemp (292) equate smiths and *ylfe*. Some scholars argue the smiths are shamanic by virtue of their profession (Hauer, 252-4; Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 133; Pollington, 481; Pettit, II, 218, 242) but there is little evidence to suggest a belief in supernatural smiths in early medieval England. D. Alff (“Workers and Artisans, the Binders and the Bound: Craftsmen and Notions of Craftsmanship in Old English Literature” [unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2013]) notes a vacillation between highly positive and highly negative attitudes towards smiths in Old English texts, but neither attitude is due to the perceived supernatural abilities of the smiths in question. For smiths in Old English homilies, see C. D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1993), 189-95. As noted in Chapter 1, Old English depictions of Weland, the only potentially supernatural smith in the Old English corpus, elide the superhuman aspects of his narrative. There is no evidence for Storms (146), Grendon (214), and Pettit’s (II, 242) association of Charm 4’s single smith with Weland.

⁴² Chickering, 86-7, 98. See also Olsen, “Sources”, 28.

enemy's spear (as in *Maldon* ll. 154-6), the melting of weapons (as in *Beowulf* l. 1609), the presentation of weapons as the work of skilled smiths, an array of inhuman antagonists menacing the body. A close analysis of Charm 4 brings familiar themes — threatening femininity, violence, violation — to the fore, and demonstrates the ways in which the charm's stylistic features serve its magical purpose.

Stylistic Analysis

The first lines of the charm open with an emphasis on riotous action and dramatic C2 types, which end with two consecutive, clashing stresses:

/ x x x x x / x x x x x x / \acute{x}
 Hlūde wæran hȳ, lā hlūde, ðā hȳ ofer þone hlæw ridan, A|C

 x x / \ x x x xx / \acute{x}
 wæran ānmōde ðā hȳ ofer land ridan. d|C

The repetition of *hlude*, with a partial *hl/l* echo in the emphatic *la*, highlights the audibly aggressive approach of the riding troop, as does the proliferation of linked sounds, including extra alliteration on *h* and assonance on *æ* and *u*.⁴³ These lines place alliterative stress on the riders' most important characteristics: they are overwhelming, unrestrained, and associated with death. Line 2 is, essentially, a poetic variation on line 1, complete with syntactic reversal of *hlude wæran ... wæran anmode*. Both long lines are punctuated and bound together by the repetition of *ridan*. Line 2's disruptive lack of alliteration both draws attention to this variation and allows for the near-exact syntactic repetition of lines 1b and 2b; this emphatic aural patterning may compensate for the loss of structural alliteration. *Anmode* [single-minded], emphasized by the light D-type verse, may also be a thematically-relevant vocabulary choice, conveying the troop's determination to assault the patient. These lines

⁴³ On the association of *hl* alliteration with loud vocal sound, see Griffith, "Alliteration", 95-7.

amplify a single individual's illness into an archetypal confrontation between humanity and its antithetical enemies.⁴⁴

Line 3 uses an extended B type not found in normal verse (2B3c) to accommodate the multiple pronouns needed for an essential command to the patient:

x x x / x x x / x \acute{x} / x
 Scyld $\acute{d}\bar{u}$ $\acute{d}\bar{e}$ nū, þū \acute{d} ysne nīð genesan mōte! **B|C**

The abrupt change in subject, from third person to second, is an essential pivot in an already dramatic opening, dropping the patient into the middle of the action outlined in lines 1-2. Assonance on *u* and echoing on *p/ð* contributes to the rapid elaboration of this series of particles, suggesting the intensity and immediacy of the patient's danger. The use of the extended verse accommodates the reflexive pronoun and two uses of the second-person pronoun, suggesting the importance of the idea that the patient shield *himself*, rather than being shielded by the charmer. The charmer will shield himself in line 5, but has not yet entered the action, and will not do so definitively until line 8, when he takes up arms. The sense here may be that the patient is commanded to remain safely behind his 'shield' while the charmer, equipped with verbal and magical skill, prepares to engage directly with the danger. Even so, the battle-aggression of these female assailants seems initially to threaten to overwhelm both patient and physician, and the charmer gathers his power in stages: first he is absent from the scene, then standing and perceiving the action, then, finally, returning a spear.

This first description of the charm's antagonists is punctuated by its exorcistic refrain:

/ \ x \acute{x} x x / x /
 Ūt, lýtél spere, gif hērinne sīe! **E|B**


Notably, this central command is an E type, and the alliteration of the line falls on the

⁴⁴ On this type of amplification, see E. Bozóky, "Medieval Narrative Charms", in *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. J. A. Kapaló *et al.* (Budapest, 2013), 101-16.

contrasting *ut* and *in*: Charm 4, like Charm 3, is concerned with removing supernatural influence that has penetrated within and must be removed without. Refrains are rare in Old English verse, appearing only in *Deor* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, but this particular line is likely formulaic and traditional. The similar charm formulae *Dock in, nettle out* and *Out fire, in frost* (the latter of which has an Old Norse equivalent, *Ut yl, inn kyl*) appear in numerous Middle English charms, while in two early medieval German versions of a worm charm, the offending agent is commanded *Gang uz, nezzo* [Go out, worm].⁴⁵ Charm 4's refrain contains particular magical force inherent in its verbal presentation, and a literalization of disease as a projectile weapon makes it easier to exhort and exorcize. The spear may be described as *lytel* because it has entered the patient's flesh without leaving a visible wound. Incursive agents like *wyrmas* are no less potent or destructive for their small size, and the littleness of the spear may suggest insidiousness rather than, for example, mocking diminishment, a tone which the charm does not otherwise deploy against its numerous enemies.⁴⁶

The charmer then enters the scene as the text's antagonists begin their assault proper:

x x x / x x x / x / x
 Stōd under linde, under lēohtu(m) scylde, **a|hypermetric A**

x x / x x / x x  x / x
 þær ðā mihtigan wīf hýra mægen beræddon, **B|A**

x x / \ x / x / x
 7 hý gyllende gāras sændan. **d|A** (ll. 5-7)

S-clusters do not usually alliterate with one another, and many metricists would consider *stod*, an undisplaced finite verb unnecessary for maintaining cross-caesura alliteration, to be

⁴⁵ Roper, *Charms*, 138. For the ON formula, see Runestick B252 (text in McKinnell *et al.*, 133). For the German charms, see C. L. Miller, ed. and trans., *The Old High German and Old Saxon Charms: Text, Commentary, and Critical Bibliography* (Ann Arbor, 1982).

⁴⁶ Cf. Pettit, II, 236.

unstressed.⁴⁷ *St-* and *sc-* do, however, alliterate in late verse, and in order to eventually become candidates for structural alliteration, *s*-clusters must have been considered to echo one another aurally even before this late development.⁴⁸ Whatever the date of Charm 4, then, an early medieval English audience could likely hear that initial *s*-sounds bracket *l*-alliteration in line 5. This transverse effect marks a new scene in the charm and highlights the gestural congruity of both charmer and patient shielding themselves, pointing, perhaps, to their shared (but temporary) human vulnerability in the face of supernatural assault.⁴⁹ *Linde* is a synecdoche for ‘shield’ in the *Battle of Maldon*, and may be so here; the importance of a ‘linden tree’ is otherwise unclear.⁵⁰ Indeed, the aural patterning of the long line reinforces the semantic connection between the two verses, suggesting that *scylde* is a variation on *linde*. This poetic diction heralds the entrance of the charmer into the supernatural landscape and signals the beginning of familiar, formulaic battle-imagery. Perhaps most importantly, however, the line demonstrates the charmer’s growing power, resurrecting an element of the personal and the individual in the charm’s archetypal narrative action.⁵¹

Line 6, elaborating on the riders as *mihtigan wif*, draws on the common alliterative collocation *miht ... mæg* [might ... power], and therefore on what Randolph Quirk calls ‘an

⁴⁷ I have not scanned *stod* as stressed because it is uncertain whether the composer(s) or audience of Charm 4 understood it to alliterate structurally with *scylde*. In general, I stress unquestionably alliterating undisplaced finite verbs when doing so creates a two-lift verse attested in Sievers–Bliss. See further R. J. Pascual, “On A Crux in *Beowulf*: The Alliteration of Finite Verbs and the Scribal Understanding of Metre”, *SN* 87 (2015), 171–85.

⁴⁸ For examples, see Terasawa, *Introduction*, 13.

⁴⁹ There is no reason to assume the charm is referring to an unnamed third person or that the subject of *stod* is the spear (*contra* Hall, *Elves*, 2). The spear does not need to be shielded and the charm reads more clearly if the speaker is the implied subject (Pettit, II, 237).

⁵⁰ *Battle of Maldon* ll. 99, 244; Pettit, II, 237. Cf. R. E. Bjork, ed. and trans., *Old English Shorter Poems Volume II: Wisdom and Lyric* (Cambridge, 2014), who translates ‘linden tree’.

⁵¹ Glosecki (*Shamanism*, 106–8) suggests that this line is evidence that the charmer engages in shamanic travel to the ‘dream time’. The charmer’s self-insertion into the narrative action is not a specifically shamanic device and there is no evidence of shamanic practice in early medieval England.

expectation of the congruous and complementary'.⁵² The collocation, in the vast majority of its occurrences, applies to God or Christ, and thus connotes the highest levels of power. The handful of instances in Old English poetry in which the adjective *mihtig* applies to a non-divine figure all appear in *Beowulf*, and the creatures so described are monstrous: Grendel, the *meredeor* [water-beast] Beowulf recalls slaying, and, twice, Grendel's mother (the *mihtig manscaða* and *merewif mihtig*).⁵³ The half-line *merewif mihtig* is the only other verse in Old English poetry to contain both the words *wif* and *mihtig*, and Grendel's mother is the only other female being described as *mihtig* in the entirety of the corpus.⁵⁴ Such a significant gender disparity, as well as the malevolent nature of the women so described, suggests that the application of the word to female characters implies inappropriate masculinity — a characteristic often noted in the *Beowulf*-poet's portrayal of Grendel's mother.⁵⁵ The *mihtigan wif*, like Grendel's mother, are in possession of a profound power that is otherwise the exclusive province of male beings. They are mighty in the extreme, but inherently inappropriate and dangerous. The description of these women as *mihtig* and possessing collective *mægen*, therefore, suggests their violent deployment of transgressive supernatural strength.⁵⁶ The *wif* then launch into their attack by hurling *gyllende garas* [screaming spears], a poetic formula that appears in both Old English and Old Norse verse.⁵⁷ As in line 5 with the use of synecdochic *linde*, poetic diction elevates Charm 4's conflict to the emotional and

⁵² Quirk, 153. *BT s.v.* "Mihtig", "Mæg"; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Miht-"; Boolean Search, "Miht ... Mæg".

⁵³ *Beowulf* ll. 558, 969, 1339, 1519.

⁵⁴ *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "Miht ... Wif"; Simple Search, "Miht-".

⁵⁵ See for example J. Nitzsche, "The Structural Unity of Beowulf: The Problem of Grendel's Mother", *TSL* 22 (1980), 287-303; S. S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame, 2006), 87-124; Orchard, *Companion*, 109, 189, 195.

⁵⁶ Cf. those scholars who argue that *mihtigan wif* is a term of respect (Grendon, 214; Ellis Davidson, *Gods*, 63; S. F. Burdorff, "Re-Reading Grendel's Mother: Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charms", *Comitatus* 45 [2014], 91-103).

⁵⁷ *Widsið* l. 128; *Atlakviða* st. 5, 14. Noted in Pettit, II, 240. Vaughan-Sterling (196) compares *garas sændan* with *garas sellan* in *Maldon* l. 46.

aesthetic level of traditional battle scenes in Old English literature more readily recognized for their artistic skill. The battle for the patient's body takes place on as grand a scale as a fight against literal invaders.

The charmer then takes action:

x x / \ x / x x / x
Ic him oðerne eft wille sændan, d|A

/ x x / x ∪ x x / x
flēogende flān(e), forane tōgēanes. A|A

/ \ x ∪ x x x / x /
Ūt lyte[l] spere, gif hit hērinne sȳ! E|B (ll. 8-10)

Line 8 violates Kuhn's Laws: the particle *wille* is displaced from the clause-initial dip and so should bear metrical stress, but in order for the b-verse to scan, it must be unstressed. We could, theoretically, emend the line such that it obeys Kuhn's Laws (*ic him eft wille / oðerne sændan*, types C/A) but there is no lacuna, or grammatical or semantic lapse, that would justify such correction. The line makes perfect sense, and it alliterates across the caesura. Indeed, the placement of *oðerne* and *eft* immediately on either side of the caesura reinforces the line's central action, the returning of the spear. Whenever this line was introduced into the charm — whether by its first composer or by a putative later reviser or compiler — it was created by an author for whom Kuhn's Laws were a secondary concern. Numerous lines across the twelve metrical charms disregard Kuhn's Laws, and we might conclude from these apparent 'lapses' that the composers of the charms in their preserved forms were simply less skilled than, say, the *Beowulf*-poet. However, the high level of ornamentation across all the metrical charms suggests that their composers did not lack an understanding of verse composition. Campbell argues that Kuhn's Laws were a monastic innovation — which may suggest that the charms, or parts of them, were composed in a more flexible mode of Old

English verse.⁵⁸

The alliterative emphasis on *oðerne* [another] and *eft* [back] reflects the exchange of near-identical spears: the charmer is turning his enemies' weapons against them. The phrase *fleogende flane*, another Old Norse and Old English poetic formula, functions as a variation not only on *oðerne* but on *gyllende garas*, further connecting the healer's dart to the spears thrown by the mighty women.⁵⁹ The elaboration of *eft* as *forane togeanes* [from the front in return], the repetition of *sændan* in a line-final position in ll. 8-9, and the use of two type d1b a-verses in a row (*7 hy gyllende ... ic him oðerne*), serve a similar purpose. Like affects like: as in Charm 3, the charmer harnesses a negative or ambivalent force — here, disease-causing spears — and uses it to banish other supernatural antagonists. The charmer literally reverses his enemies' aggression, turning malicious influences back on themselves.⁶⁰

The text then introduces a new set of enemies, bringing the narrative closer to the supernatural origin of the disease-causing projectiles:

x / x /
Sæt smið, slōh seax, ?|? (or // | //, also unattested)

/ x /\ x / \ x
lýtℓ iſerna, wundswīðe. D|?

/ \ x ˘x x x / x /
Ūt lýtℓ spere, gif hērinne sý! E|B

/ ˘x \ x / ˘x⁶¹ / x
Syx smiðas sætan,⁶² wælspera worhtan. D|A

⁵⁸ A. Campbell, "The Old English Epic Style", in *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. N. Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London, 1962), 13-26.

⁵⁹ Riddle 1 ll. 86-7; *Judith* l. 221; *Hávamál* st. 86; *Rígsþula* st. 35. See also *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "Flan ... Fleogen".

⁶⁰ Weston, "Language", 179.

⁶¹ This resolved stress should be a resolved secondary stress. My word processor lacks the correct symbol.

⁶² This half-line is metrically ambiguous because all three words alliterate. If we scan one of the words with secondary stress (/ \ x or /\ x), it is a D type. If we scan all three words with full stress (/// x), it is irregular in all metrical systems aside from Yakovlev's (74-5). Other examples of ambiguous triple alliteration in the a-verse include *Christ III* l. 1630 and *Resignation* l. 43.

/ / x x / / x
 Ūt spere! Næs in, spere!⁶³ C|C (ll. 11-15)

As the pace of the charm increases — shorter descriptions of the charmer’s foes, with more frequent iterations of the refrain – the verses become increasingly heavy. While the narrative moves faster, the metre grows more emphatic, building both momentum and power. Lines 11-12 are notably metrically irregular, and therefore perhaps striking to an audience accustomed to verses with four or more syllables and closely regulated cross-caesura alliteration. Terasawa suggests that the rule that a given verse must have at least four syllables was fundamental to Old English verse, yet some short verses — like *Wulf and Eadwacer*’s famous half-line *Wulf, min Wulf* — have been accepted as instances of poetic license.⁶⁴ Some previous editors have assumed there must be a lacuna or corruption in lines 11-12, but they are grammatically and semantically clear, so emendation is technically unnecessary and requires significant conjecture.⁶⁵ Line 11, in its extant form, has relevant stylistic features. The long line is stripped to its barest elements: every syllable alliterates, and the two half-lines are syntactically and rhythmically balanced. This unusual, and therefore noticeable, metre provides an abrupt narrative shift to introduce a new antagonist — just as Charm 3 abandons cross-caesura alliteration to announce the disruptive entrance of a new inhuman creature, the sister. Perhaps more importantly, this description of a smith may be traditional. The possibly Anglo-Scandinavian *Völundarkviða* says of the captive smith: *sat hann, né hann svaf, ávalt / ok hann sló hamri* [he sat, he did not sleep, ceaselessly, and struck with his

⁶³ Resolution on *spere* is suspended in both verses because it immediately follows a stressed syllable.

⁶⁴ J. Terasawa, “*Secg Betsta* and *Dejn Betstan*: A Reconsideration of the Short Verses in *Beowulf*”, in *Early English Poetic Culture and Meter: The Influence of G. R. Russom*, ed. M. J. Toswell and L. Brady (Kalamazoo, 2016), 9-20. The patterns //x and /x/ are permitted in Sievers–Bliss.

⁶⁵ Emenders include Storms (143), Hill (“Rod”, 159), Dobbie (122), and Sandmann (92). The text’s most recent editors (Pettit, II, 245; Hall, *Elves*, 2) divide the lines as I have done here.

hammer].⁶⁶ The use of this particular language (sitting and striking) to describe the act of smithing may be more important than the maintenance of Sieversian metre, and the line in its current form is aurally compelling.

Line 12 does not alliterate, and 12b is an unattested three-position verse type. Such verses appear throughout the metrical charms, suggesting, again, that this feature may be permitted by their particular compositional mode. The use of the phrase *lytel iserna* is likely relevant to the charm's narrative purpose, given that it echoes other words used to describe the 'shot' and so designates the smith as an enemy, but the *hapax* compound *wundswiðe* may also be essential. The term is productively ambiguous: it can mean either 'powerful in wounding' or 'powerfully wounded', and indeed, the iron that wounds the patient is itself 'wounded' by the smith's hammer during its forging.⁶⁷ Like affects like: the iron must be injured in order to injure the patient.

Line 14 — *Syx smiðas scætan, wælspera worhtan* — similarly does not alliterate across the caesura, but features internal alliteration within each half-line, and the use of a poetic compound (*wælspera*) that picks up the *s*-alliteration of the first half-line in its second element.⁶⁸ Many of the metrical charms include lines that compensate for a lack of cross-caesura alliteration with this kind of internal double-alliteration.⁶⁹ The massed *s*-alliteration and syntax of line 14a echoes 11a closely, and the *w* alliteration of 14b echoes 12b. The single smith is aurally aligned with his six fellow smiths in an act of verbal multiplication that heightens the sense of threat as the charm gathers pace. As the charm narrative grows closer

⁶⁶ *Völundarkviða* st. 19. On the poem's possible Anglo-Scandinavian origin, see J. McKinnell, "Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian Northern England", in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Selected Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21-30 August 1997*, ed. J. Graham-Campbell (Oxford, 2001), 327-44.

⁶⁷ On the meaning of the compound, see Pettit, II, 244.

⁶⁸ *Wælspera* also appears in *Battle of Maldon* l. 322.

⁶⁹ E.g. Charm 2 l. 10; Charm 5 l. 1; Charm 6 ll. 1-3.

to the origin of the shot, however, the exorcistic refrain also gains power. The emphatic, shortened version that appears in line 15 has been stripped down to its essentials — *ut, næs in* — and consists of two C types, one with fewer than four positions (permissible, in this case, in Sievers–Bliss). This short version is closer to other traditional formulae of this type, which, like *Out fire, in frost*, consist of brief, syntactically-parallel reversals. The refrain becomes pithier, more demanding, and more traditionally magical.

Lines 16-17 elaborate on this command, supplying the phrase from the longer form of the refrain (*gif herinne sie*) that does not appear in the shortened version:

x x / x / / x x /
 Gif hērinne sȳ īsenes dǣl,⁷⁰ B|E

 / x x x / / x x / x
 hægtessan geweorc, hit sceal gemyltan. E|A

Two E-type verses across lines 16b-17a highlight the use of elements (*isern, wyrce*) found elsewhere in the charm to describe the shot, and draws attention to the use of the word *hægtessan*, evidently important to the charm’s magical effectiveness as it is repeated twice in its final lines. Again, a violative feminine threat is given particular poetic emphasis. In addition, where the spear has previously been commanded to exit the body, now it is told to ‘melt’. *Gemyltan* does not alliterate with *hægtessan* and therefore pushes the alliteration of the verse onto an undisplaced particle. The use of this particular verb may be important. The image recalls the melting of the sword that kills Grendel’s mother: its strength spent, the weapon can only disintegrate into nothing, and similar annihilation is clearly intended for Charm 4’s ‘shot’. In the exhaustive spirit of the charm’s concluding lines, the charmer seeks to destroy the spear by multiple methods.

The charm climaxes in lines 18-24, which enact the curing of the patient in a series of

⁷⁰ *Ise(r)nes dǣl* appears only in Riddle 56 (*DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Isern . . . Dǣl”). The phrase there means ‘partly made of iron’. *Dǣl* usually means ‘portion’, and its use here, evidently meaning ‘pieces’, is unusual.

rhetorically elaborate formulae.⁷¹ After dramatizing the patient's pain, illustrating the battle occurring in his body, identifying his enemies, and demanding the exorcism of their malicious influence, the text declares itself effective and actually heals the patient, in lines that bring all the text's actors (charmer, patient, antagonists, shot) together. This section begins with a series of C types that present a natural climax to the charm's increasingly heavy, increasingly ornamented verse:

x x x x x / / x x x x x x / / x
 Gif ðū wære on fell scoten,⁷² oððe wære on flæsc scoten,

 x x x x x / / x
 oððe wære on blōd scoten,

 x x x x x / / x x x x x x / x / x
 oððe wære on lið scoten, nǣfre ne sȳ ðīn lif ātæsed. (ll. 18-20)

Several editors add a b-verse to line 19, *oððe wære on ban scoten* [or were shot in the bone], to remedy the single half-line and supply the second member of the common poetic collocation *blod ... ban*.⁷³ This collocation appears on several occasions alongside the collocation *fell ... flæsc*, another common alliterative pairing whose presence in Charm 4 is indisputable, and which also appears in the Old High German charm *Pro nessia*.⁷⁴ The addition is therefore poetically congruent. It is not, however, necessary for the sense of the charm, and single half-lines do appear elsewhere in the corpus, used for dramatic effect.⁷⁵ *Fell*, *flæsc*, and *blod* might be a tripartite unit, with the fourth element (*lið*) following in a subsequent line so as to alliterate with, and indeed punningly echo, *lif*. Regardless, the section is aesthetically striking: either four or five verses of precisely the same C-type scansion

⁷¹ Storms (143), Chickering (94), and Sandmann (92) believe these lines are an interpolation or addition, but this section contains the actual enactment of the cure, suggesting its importance to the charm as a whole.

⁷² Resolution on *scoten* is suspended because it immediately follows a stressed syllable.

⁷³ Storms (142), Grattan and Singer (174), and Pettit (I, 92) suggest the emendation; Dobbie (122) and Cockayne (III, 54) do not emend. For the collocation, see *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "Blod ... Ban".

⁷⁴ *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "Fell ... Flæsc". For *Pro nessia*, see Braune, 81-2.

⁷⁵ Bliss, "Half-Lines", 442-5.

(2C2e), exact syntactic and verbal repetition, either one or two lines of cross-alliteration, and anaphora on *oððe*, a homiletic construction used for rhetorical effect in sermonic prose and poetry.⁷⁶ The final verse is a hypermetric A type with a long anacrustic sequence, accommodating the essential declaration that the patient's life will never be threatened (again), much as the hypermetric cluster in Charm 3 ll. 2-4 ends with a D type with unusually long anacrusis to accommodate the action's final, climactic result. The section is incantatory, rhythmic, and replete with echoing, alerting the audience to the beginning of the cure and building to an explicit assurance that the patient will not die of his illness — or, in the terms of Charm 4, fall in battle against the nonhuman.

This exhaustive protection of a patient's *fell, flæsc, blod, lið*, and potentially *ban* is a traditional formula, found in numerous Indo-European texts of varying dates and in varying languages. The oldest attested version appears in Book 4, Hymn 12 of the Sanskrit *Atharva Veda*, which commands that skin, marrow, and joints be reconnected with one another ('marrow with marrow' etc.) to heal a broken limb.⁷⁷ This 'rejoining' formula is found in numerous Scandinavian charms and in the second Merseburg Charm (*ben zi bena, bluot zi bluoda* etc.).⁷⁸ An exorcistic version of the formula, in which a disease agent is removed from the patient's body, appears in the Old High German *Pro Nessia* and Old Saxon *Contra vermes*, which command a worm to exit the patient's body by traveling from marrow to vein to flesh to skin (*marge ... adra ... fleisk ... fel*), as well as in Scandinavian and Eastern

⁷⁶ Steen, 80-85. See for example *Judgment Day II* l. 132-4, 138-9; *Beowulf* ll. 1764-6. On these lines in *Beowulf*, see M. Lapidge, "The Archetype of *Beowulf*", *ASE* 29 (2000), 5-41; and L. Neidorf's response, "The Archetype of *Beowulf*", *ES* 99 (2018), 229-42.

⁷⁷ Text in N. S. Singh, ed., and W. D. Whitney, trans., *Atharva-Veda-Samhita: Text with English Translation, Mantra Index and Names of Rsis and Devtas*, 2 vols (Delhi, 1987). See Dendle, *Possession*, 41; C. Singer, *Early English Magic and Medicine* (London, 1920), 15.

⁷⁸ Merseburg Charm 2, ll. 6-8. Scandinavian charms in Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, 164-8.

European charms for removing ‘shot’.⁷⁹ The Old English formula clearly belongs to this exorcistic tradition, and the charm’s use of an apparently ancient, highly traditional incantation gives its climactic moment of healing the authority of citation and the curative potency of a correctly-delivered magical formula. The Old English version does not, however, simply list body parts. The use of the phrase *Gif ðu wære ... scoten* to contain the formulaic list suits Old English metre — it creates C-type half-lines and adds cross-alliteration to the long line — but also emphasizes the importance of the patient (*ðu*) and the agency of the antagonists who did the shooting. More so than any of its analogues, the Old English version of the formula focuses magical attention on the patient’s body and on the concept of disease as intimate contact with and invasion by enemy forces.

The charm then offers a second exhaustive formula:

x x x x / x x / x x x x x / x x /
 Gif hit wære ēsa gescot oððe hit wære ylfa gescot **B|B**

 x x x x x / x x x / x x x x x / x
 oððe hit wære hægtessan gescot nū ic wille ðīn helpan. ?|a (ll. 21-2)

This is the only instance of the collocation *ese ... ylfe* in Old English, and, as noted above, it is used for rhetorical and alliterative effect and to defend the patient against a broad range of aggressors. Its presence suggests again that the language of these lines is formulaic and traditional, seeking to draw curative power from the correct reiteration of particular language that is both poetically familiar and magically potent. Line 22a is unattested in Sievers–Bliss scansion because the word *hægtessan* creates an over-long second dip in the B-type verse. The naming of all three potential groups of antagonists, and the continuation of the repetitive diction of the previous two half-lines, is evidently more important than exact metrical

⁷⁹ Texts of German charms in Braune, 80-83. For other analogues, see T. Butler, ed. and trans., *Monumenta Serbocroatica: A Bilingual Anthology of Serbian and Croatian Texts and Translations from the 12th to the 19th Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1980), 465; Gay, “Christianity”, 40; Pettit, II, 250.

regularity. In an expansion and continuation of the body-part formula, the text's power derives from its exhaustiveness. Line 22b is of a type disallowed in the b-verse, but its stressed syllable serves as sole metrical punctuation for the rhetorical unit, emphasizing the importance of the charmer's aid and the immediacy of its effect. The verse is a speech act: a promise becomes reality.⁸⁰

Lines 23-4 are hypermetrics entirely unattested not only in Sievers–Bliss scansion but also in Yakovlev's 'unregulated' hypermetric system:

x x x / x / x x \acute{x} x x x / x / x x \acute{x}
 þis ðē tō bōte ēsa gescotes, ðis ðē tō bōte ylfa gescotes,

x x x / x / x x x \acute{x} x x xx / x
 ðis ðē tō bōte hægtesan gescotes; ic ðīn wille helpan.

These lines continue the triplicate formula laid out in lines 21-2, reiterating the same names, alliterative collocations, and resulting cross-alliteration, but the text here adds another traditional formula: *þis þe to bote*. The phrase appears in several medieval German charms (*daz dir ze byoze*), suggesting it was a known magical formula in the early medieval European charm tradition.⁸¹ Indeed, it also appears in Charm 6 (ll. 1-3). In Charm 6 as in Charm 4, the formula is repeated three times, is followed by a series of syntactically-parallel phrases, and creates lines that are metrically irregular. In both charms, too, the formula literally enacts the desired cure. Deploying prescribed magical language, whether it suits the metre of a Sieversian long line or not, is clearly part of the charms' practical projects. The metre bends to accommodate function, and though these lines are technically irregular, they are incantatory, ornamented, and aurally compelling.

With the patient cured, line 25 banishes the spear to the wilderness:

⁸⁰ Arnovick, 10. On speech acts, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford, 1962); J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, 1969).

⁸¹ Examples in Pettit, II, 254. See also the twelfth-century charm *Contra rehin* (Miller, *Charms*, 15).

/ x x / \ x
Flēd þær on fyrgenhæfde.⁸² ?|d

The charm offers another two-position half-line, but here the text is demonstrably problematic: *fled* is not an attested verb form.⁸³ *Fyrgen* is not elsewhere attested as a simplex, so the clearest reading of the b-verse is ‘to the mountain headland/mountaintop’.⁸⁴ *Fled* is most probably a form of *fleon* [to flee], and may be an error for *fleoð* [it is fleeing] or for *fleo* [may it flee], given that this scribe’s *o* and *d* are in some instances similar in shape, and indeed the *d* here has a rounder bowl and smaller ascender than is usual for this scribe.⁸⁵ Regardless, the general sense of the line seems to be that the charmer’s enemies are put to flight and exiled to the uninhabited wilderness. Indeed, numerous medieval and modern European charms send disease to the wild once it is removed from the patient, including an Old Norse runic charm inserted into the margins of an eleventh-century English manuscript.⁸⁶ Charm 12 (l. 3) removes a wen or tumor from a patient and banishes it to *þan nihgan berhge* [to the nearby hill], suggesting that a mountain is a particularly suitable place to banish disease-agents. As the boundaries of the patient’s body are restored, the lines between human and non-human, community and wilderness, order and chaos, are redrawn.⁸⁷

The charm’s concluding verse line employs a formula that is elsewhere used as a greeting.⁸⁸ The phrase is here appropriated as a practical command and punctuating

⁸² The epenthetic vowel is syncopated.

⁸³ Numerous emendations have been proposed (Skemp, 292; Cockayne, 54; Hall, *Elves*, 2; Pollington, 229), but all require a significant level of conjecture. Pettit (I, 94) and Hill (“Rod”, 159) leave the MS line.

⁸⁴ *DOE* s.v. “Fyrgen-Heafod”.

⁸⁵ Harley 585 f. 176r. On these potential emendations, see Pettit, II, 255-6. For verb forms, see *DOE* s.v. “Fleon”.

⁸⁶ Bozóky, 105; Pettit, II, 256-7; Halpern and Foley, 916. For the ON charm, see MacLeod and Mees, 118-22; McKinnell *et al.*, 126-7. Some scholars suggest the charmer’s spear is ‘flying’ to the mountaintop to strike its enemies, but there are fewer analogues for such an interpretation (Pettit, II, 256).

⁸⁷ On the demarcation of civilization and wilderness in the charms, see C. Arthur, “Ex Ecclesia: Salvific Power Beyond Sacred Space in Anglo-Saxon Charms”, *Incantatio* 3 (2013), 9-32. On this dynamic in Old English poetry at large, see H. Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1996); J. Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1999).

⁸⁸ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Hal wes-”.

affirmation:

/ / x / x x / x
Hāl westū!⁸⁹ Helpe ðīn drihten. C|A

The invocation of God legitimizes everything that comes before it, but his title is perhaps deemphasized: an undisplaced particle bears the alliteration of the line, rather than the noun *drihten*. The half-line emphasizes that help is forthcoming for the patient — echoing the charmer’s confident declaration *ic wille ðin helpan* — rather than the source of that aid. The charm is evidently more interested in commanding monstrous forces than invoking positive ones, and God is only called upon after the cure has already been enacted by the physician alone. This invocation is a kind of coda, a reminder of the ultimate source of the charmer’s power, but the text focuses closely on the combatants on the ground.

The charm’s concluding prose instruction — *Nim þon(ne) þ(æt) seax; ado on wætan* — is essentially opaque, and must have served as a kind of shorthand for the physician, an instruction whose details he could fill in from experience or outside knowledge.⁹⁰ The *wætan* is presumably the salve to which the initial prose instructions refer, and the knife may be an applicator for the salve, a tool for a surgical procedure, a symbol of the shot plunged into heat to melt it, or a symbol of the shot anointed with healing liquid to sympathetically effect the cure in the patient’s body.⁹¹ Regardless of its exact meaning, however, this wordless final gesture punctuates the text as much as the exclamatory last line.

Charm 4 is thus a performative, practical, and aesthetically-sound text. It seeks to combat a variety of incursive agents and to maintain the fundamental conceptual boundaries

⁸⁹ The line scans as a type 2C1- if the pronoun is enclitic, as its absorption by the verb suggests.

⁹⁰ Garner, “Performance”, 24. Knives are used in multiple medical remedies (*DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, Cameron Number B21, “Seax”).

⁹¹ On knife as applicator, see Skemp, 290; Garner, “Performance”, 28; Cameron, *Medicine*, 144. On surgery, see Pollington, 417. On melting shot, see Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 137. On anointing, see Pettit, II, 259; Weston, “Language”, 180.

of inside/outside, human/nonhuman, wilderness/civilization. Its stylistic features and metrical ‘irregularities’ highlight its particular anxieties, and indicate the use of traditional formulae prioritizing the charm’s practical agenda: healing the patient’s violated flesh. To better understand the metrical charms’ use of supernatural battle-imagery, however, we must turn to another remedy for elf-disease — Charm 7.

Charm 7, Elves, and Battle-Wounds

Unlike Charm 4, which has received sustained critical attention, the content and imagery of Metrical Charm 7, *Wið Wæterælfadle* [Against Water-Elf-Disease], is rarely explored in depth. Indeed, thus far, only a single academic study has been published that takes Charm 7 as its main subject.⁹² Despite this relative lack of specific critical attention to its content and textual features, Charm 7 is nevertheless a rhetorically and poetically powerful text, deploying both the principles of sympathy (like affects like) and antipathy (unlike negates unlike) against incurative disease, and conflating healthiness with inviolate wholeness. Like Charm 4, it makes use of and deviates from the principles of Old English metre and style in ways that highlight its vivid imagery and enhance its effectiveness. Indeed, as I will demonstrate here, all of Charm 7’s irregular lines accommodate the use of prescribed magical formulae and highlight the moments in which healing is enacted. The text’s unusual lines can be understood as meaningful deviations shaped by the text’s practical purpose and rhetorical demands, rather than lapses or errors.

Charm 7 appears on ff. 125r-125v of *Leechbook III*, with a chapter heading on f. 110v: *Tacnu hu þu meah t ongitan hwæþer mon sie on wæterælfædle 7 læcedom wiþ þam 7 gealdor on to singanne 7 þ(æt) ilce mon mæg singan on wunda* [signs by which you can

⁹² This study is Schneider, “Zaubersprüchen”.

determine whether a person has water-elf-disease, and a remedy against that, and a charm to sing over (it), and one can sing that (charm) on wounds in the same way]. The text is clearly demarcated as a poem: large capitals and pointing mark both the beginning of the verse portion of the charm and the resumption of prose at its conclusion, and both the charm itself and the remedy's chapter heading refer to the text as a *gealdor*.⁹³ Charm 7 is preceded in the manuscript by a group of elf-remedies with exorcistic elements, and followed by a group of remedies for *feondes costunga* [the temptations of a demon] and *deofolseocnes*.⁹⁴ The compiler of *Leechbook III* evidently considered it appropriate to group Charm 7 with other remedies for elf-disease and devil-sickness, suggesting that *wæterælfadl* [water-elf-disease] in fact refers to an illness caused by the incursive assault of an elf or elves. Indeed, the elf-remedies preceding Charm 7 are particularly clear in attributing disease to literal supernatural beings. A remedy for *ælfadl* [elf-sickness] warns that a physician might meet *hwæt-hwega egeslices* [something terrifying] during the course of the long ritual prescribed by the text, while the remedy for *ælfsoġoða* [elf-?pain] contains the text of a Latin exorcism altered to include the word *Castalidas* [Castalians].⁹⁵ *Dunælf*a [mountain-elves] glosses *castalidas nymphas* [Castalian nymphs] in several contemporary Old English glossaries, suggesting that a learned author deliberately changed the text to include a reference to 'elves'.⁹⁶ These remedies — like Charm 4 — suggest a genuine belief in *ylfe* as malicious supernatural agents, and, given this cultural and manuscript context, the term *wæterælfadl* almost certainly connoted the involvement of an inhuman creature to a tenth-century audience. The herbs used in the prose instructions further confirm the exorcistic nature of the charm: eleven of the

⁹³ *Leechbook III* f. 125r. See Bredehoft, "Boundaries", 151. Cf. Nelson, *Structures*, 51.

⁹⁴ *Leechbook III* ff. 122v-125r; 125v-126v.

⁹⁵ *Leechbook III* ff. 123v, 124v. For this translation of *sogoða*, see Hall, "Shots", 204.

⁹⁶ Hall, *Elves*, 106; Závoti, 75; Thun, 387; H. Stuart, "The Anglo-Saxon Elf", *SN* 48 (1976), 313-20 [319].

nineteen plants named in Charm 7 feature at least twice in other Old English remedies for diseases caused by a supernatural agent.⁹⁷

The charm's prose instructions also list signs of the ailment, an unusual feature in the Old English medical corpus; only a handful of remedies for named diseases describe symptomatology.⁹⁸ The list of symptoms may serve to distinguish this particular, water-related variety of *ælfadl* from the generic *ælfadl* that appears earlier in *Leechbook III*, without symptoms listed.⁹⁹ The symptoms of *wæterælfadl* — dark or livid fingernails, teary eyes, and a sensitivity to light — should also be taken to include lesions, given that the chapter heading, final prose instructions, and verse incantation all refer repeatedly to the charm's effectiveness against all kinds of 'wounds'. Indeed, light sensitivity and darkened fingernails are notable symptoms of a particular cluster of ailments that also cause the proliferation of fluid-filled blisters: chicken pox, measles, and shingles.¹⁰⁰ The term *wæterælfadl* almost certainly refers to one or more of these illnesses.

The word *wund* — which appears in the chapter heading, verse incantation, and final prose of the charm — is used with equal frequency in Old English texts for injuries caused by blows and sores caused by illness.¹⁰¹ The chapter heading states that the charm can be sung in the same manner (*ilce*) for both *wæterælfadl* and wounds, suggesting that the incantation may have been multipurpose and intended for a broad range of injuries. The Old English medical corpus offers relatively little by way of battlefield medicine, so we cannot assume the charm

⁹⁷ For examples of these eleven herbs used in exorcistic remedies, see *Leechbook I* ff. 52r-53v; *Leechbook III* ff. 120r-127r. See also particularly *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Elehtre", "Wermod", "Finol", "Cassuc".

⁹⁸ *Leechbook I* ff. 40v; *Leechbook II* ff. 69v, 72r, 74r-76v, 78r, 81r-82v, 86v, 91r, 97r-98r.

⁹⁹ See *Leechbook III* ff. 110v, 123v. Cf. Cameron, *Medicine*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ Storms, 159; Cameron, *Medicine*, 142, 154; Pollington, 459; Schneider, "Zaubersprüchen", 294; Hall, *Elves*, 108; Meaney, "Causes", 31. Grattan and Singer's (60) and Bonser's (*Background*, 163) suggestion that the illness is edema fails to account for this cutaneous aspect.

¹⁰¹ *BT s.v.* "Wund"; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Wund".

was intended for literal axe- or sword-wounds.¹⁰² The use of the same word for both blisters and battle-wounds, however, is telling: the fact that *wund* encompasses a range of visible openings in the skin suggests that a conceptual spectrum of external injuries existed in Old English medical thought, encompassing both sores and combat trauma. Lesions and cysts are thus elevated from minor skin ailments to evidence of the martial assault of disease, a threat as existential, immediate, and violent as an axe-blow. Charm 7 purports to treat the ailment in question with *beadwræda* [war bandages or troops] — transforming the patient’s experience of disease into a battlefield confrontation and suggesting that the elf or elves of Charm 7, like the elves of Charm 4, cause disease by assaulting the patient with weapons.

The supernatural agents of *wæterælfadl*, however, are unlikely to be specifically marshland or river sprites called ‘water-elves’, as some scholars have suggested.¹⁰³ No such creatures are described in the extant Old English corpus, and the *nicoras* [water-monsters] of *Beowulf* and the homilies are associated neither with disease nor with *ylfe*.¹⁰⁴ The only evidence for a belief in elves associated with water is a list of names for different types of nymphs — *naiades*, *oreades*, and others — taken from Aldhelm’s *Carmen de uirginitate* and glossed with a list of compounds ending in the feminized *ælfa*, yielding the words *sæælfenne* for *naiades*, *wuduælfenne* for *oreades*, and so on, including *wæterælfenne* for *nymphas* [nymphs].¹⁰⁵ The facts that each gloss follows the same construction (location+*ælfa*) and that neither these compounds nor the feminine version of the word *ælf* appear elsewhere in the Old English corpus, suggest the compounds were invented to correspond to the various types

¹⁰² Schneider (“Zaubersprüchen”, 301) suggests the charm is for both sores and battle wounds.

¹⁰³ Grendon, 121; Grattan and Singer, 60; Pettit, II, 253; Stuart, “Elf”, 318; W. Bonser, “Magical Practices Against Elves”, *Folklore* 37 (1926), 350-63.

¹⁰⁴ *Nicor* also generally refers to exotic animals like hippopotami (*BT s.v.* “*Nicor*”), only coming to refer to humanlike sprites in the later medieval period. The concept of ‘nixies’ is not recorded until the early modern period. See *OED s.v.* “*Niker*”, “*Nixie*”.

¹⁰⁵ For citations, see *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “*Ælfe*”.

of nymphs named by the lemmata.¹⁰⁶ The glossator likely crafted neologisms for sea- and wood-nymphs by using an Old English word for a broadly humanlike being and varying the location-related prefix. We therefore cannot conclude that these names refer to genuine categories of elves, or confidently translate, as many have done, Charm 7's ailment as 'water-elf disease'. On the other hand, the translation 'watery elf-disease' — referring to a disease caused by elves and marked by the production of excessive bodily fluid — is grammatically sound and has some textual precedent. *Ælfadl* is, as noted above, separately attested, while *wæter* is a common prefix in Old English disease names, referring to illnesses marked by an excess of bodily fluid.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, given the Charm 7 patient's tearfulness and fluid-filled blisters, he or she seems to be afflicted by a surfeit of 'water'.¹⁰⁸ This ailment is therefore a type of elf-caused disease, rather than a disease caused by a type of elf.

Reading *wæterælfadl* as a 'watery' illness highlights the importance of the principle of sympathy in Charm 7's associated ritual: holy water, added to the herbs and ale, negates the unhealthy excess of 'water' caused by the disease. Holy water, used throughout the Old English medical corpus, also brings a specifically redemptive, cleansing, and exorcistic Christian power to bear on the inhuman enemy.¹⁰⁹ Bringing the patient into contact with holy water recalls baptism, symbolically re-inscribing their membership in the community of the righteous, and thus their right to salvation and protection. Bringing the disease agent into contact with holy water, by contrast, defeats and banishes it. Holy water may be the sole

¹⁰⁶ Shippey, 169; Hall, *Elves*, 83; J. Simpson, "On the Ambiguity of Elves", *Folklore* 122 (2011), 76-83 [78]; cf. Stuart, "Elf".

¹⁰⁷ Hall, *Elves*, 106; Cameron, *Medicine*, 154. See, for example, *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Wæteradl", "Wæterseocnes", "Wæterbolla".

¹⁰⁸ Jolly, *Religion*, 166.

¹⁰⁹ Those scholars who consider the charm pagan (Grendon, 154; Storms, 162; Tornaghi, 453; Schneider, "Zaubersprüche", 295) believe the *halig wæter* was originally running water or dew, or that the phrase refers to water from a 'sacred mountain' in the heavens (a belief unattested in OE and ON literature). There is no evidence, however, that holy water in this charm is a substitute for another kind of water, and the word *halig* only occurs in Christian contexts in extant OE texts (*DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Halig"; Boolean Search, "Halig ... Wæter").

explicitly Christian element in the charm, but its presence legitimizes every component of the remedy and ritual. A close stylometric analysis of Charm 7 further illuminates the text's adherence to these principles of similarity and opposition — as well as its use of rhetorical structures, stylistic ornamentation, and metrically unusual lines to generate relevant aesthetic effects and accommodate prescribed magical language.

Stylistic Analysis

Charm 7 features a particularly high number of 'irregular' lines, but it is rife with ornamental features, and the bulk of the charm is devoted to a formulaic anaphoric sequence that will be discussed in detail below. The opening lines, too, are highly dramatic. The charm's first long line includes a D-type half-line and a poetic compound that is also a *hapax legomenon*:

x / x x / \acute{x} \acute{x} \ x
Ic benne awrat betest beadowræda **B|D**

Double alliteration in the off-verse, a feature of the vast majority of the metrical charms but otherwise rare in the Old English poetic corpus, here draws attention to the unique poetic compound *beadowræda*, and thus to the war-metaphor that defines the charm. The patient's experience of disease, as in Charm 4, is rhetorically transformed into a martial conflict.

Structural alliteration emphasizes the ailment in question (*benne*, another poetic word), the superlative perfection of the healer's remedy (*betest*), and the conflict (*beado-*) in which he will deploy his skills. Assonance and internal echo (*benne ... betest; awrat ... wræda*) only add to this effect.

The meaning of the compound *beado-wræda* is unclear: the simplex *wræd* most often means 'bandage', but in some instances can also mean 'a band, company, flock, military

unit'.¹¹⁰ The compound thus either means 'battle-troops', suggesting an assembly of forces designed to combat disease (and perhaps referring to the plants that the physician has transformed into the salve or drink he gives the patient), or 'battle-bandages', referring either to literal or metaphorical bandages for the patient's lesions.¹¹¹ Some clarity may be provided by examining the verb. *Awrat* is, as written in the manuscript, the past tense third person singular of *awritan* [to write out]. The phrase 'I have written out for wounds the best of battle-bandages' resists interpretation, so if we accept *awrat* the likelier translation of *wræda* would be 'troops', evidently taken in some metaphorical sense. It is unclear, however, what 'troops' the physician would be 'writing': those Old English remedies that involve the inscription of letters or symbols generally state that writing should be performed and provide the text the practitioner should copy out, but the instructions of Charm 7 offer no sign that writing is required at all.¹¹² The *DOE* suggests the 'troops' that are 'written out' are the names of the plants in the prose instructions, but the scribal copying out of the prose instructions cannot be assumed to constitute part of the charm's actual performance. Alternatively, *awrat*, a common form, may well be a scribal error for the rarer *awrað*, the first person singular past tense form of *awriþan* [to bind up], a verb that appears in other Old English medical remedies and describes the bandaging of wounds in the *Old English Bede*.¹¹³ If we accept the emendation to *awrað*, *wræd* must take on its more common meaning 'bandage'. A potential play on *awriþan* and *wræd* in a line already filled with internal echoes perhaps makes this

¹¹⁰ *BT s.v.* "Wræd", "Beadowræda"; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Wræd"; *DOE s.v.* "Beadu-wræd". The *DOE*'s suggested translation 'battle-amulet' still considers *wræd* to mean a band or bandage wrapped around a wound.

¹¹¹ For the interpretation 'troops', see Nelson, *Structures*, 51; Bjork, *Poems*, 215. For 'bandages', see Storms, 161; Tornaghi, 455; Cockayne, II, 353; Cameron, *Medicine*, 154; Jolly, *Religion*, 165.

¹¹² For discussion of writing in OE remedies, see Skemer, 79-81. See also, as an example, Harley 585 ff. 165r. Cf. Schneider, "Zaubersprüche", 296; B. Griffiths, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic*, rev. ed. (Hockwold-cum-Wilton, 2012), 196.

¹¹³ *DOE s.v.* "Awriþan". See for example *Leechbook I* f. 55v; *Old English Bede*, Book 4, ch. 326. Abernethy (138) suggests this emendation.

emendation more likely. The interpretation ‘I bound around the wounds the best of battle-bandages’ is certainly attractive: grammatically and semantically straightforward, medically appropriate, and easily interpreted as referring to either literal or figurative bandages. The charm’s prose instructions, of course, do not mention bandages, but to assume the use of wound dressings in a remedy for skin lesions is reasonable and requires far less speculation than assuming the existence of a ‘writing’ element of the ritual entirely unattested by the text. Such bandages might also be metaphorical. Arguably, the herbal remedy and spoken charm act as figurative wound-coverings because they are designed to seal off and close up the sores, which are themselves as much symbolic as literal, vulnerable points of entry into the patient’s body and signs of his violation. The translation ‘I bound around the wounds the best of battle-bandages’ is therefore tentatively to be preferred.

Regardless of interpretation, however, the half-line is notably similar to two verses in *Beowulf*: *beaduscruda betst* [the best of battle-clothing] and *betst beadorinca* [the best of battle-warriors], whose shared structure suggests a heroic poetic formula.¹¹⁴ Whether the compound refers to plants, wound dressings, or symbols, the tools of the healer are transformed into the tools of war, as essential to martial victory as high-quality armour or excellent soldiers. The first line of the charm seeks to arm and protect both physician and patient in combat with the patient’s sores. If the compound refers to bandages, such wound-coverings might be considered a kind of armour (like *Beowulf*’s *beaduscruda*), or they might be considered to engage directly in battle with the disease (like *beadorincas*).¹¹⁵ The first line of the charm seeks to reestablish and police the boundaries of the patient’s body with the intensity of a military rout.

¹¹⁴ *Beowulf* ll. 453, 1109.

¹¹⁵ Storms (161), Tornaghi (455) and Schneider (“Zaubersprüche”, 297) suggest the bandages ‘make war on’ the patient’s wounds.

The bulk of the charm, lines 2-5, is an anaphoric sequence, marked by repetition of the conjunction *ne*:

x / x x / x x / x
 swā benne ne burnon, ne burston A|?

x / \ x x ∪ x
 ne fundian, ne feologan d|?

x / \ x x / / \ x
 ne hoppettan, ne wund waxsian d|D

x / / \ x
 ne dolh dīopian, D

x x x / x / x / x
 ac him self healde hāle wæge a|A

Dobbie lineates lines 5-6 as one long line (*ne dolh diopian, | ac him self healde hale wæge*), which lacks cross-caesura alliteration. When lineated as I have done, however, the text yields a regular single half-line and a regular long line. Unpaired half-lines, as noted in the Introduction, are occasionally used for dramatic effect in Old English verse, and here line 5 punctuates and concludes the seven-part anaphoric structure. Indeed, in Charm 9 (l. 7), Charm 11 (l. 3), and Merseburg Charm 2 (l. 7), an anaphoric structure with an odd total number of elements concludes with a single half-line — suggesting this structure is a generic feature rather than a flaw.¹¹⁶

Anaphoric catalogues — particularly on *ne* — appear throughout Old English poetry and prose. Such catalogues may be partially inspired by *nec* and *necque* structures in Latin verse known to Old English composers, but the use of anaphora in Old English poetry is

¹¹⁶ See Bliss, “Half-Lines”, 445. Lindquist understands this to be a defining feature of ‘Germanic’ charm metre (10).

notably more frequent, and often more extensive or involved, than in its Latin inspirations.¹¹⁷ Indeed, in many Old English *ne* constructions, the structure contains repeated verbs, rhyming verb endings, and double alliteration, including doublets of alliterating verbs as in Charm 7, resulting in a profusion of aural patterns that define and draw attention to a discrete unit within the poem at large.¹¹⁸ The *ne* construction is used for varying purposes in Old English literature — to create a tone of sermonic instruction in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, for example, or to convey the ineffable nature of Paradise in *The Phoenix* and *Guthlac B* — but the structure always serves to heighten a given text’s rhetorical power, and to drive home essential concepts with a relentless rhythmic beat. Repetition is a defining feature of every compositional level of Old English poetry, including variation, envelope patterns, parallel and interlace constructions, and indeed structural alliteration itself.¹¹⁹ It is also, however, a particularly common feature of numerous medieval European charms and curses, including those in Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Norse, and Middle English.¹²⁰ Such additive, exhaustive verbal patterning, evident in lines 2-5 of Charm 7, not only is aesthetically valuable, but also serves a practical function. This repeated, multifaceted command is exhortative and incantatory, and the consistent alliteration of wound terms with prohibited verbs increases the charmer’s verbal power over those same wounds. Pointing added after each verb in this sequence by the *Leechbook* scribe suggests an awareness of this repetition as

¹¹⁷ *Ne* catalogues are found in *The Wanderer* ll. 66-9; *The Seafarer* ll. 44-6, 95-6; *The Phoenix* ll. 14-18, 21-5, 51-61, 134-8, 612-4; *Guthlac B* ll. 579-80, 698-9, 828-30; Riddle 35 ll. 5-8; as well as homilies and sermons noted in Steen (48, 52-3, 124) and H. L. C. Tristram (“Stock Descriptions of Heaven and Hell in Old English Prose and Poetry”, *NM* 79 [1978], 102-13). *Sum* catalogues are found in Old English in *The Wanderer* ll. 80-83; *The Gifts of Men* and *Fortunes of Men* throughout; *Juliana* ll. 473-90; *Elene* ll. 131-6; *Christ II* ll. 668-80; in Old Norse, in *Hávamál* st. 69; *Hyndluljóð* st. 3; in Old High German, in Merseburg Charm 1 ll. 2-3. For *opbe* catalogues, see *Judgment Day II* l. 268; *Beowulf* ll. 1764-6; Charm 4 ll. 18-22. See also *Dream of the Rood* ll. 139-42. On anaphora in Old English poetry as compared to its Latin sources, see Steen, 45.

¹¹⁸ Steen, 47, 124; see for example *The Phoenix* ll. 51-62; *Guthlac B* ll. 828-31.

¹¹⁹ Steen, 4-5. See Bartlett on repetitive patterning.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Merseburg Charms 1 and 2; *Buslubæn*; *Contra malum malannum* (text in Miller, *Charms*). On anaphora in charms, see Roper, “Poetics”, 10; Griffiths, 159; Pollington, 473.

a deliberate rhetorical effect.

Indeed, these lines are replete with ornamental poetic features. Line 2 (*swa benne ne burnon, ne burston*), like line 1, alliterates on *b*, creating a plurilinear cluster at the charm's opening enhanced by the repetition of *benne*. The end-rhyme and close assonance of *burnon* ... *burston* highlights both prohibited actions and enhances the power of the charmer's command to the wound. Several other Old English medical texts are concerned with preventing the bursting (*berstan*) of wounds, and wounds and body parts burst open (*burston*) repeatedly in *Beowulf*, suggesting the motif is grounded in both practical medical concerns and a poetic interest in dramatic 'body horror'.¹²¹ In addition, the verb endings chime with one another throughout lines 2-5. The repetition of *ne* combined with alliterating verbs in lines 2-3 creates a patterning effect similar to cross-alliteration (*ne burnon, ne burston, ne fundian, ne feologan*). Lines 4-5 are bound together by the use of two verses in a row with double alliteration and rhyming verbs (ll. 4b-5, *wund waxsian, dolh diopian*), including a b-verse. The section is also enhanced by its metrical heaviness. These rhetorically elaborate lines are exhaustive and cumulative, restricting the disease's potential for harm until it no longer exists.

This proliferation of ornamental features compensates stylistically for the fact that these lines are irregular. Line 4 lacks cross-caesura alliteration, lines 4b and 5 have unusual anacrusis, and lines 2b and 3b are metrically unattested, with fewer than four positions. These lines may, however, be metrically unusual precisely because their word choice is prescribed.

Charm 7 is the earliest attested English version of a charm type that appears in Middle

¹²¹ *Beowulf* ll. 760, 818, 1121. Medical mentions of bursting wounds and body parts can be found in the *Herbarium*, *Leechbook I*, *Leechbook II*, the *Lacnunga*, *Peri Didaxeon*, and a bloodletting text on ff. 90v-91r of London, British Library, Harley MS 3271; for all citations, see *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Burst-", "Berst-". On bursting wounds in *Beowulf*, see G. R. Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf and the Structure of the Poem* (Manchester, 2000), 55.

English, Middle High German, medieval Irish, medieval Latin, and early modern Eastern European and Baltic Sea charms, generally referred to as *Neque Doluit Neque Tumuit* (Neither Ache Nor Swell).¹²² A *Neque Doluit* charm is always intended for wounds or skin lesions, and is based on a ‘neither/nor’ anaphoric construction that lists a series of actions the patient’s wounds are forbidden to complete. The verb list across all of these charms is limited to aching, swelling, festering, putrefying, rankling, growing, spreading, and bleeding in every language in which it appears, and almost always begins with the command ‘neither ache nor swell’.¹²³ Line 2b of Charm 7 may be unattested in Sieversian metrics, but *ne burnon ne burston* is essentially an alliterating, rhyming paraphrase of ‘neither ache nor swell’, ‘burning’ referring to pain and ‘bursting’ to the inevitable end result of a swelling blister or ulcer. The choice of the phrase *ne burnon ne burston* thus is almost certainly essential to the charm’s practical project, and its use, as well as its emphatic, commanding effect enhanced by aural ornament, takes precedence over strict metrical regularity.

Fundian is otherwise unattested in a medical context, but can mean ‘to set out’, in some cases ‘to set out with evil intent’, so the *Dictionary of Old English* suggests that in this charm it means ‘to get worse, to spread inwards’¹²⁴ — the charmer seeks to prevent the wound from growing or spreading. The unattested line 3b contains a *hapax* verb, *feologan*. Numerous scholars have argued that the verb derives from *fela* [many] and means ‘to multiply or spread’; the *DOE*, however, suggests that the verb likely derives from the

¹²² Roper, *Charms*, 66; Storms, 163; Sandmann, 49; L. Olsan, “The Three Good Brothers Charms: Some Historical Points”, *Incantatio* 1 (2011), 48-78. Later *Neque Doluit* charms almost always appear incorporated into another narrative charm category, the *Tres Boni Fratres* type. The fact that Charm 7 contains the *Neque Doluit* formula without the *Fratres* frame suggests the charm represents an early, independent version (Roper, *Charms*, 114).

¹²³ Olsan, “Brothers”, 52.

¹²⁴ *DOE* s.v. “Fundian”.

adjective *fealu* [yellow, grayish-yellow] and would thus mean ‘to discolour, to putrefy’.¹²⁵ Nearly all of the extant *Neque Doluit* texts command the wound not to fester or putrefy, but none command the wound not to multiply.¹²⁶ While we cannot definitively interpret an Old English text based on Middle English and Latin analogues, the frequency with which putrefaction is referred to in wound charms and in *Neque Doluit* charms specifically, and the potential for wound infections caused by non-sterile medical equipment and exposure, suggests that protection against festering was a common magical exhortation for a frequent complication. Charm 7 also contains two other verbs that prohibit growth (*fundian* and *waxsian*). In a text clearly motivated by exhaustiveness, a prohibition against putrefaction makes more semantic and pragmatic sense than a prohibition against multiplication when growth is already forbidden. Similarly, the unusual verb *hoppettan* [to throb, pulsate], which prevents line 4 from alliterating across the caesura, may well be a required vocabulary choice, filling the function of ‘rankle’ verbs in other *Neque Doluit* texts. The verb usually means ‘to leap, to dance’, but this oddness in context further suggests that its use here was intentional or prescribed.¹²⁷ The semantic and metrical irregularities of these lines, then, can be explained as functions of the charm’s prioritization of a traditional magical formula.

Line 6 marks an important rhetorical shift in the text. As the *ne* catalogue concludes, the text pivots on the new conjunction *ac*, indicating a turn towards the creation and affirmation of health after the negation of disease is complete. The conclusion of a *ne* sequence with a pivotal *ac* is a flourish found in both Old English and Old Saxon verse, used

¹²⁵ For the translation ‘multiply’ or ‘spread’, see Storms, 161; Tornaghi, 452; Cameron, *Medicine*, 154; Griffiths, 196; Jolly, *Religion*, 165; Abernethy, 139. For the translation ‘putrefy’, see *DOE* s.v. “Feologan”; Grendon, 195.

¹²⁶ Olsan, “Brothers”, 52; Roper, *Charms*, 114.

¹²⁷ *DOE* s.v. “Hoppettan”.

to emphasize fundamental contrasts.¹²⁸ The interpretation of this line, however, has been the subject of some debate, made difficult by the uncertain subject of the verb *healdan*. The primary meaning of *healdan*, which can take either accusative or dative, is ‘to preserve, guard, retain, protect’ and does not generally mean to hold or to proffer something.¹²⁹ The subject of the singular subjunctive *healde* could be either the charmer (*ic*), subject of the only previous finite verb in the charm and thus a potential antecedent, or the patient, to whom the dative *him* seems to refer. The a-verse could thus mean either ‘but may I myself preserve him’ or ‘but may he preserve himself’. If *self* were to be construed with the dative *him*, however, we would expect *selfum*.¹³⁰ The first interpretation, then, should be preferred.¹³¹

Wæge can be read as the accusative noun ‘cup, vessel’, yielding the phrase ‘but may I myself preserve for him the holy/healthy cup’, or as the dative instrumental noun ‘water’, yielding the phrase ‘but may I preserve him with holy/healthy water’. In either case, *hale* could be an adjective (OE *hal*, holy/healthy), forming a phrase, or a noun (OE *hælu*, holiness/health), creating a compound.¹³² The translation is roughly the same regardless, and the b-verse scans as an A type either way. Reading *wæge* as ‘cup’ introduces an object and a concept — a cup of holiness or health — not mentioned elsewhere in the Old English medical corpus, though the image could be an echo of the Eucharistic chalice. The probable referent is the (implied, but never mentioned) vessel containing the herbal concoction described in the instructions. If we take *wæge* to mean ‘water’, however, then it refers to the holy water explicitly mentioned in the prose, the legitimizing ingredient in the herbal remedy.

¹²⁸ R. D. Fulk, “Rhetoric, Form, And Linguistic Structure in Early Germanic Verse: Toward a Synthesis”, *IJGLSA* 1 (1996), 63-88 [70].

¹²⁹ *DOE s.v.* “Healdan”. Cf. Bjork, *Poems*, 215; Schneider, “Zaubersprüchen”, 299.

¹³⁰ B. Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1987), I, 112.

¹³¹ Storms (161), Schneider (“Zaubersprüchen”, 299), Cameron (*Medicine*, 154), and Griffiths (196) assume the first-person subject. Jolly (*Religion*, 165), Grendon (195), and Abernethy (141) assume the third person.

¹³² *DOE s.v.* “Halewæge”.

Interpreting *wæge* as ‘water’ is also perhaps a more grammatically straightforward reading, because *wæge* is then an instrumental dative describing how the charmer preserves the patient, rather than the accusative object that the charmer preserves ‘for’ the patient; it is unclear why the cup would need preservation when the patient is the one under attack. This latter interpretation, then, seems the more likely, and the line probably means ‘but may I myself preserve him with health-giving water’. Whether *wæge* means ‘cup’ or ‘water’, however, the line is evidently referring to the mix of herbs and liquids the physician offers the patient. The sacred water of the cure battles the undesirable water of the disease. Like affects like — and unlike negates unlike, in that Christian health and holiness remove illness perpetrated by an inherently non-Christian agent. The patient is preserved, guarded, re-baptized; his bodily defenses are rebuilt.

Charm 7’s emphasis on the *hale wæge* illuminates further aspects of the early medieval English understanding of disease as incursion. If sickness was genuinely considered to be a result of violation by the anti-Christian supernatural in the early medieval English period, we should expect to see evidence that its opposite, health, was thought to be a state of invulnerable wholeness safeguarded by God. Precisely such a concept is inherent to the Old English adjective *hal* and noun *hælu*. The primary meaning of *hal* is ‘whole, undivided’ or ‘entire, lacking no part’; the word also means ‘whole or healthy in body, free from physical defect’.¹³³ In at least two cases, the term specifically means ‘undamaged’.¹³⁴ In poetry, glosses, numerous psalms, and religious prose, *hal* also means ‘safe from spiritual danger’ or ‘under the protection of God’.¹³⁵ *Hælu*, similarly, means ‘good health’, ‘safety’, and ‘spiritual

¹³³ *DOE s.v.* “Hal”.

¹³⁴ *Daniel* l. 270; Ælfric, “Lives of Saints Julian and Basilissa”, l. 337 (text in Skeat).

¹³⁵ *DOE s.v.* “Hal”, E.2.

deliverance or salvation'.¹³⁶ This understanding of health is evidently essential to Old English medical thought: the medical texts use the word *hal*, *hælu*, and related forms one hundred and thirty one times to indicate bodily health and wellness.¹³⁷ Indeed, the pairing of *hal* and its opposite *unhal* in these texts is used to make fundamental distinctions of kind, not only between healthy and unhealthy men, but between living and dead flesh.¹³⁸ To be healthy in early medieval England was literally to be 'all in one piece'. In other words, to be healthy is to be inviolate. Health is the maintenance of the self as a continuous, invulnerable whole, without damage, defect, or point of entry. To be whole is also to be safe from spiritual threat, infused with the salvific protection of Christ. God's protection consists precisely of the maintenance of wholeness in the face of invasion, the preservation of the body in a state of undamaged invulnerability. The use of *unmæle* [unmarked, immaculate] cows and virgins in medical remedies — and references to resurrection bodies — further attest to the importance of maintaining the inviolate self.¹³⁹ Similarly, in the *lorica* tradition, the speaker requests that God guard the entirety of his body, part by part, from hands to innards to, in the remedy for *ælfsoðaða*, his epiglottis.¹⁴⁰ The speaker preserves his health by inviting God to permeate his flesh, in turn shielding the body from penetration by malicious forces. God's incursion is benevolent and fortifying where demonic incursion is destructive. The vulnerability of the body, its inherent openness to outside influence, is turned to the patient's advantage.

Unsurprisingly, the command that a patient or object be *hal* appears in four of the twelve

¹³⁶ *DOE* s.v. "Hælu".

¹³⁷ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, Cameron Numer B21, "Hal".

¹³⁸ *Leechbook I* ff. 28v, 31v; *Leechbook II* f. 63v. Barley (69) notes that *hælu* is the opposite of illness in Old English medical texts, and suggests that Old English medical remedies are designed to reinforce boundaries between *hal* and *unhal*, but does not take these arguments further.

¹³⁹ For example, Harley 585 ff. 137r-138r, 147v.

¹⁴⁰ *Leechbook III* ff. 123v-124v.

metrical charms.¹⁴¹ The struggle to preserve vulnerable human flesh in the face of forces that seek to enter and damage it is the (micro)cosmic struggle faced by physician and patient in these texts.

After the charm's crucial turn from violation to wholeness, emphasized by word choice, metre, and the completion of a traditional formula, the main verse portion of the text concludes with a final command:

x \acute{x} x x / x / x x / x \acute{x}
ne ace þē þon mā þe eorþan on ēare ace. **B|?**

Line 7b is a hypermetric with three alliterating syllables unattested in Sievers–Bliss scansion, but vocalic alliteration is maintained across the long line, framed by repetition of *ace* and enhanced by echoing on *eorþan ... eare*. The line is syntactically chiasmic, and seems to be the final enactment of the cure: the metre bends to make room for the essential comparison, the repetition of the verb, and the opaque but clearly relevant reference to ‘earth’. In the actual moment of healing, the charm’s practical purpose takes precedence over regularity and determines its stylistic expression.

The interpretation of the b-verse is uncertain, though the sense is certainly one of diminishing pain and departing illness. Neither *eorþan* nor *eare* can be the subject of the clause, as neither noun is nominative, so the line is best read as ‘nor let it ache for you any more than it pains the earth *on eare*’. Numerous interpretations have been proposed for *eare*: ear,¹⁴² sea,¹⁴³ ear of grain,¹⁴⁴ earth,¹⁴⁵ the grave.¹⁴⁶ The word is unlikely to mean ‘ear’: the

¹⁴¹ Charm 1 l. 30; Charm 4 l. 26; Charm 11 l. 41.

¹⁴² Tornaghi, 452; Meaney, “Causes”, 20; Jolly, *Religion*, 165; Dobbie, 214. Cockayne (II, 353) and Storms (162) suggest the statement refers to the fact that one’s ear does not hurt after death.

¹⁴³ Grendon, 195; Jolly, *Religion*, 209.

¹⁴⁴ Griffiths, 196; Cameron, *Medicine*, 154.

¹⁴⁵ Griffiths, 196; Cameron, *Medicine*, 154; Jolly, *Religion*, 209.

¹⁴⁶ Sandmann, 48; Schneider, “Zaubersprüchen”, 300; Cameron, *Medicine*, 154. Abernethy (143) suggests emending to *sare* [wound].

preposition *on* almost always takes the dative, and the dative form of the noun *ear(e)* meaning ‘ear’ is *earan*.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, there is no mention of ears or ear-related symptoms in the charm, and pox diseases do not involve earache. The readings ‘sea’ and ‘ear of grain’ are also grammatically awkward. *On* does not mean ‘next to’ or ‘beside’, but rather ‘on, in, among’, and the resulting phrases ‘the earth on the sea’ or ‘the earth on/among an ear of grain’ resist interpretation.¹⁴⁸

The meaning ‘grave’ for *ear* is attested in *The Rune Poem*, though the rune name itself seems to mean ‘earth, clay’.¹⁴⁹ Such an interpretation would here produce the phrase ‘let it not ache for you any more than it pains the earth in the grave’. The digging of a grave certainly does not cause the earth pain, but it is unclear why the charm text should be interested in the effect of grave creation on the soil around it. The grave is almost never associated with positive imagery in Old English poetry: it is not a gateway to heaven or the afterlife, but rather a place of decomposition, the devouring of the flesh by worms.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, the *ear* described by *The Rune Poem* is a place wherein the earth embraces the body in an explicitly, and undesirably, sexual fashion.¹⁵¹ The body is not ‘secure’ in the grave in the Old English literary tradition. Rather, it is vulnerable to consumption, destruction, and even sexual predation. Such an image is unlikely to appear in a charm designed to cure disease; indeed, as Chapter 4 will discuss, the only grave mentioned in an Old English medical remedy (Charm 6) serves as a symbol of death to be defeated. Sandmann and Schneider suggest that *ear* means ‘grave’ and that this line refers to the lack of sensation experienced by

¹⁴⁷ *BT, DOE, s.v.* “Ear(e)”.

¹⁴⁸ *BT s.v.* “On”.

¹⁴⁹ *The Rune Poem* ll. 90-94; *DOE s.v.* “Ear”, 3.

¹⁵⁰ See for example *Soul and Body I and II; The Rhyming Poem; The Lord’s Prayer II; The Grave; The Soul’s Address to the Body; Vercelli Homilies IV, IX and XXI. Fortunes of Men, Instructions for Christians, and Judgment Day II* also describe decaying and consumed corpses. For further discussion, see Thompson, 94.

¹⁵¹ *The Rune Poem* ll. 90-94.

the corpse after death, but their shared reading requires the addition of a second-person pronoun not found in the text, and the use of accusative *eorþan* as the subject of the clause.¹⁵²

There is, however, a potentially appropriate translation for *ear* in this context. In two Aldhelmian glosses, *ear* glosses *occa*, which evidently means ‘arable land, tilth’.¹⁵³ This meaning of *ear* is admittedly rare in the extant corpus, but it may be the most suited to Charm 7’s practical project. The reading ‘nor let it pain you any more than it pains the earth in the arable plot’ is relatively grammatically straightforward, and can be improved: *on* can also mean ‘consisting of, marking the material of which a thing is made’, so the line may be best translated ‘nor let it pain you any more than it (cultivation) pains the earth of the tillage’.¹⁵⁴ A coulter enters the earth without harming it, and brings about life-sustaining results. The unwanted incursion of the patient’s body by disease should become as painless and harmless as the penetration of earth by a plough. A healthy, life-giving incursion negates a destructive one. Fertility defeats disease, and, indeed, earth counteracts water.¹⁵⁵ Like affects like, unlike negates unlike; similar and opposite elements are juxtaposed to create a life-affirming cure.

After this enigmatic command, the text then instructs the user to ‘sing’ a final line multiple times: *Eorþe þe onbere eallum hire mihtum and mægenum* [may earth destroy you with all her (its) might and power]. This incantation is usually printed as prose. *Singan* is often used to refer to the performance of poetry, however, and the charm’s final prose instruction, *Pas galdor mon mæg singan on wunde* [one can sing this charm on a wound], seems to refer to this last incantatory utterance, given that the verse portion of the charm is

¹⁵² Sandmann, 48-9; Schneider, “Zaubersprüche”, 300. In support of this argument, Sandmann cites two Pomeranian *Neque Doluit* charms: one states that the patient’s wounds will not fester until his bones rest in the grave, the other that the patient’s wounds cease to hurt just as pain ceases in the grave. Both of these charms, however, refer directly to the human body within the grave, rather than to the earth that constitutes it.

¹⁵³ *DOE s.v.* “Ear”, 1.

¹⁵⁴ *BT s.v.* “On”.

¹⁵⁵ Jolly, *Religion*, 166; Storms, 163; Grattan and Singer, 60; Bonser, *Background*, 439.

obviously a treatment for wounds or sores and requires no such clarification. This line, then, is itself a *galdor* like the verse portion, and should probably be treated as a line of verse.¹⁵⁶

Indeed, the text contains regular vocalic alliteration across its potential caesura and a common poetic collocation. It can be lineated and scanned as follows:

/ x x x \acute{x} / x xx / x x \acute{x} x
 Eorþe þē onbere eallum hire mihtum and mægenum. **E|hypermetric**

The fact that the resulting line includes an E-type verse and a regular hypermetric (though a type 1A*1b(1A*1a), unusual for a b-verse) confirms that this brief second incantation is indeed a single line of poetry.

Earth is used to affect healing or enact a desired magical result in two other metrical charms, as will be discussed in Chapter 4: Charm 6 uses a handful of earth from a child's grave to heal the womb of a woman who has suffered a past stillbirth, while Charm 8 uses earth to settle swarming bees. The *Old English Penitential*, the Anglo-Latin *Penitential of Theodore*, the *Canons of Edgar*, and Ælfric's *De Auguriis* also refer to the forbidden practice of drawing a child through the earth to cure illness.¹⁵⁷ These texts may describe a contemporary practice, though later mentions of the ritual may be drawing on the *Penitential of Theodore* rather than describing an activity known to the authors.¹⁵⁸ The idea of the earth as an absorber of illness, a receiver of symbolically-transferred disease or suffering, seems to

¹⁵⁶ Abernethy (137) says this line is 'obviously poetry of some kind' but does not scan it. Dobbie prints as prose, and all previous commentators have followed suit. H. Stuart ("Utterance Instructions in the Anglo-Saxon Charms", *Parergon* 3 [1985], 31-7) notes that the use of *singan* for such a short utterance is unusual.

¹⁵⁷ Canon 44.16.01; *Wulfstan's Canons of Edgar*, ed. R. Fowler (London, 1972), 3-19; *De auguriis* ll. 148-9 (text in Skeat). On a version of this prohibition in Burchard's *Decretum*, and a similar ritual for sheep mentioned in the Merovingian *Vita Eligii Noviomagensis*, see Flint, 251. Passing a child through a bramble rooted at both ends was cited as a remedy for various illnesses up to the eighteenth century in Cornwall (Roper, *Charms*, 18), while in *Gísla saga* ch. 6 (in *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson [Reykjavík, 1943]) men cement a bond of blood-brotherhood by walking under an arch of raised turf.

¹⁵⁸ On drawing through the earth as a contemporary practice, see M. Godden, "The Sources of Ælfric Lives 17 (On Auguries) (Cameron C.B.1.3.18)", *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, consulted 02/01/20, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk>; W. Rudolf, "Anglo-Saxon Preaching on Children", in *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, ed. W. Rudolf and S. Irvine (Toronto, 2018), 48-70. For a skeptical view, see Meaney, "Women", 22.

have been culturally available to early medieval English physicians and to the putative composer of Charm 7. Such a concept explains this final incantation: the earth takes in, removes, and destroys the patient's disease, and is also perhaps a particularly appropriate counterpart to the excessive 'water' of the illness.

The use of the pronoun *hire* [her] for the earth in this utterance may be purely grammatical, as *eorþe* is a feminine noun. Charm 1, however, demonstrates that early medieval English charm composers and practitioners considered it appropriate to treat the earth as a personified female being: the *eorþan modor* [mother of earth] is a natural force separate from, subservient to, and willing to enter a sexual embrace with the Christian God.¹⁵⁹ If the earth of Charm 7 is a sentient female agent, she acts in service of mankind, supplicated rather than commanded by the charmer, but is perhaps an ambivalent force, dangerous in the extremity of her power. As previously discussed in this chapter, the collocation *miht ... mæg* consistently describes malicious or transgressive power in the metrical charms in which it appears, and, in both Charm 4 and *Beowulf*, *miht* is monstrous when possessed by a female being. *Onberan* [diminish, harm, impair] is a violent verb, used to describe the raiding of hoards, the inflicting of wounds, and, indeed, the ravages of sickness.¹⁶⁰ The earth's destruction of a disease agent is commensurate with the harm done to the human body by that same illness. As in Charms 3 and 4, at the climactic moment of healing the charmer harnesses the power of an ambivalent agent — rather than invoking, again, the purely benevolent protection of the Christian God — to combat negative forces.

Though Charm 7 is a short text, by turns straightforward and opaque, its critical neglect is unwarranted. The charm is poetically powerful: it is constructed upon a

¹⁵⁹ K. L. Jolly, "Father God and Mother Earth: Nature-Mysticism in the Anglo-Saxon World", in *The Medieval World of Nature: A Book of Essays*, ed. J. E. Salisbury (London, 1992), 211-52.

¹⁶⁰ *Beowulf* l. 990, 2284; *Guthlac B* l. 944.

sophisticated rhetorical structure, and features notable aural ornamentation and consistent imagery of likeness and opposition. Like the other metrical charms, the text is concerned with maintaining the boundaries of the patient's flesh, and upholding divisions between human and nonhuman, healthy and diseased, inside and outside, in the face of invasive threats.

The martial approach to incursive agents found in Charms 4 and 7, however, is not the only mode of engaging with penetrative disease agents. For a different poetic and magical answer to the same problem, we must turn to Charm 12. This short text briefly invokes battle motifs, but many of its poetic images are distinctly domestic. Even chickens, water pails, and coal, however, can be weaponized, turning human fears of consumption, exposure, and shrinkage against supernatural enemies.

Charm 12: Beasts and Builders

Like the charms previously discussed, Charm 12 confronts the existential threat caused by a disease-agent seeking to enter and establish residence in the human body, but it does so in very particular terms, expressing a specific fear of creatures and forces that consume human flesh. The same themes and magical mechanisms that mark the other metrical charms — the harnessing of negative forces to combat one another, the use of the principle of sympathy, and the maintenance of boundaries between human and nonhuman through the demarcation of the line between civilization and wilderness — can also be found in Charm 12, despite the late date of its extant manuscript transmission. Such thematic continuity suggests the charms collectively address ideas and anxieties that remained relatively stable over the early medieval English period and between all twelve poems. However, Charm 12's anxiety over the consumption of the body, and its juxtaposition of domestic and martial imagery both to illustrate the wen's transgression and to remove it from the patient, offer a distinctive and

nanced take on these recognizable themes.

Charm 12 was opportunistically copied onto the final folio of a religious collection (Royal 4 A.xiv), which includes exegetical homilies on the Psalms (Jerome's *Tractatus .lix. in Psalmos* and the pseudo-Jerome text *Breuiarium in Psalmos*) and excerpts from Origen.¹⁶¹ The manuscript dates to the mid-tenth century and was probably produced at Winchester, alongside a psalter with which it was presumably paired (London, British Library, Royal MS 2 B.v).¹⁶² Royal 4 A.xiv, however, almost certainly arrived at the Benedictine cathedral priory in Worcester at or before the end of the eleventh century, without the accompanying psalter.¹⁶³ The main text of the manuscript ends halfway down the verso of the last leaf (f. 106v), and in the mid-twelfth century a scribe at Worcester copied Charm 12 in the resulting empty space. The charm lacks utterance instructions or accompanying ritual, suggesting either that the remedy is purely an incantation, or that the scribe was unaware of an accompanying ritual at the time of copying. The inclusion of this incantation in a manuscript closely linked to the Psalms suggests that Charm 12 was incorporated into, composed for, or perceived to belong to the paraliturgical stratum of remedies, prayers, and computistical texts found in the prefaces and margins of early medieval English psalters.¹⁶⁴

The text of the charm is in Old English, but has been copied with some twelfth-century spellings and vocalic transformations, and many words have picked up a Middle English inorganic final *-e*.¹⁶⁵ Almost no vernacular charms survive from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England, and the only other Old English charm preserved in twelfth-century manuscripts — a cattle theft text discussed in Chapter 5 — was recopied without the

¹⁶¹ Gneuss and Lapidge no. 455; Ker no. 250.

¹⁶² Ker no. 250.

¹⁶³ Gneuss and Lapidge no. 455; Ker no. 250.

¹⁶⁴ *Contra* Sandmann (68) and Schneider ("Zaubersprüchen", 288), who argue the charm is pagan.

¹⁶⁵ Ker no. 250; Dobbie, 128; Storms, 155. For a list of these sound changes, see Abernethy, 168-71.

spelling changes that distinguish Charm 12.¹⁶⁶ Charm 12's scribe, then, seems to have sought to make his text usable, to modernize its language for contemporary readers. He also seems to have found the process difficult, but persisted. He corrected his own spelling three times in the first two manuscript lines of verse, adding two *hs* and an *r* in superscript, and copied the meaningless words *uolmes* and *scesne* in later lines. Charm 12 thus may not have been purely of antiquarian interest to its twelfth-century copier: it may still have been perceived as medically efficacious.

There are numerous remedies for 'wens' in the Old English medical corpus, but the term itself is never explicitly defined. Wens appear variously on the eyes, on the face, and *æt mannes heortan* [around a man's heart].¹⁶⁷ One remedy provides a *sealfe wið wennas 7 wið nyrwet* [salve against wens and oppression of the chest].¹⁶⁸ When wens appear on the face, eyes, or skin, they seem to be cysts, boils, or small tumors, and most scholars define 'wens' exclusively as these kinds of cutaneous swellings.¹⁶⁹ Given that the same word describes a heart ailment and chest oppression, however, a 'wen' may be best defined as a swelling of any kind, usually epidermal but sometimes extended to describe the feeling of inflammation or swelling in the chest. As with the use of the multivalent term *wund* in Charm 7, the word *wenn* refers to a spectrum of illnesses, and thus even less-severe cysts or boils invoke the possibility of deadly tumors. Indeed, the conflation of a purely internal heart ailment — one that affects the centre of the body and the centre of the self, in early medieval English

¹⁶⁶ T. M. Smallwood, "The Transmission of Charms in English, Medieval and Modern", in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. J. Roper (Basingstoke, 2004), 11-31; T. A. Cooper, "Episcopal Power and Performance: The Fugitive-Thief Rite in *Textus Roffensis* (Also Known as the Cattle-Theft Charm)", in *Textus Roffensis: Law, Language, and Libraries in Early Medieval England*, ed. B. O'Brien and B. Bombi (Turnhout, 2015), 193-214.

¹⁶⁷ *Leechbook I* f. 12v; *Leechbook III* ff. 117r-117v, 123r; Harley 585 ff. 138r-138v, 158v, 165r, 171r, 189r; London, British Library, Cotton MS Domitian A.i f. 55v; London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library, MS 46 f. 144r.

¹⁶⁸ Harley 585 ff. 138r-138v.

¹⁶⁹ *BT s.v.* "Wen"; Paz, 228; Grattan and Singer, 111; Griffiths, 194; Pettit, II, 169; Storms, 159; Grendon, 216.

psychological understanding¹⁷⁰ — with an epidermal one is striking. This semantic linking of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ illnesses suggests that the cutaneous swellings designated by the term *wenn* were not considered to reside on the surface of the body, but underneath it. A cutaneous swelling or inflammation is thus a disease that has literally gotten under one’s skin, a visible mark of the presence of something unwanted in the body. The wen of Charm 12 is yet another sentient disease agent who enters the patient and establishes an unwanted presence within his flesh; this particular being, however, seeks specifically to construct a home inside the human body (presumably the swelling itself), thus in some way displacing the actual occupant of that body. The wen builds its *tun* [homestead, enclosed dwelling] inside what should be the patient’s most personal, private, and intimate ‘enclosed dwelling’ — his *banhus* [bone-house], *bancofa* [bone-dwelling], or *ferðloca* [life-enclosure], containing his *sawelhord* [soul-treasure]. Just as the concept of *hælu* invoked by Charm 7 focuses on the equation of health with inviolate wholeness, Old English kennings for the body emphasize the importance of the flesh as an enclosed space and as the place where one’s spirit lives.¹⁷¹ While the other metrical charms focus on ways that disease-agents seek inappropriately and malevolently to break open that enclosed space, Charm 12 addresses an illness that tries not only to cause harm to the body but also to take up permanent residence in it parasitically, to make its home in a place that should belong to the human soul alone. A wen under the skin and a wen on the heart thus differ only in the degree to which the swollen disease-agent has penetrated into the body; it is a question not of what kind of parasite seeks to enter the flesh, but how far that parasite has progressed.

As noted above, while the other medical charms are often heroic in register, Charm 12

¹⁷⁰ L. Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto, 2011), 4.

¹⁷¹ On the early medieval English understanding of the spirit as residing in the container of the body, see Lockett, *Psychologies*, 54-109, as well as B. Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto, 2013).

offers a striking mix of martial and domestic poetic imagery. The text draws on a version of the ‘beasts of battle’ motif common in Old English depictions of military aggression (discussed below), but its most prominent references are to chickens, dung, and water-pails.¹⁷² Like many of the Exeter Book riddles, which use heroic imagery to describe distinctly quotidian subjects — a hedgehog, a chopping block, an ink horn — Charm 12 complicates the aristocratic register of a poetic motif like the ‘beasts of battle’.¹⁷³ The charm transforms literary language into a practical, protective incantation. The attack on the wen is twofold: the eagle and the wolf are deployed to destroy the wen as an aggressive foe, while the familiar, tamed processes of the farmyard act as a shield against an unwanted foreign agent. The use of a battle motif, too, elevates the farmyard and personal dwelling into an essential theatre of war in the conflict between human and nonhuman.

This domestic imagery, as well as the fact that its final two lines do not alliterate, has led some scholars to suggest that Charm 12 is not verse, or not entirely verse.¹⁷⁴ The ‘beasts of battle’ motif, however, is an exclusively poetic topos. When lineated, the text includes only one half-line that is unattested in the Sievers–Bliss system of scansion, and the majority of long lines (10 out of 13) alliterate.¹⁷⁵ Several b-verses are types only found in a-verses in *Beowulf*, but such verses are common in the charms — as are non-alliterating or irregular

¹⁷² This imagery, alongside the charm’s straightforward diction and lack of poetic vocabulary, has led some scholars to read Charm 12 as a ‘popular’ text originating in an uneducated milieu (Roper, *Charms*, 23; Storms, 156; Sandmann, 73; L. Cook, “How Charms Work: A Pragmatic Approach to Old, Middle, and Modern English Charms” [unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1995], 28). The charm, however, is uniquely preserved in a good-quality Latin manuscript, was copied by a cathedral scribe, and already had at least one written exemplar, given the scribe’s correction of his work in superscript. The text therefore has, at the very least, been assimilated to an educated tradition in its current form.

¹⁷³ On the riddles, see E. G. Stanley, “Heroic Aspects of the Exeter Book Riddles”, in *Prosody and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of C. B. Heatt*, ed. M. J. Toswell (Toronto, 1995), 197-218. On mixed register in the charms, see P. B. Taylor, “Charms of *Wynn* and Fetters of *Wyrð* in *The Wanderer*”, *NM* 73 (1972), 448-55 [448].

¹⁷⁴ Abernethy, 174; Storms, 156; E. G. Stanley, “Alliterative Ornament and Alliterative Rhythmical Discourse in Old High German and Old Frisian Compared with Similar Manifestation in Old English”, *BGdSL* 106 (1984), 184-217 [206]. Dobbie’s lineation of the final lines as prose (128) is challenged below.

¹⁷⁵ This statement holds true if we reassign the prepositional phrases of lines 6-7a to the clause in line 5 as proposed below, thus adhering to Kuhn’s Laws.

lines in the climactic moment of healing. Indeed, Charm 12 is rife with poetic and metrical ornamentation that highlights its particular preoccupations: the consumption of the body as food, the turning of those consuming forces against one another, and the veneration of domestic space as a locus that must be protected but that is fundamentally opposed to disease, wilderness, and supernatural incursion.

Stylistic Analysis

Much like Charms 3 and 4, Charm 12 is, structurally speaking, divided into two sections: the wen is first banished to the wilderness, then steadily annihilated.¹⁷⁶ This transition is mediated by the involvement of the wen's brother, who receives the wen when it is sent to the mountain, and whose action of laying a leaf 'at the head' marks the beginning of the wen's diminishment. There are several structural triads identifiable within the charm as well, beginning with the threefold invocation of the wen in line 1.¹⁷⁷ The wen is then told twice not to establish a residence in its current location, and once to go north; these commands perhaps constitute a loose triple speech act removing the wen from the patient's body. Another set of three related images appears in lines 6-7 (the 'wolf's' foot, eagle's feather, and eagle's claw). Two triplicate demands close the charm, when the wen is first commanded to wither like coal, dung, and evaporating water, and second to shrink as little as a linseed-grain, then as small as the hipbone of a scabies mite, and finally to become nothing. These coexisting bipartite and tripartite structures emphasize the two actions the speaker compels the wen to perform — to depart and to disappear — and highlight three stages, each containing a

¹⁷⁶ Sandmann (63) and Schneider ("Zaubersprüchen", 292) suggest this general division of the charm, but assert that line 5 does not belong to the main body of the text, though there is no manuscript or textual evidence to support this view. Sandmann also assumes that the swelling itself and the disease agent are different entities addressed by the two parts of the charm, though the text itself makes no such distinction.

¹⁷⁷ Nelson, *Structures*, 59; Sandmann, 63.

threefold process of diminution, in which the wen is destroyed.

The charm's first line is a heavily ornamented invocation of the disease itself:

/ x / x / / \ x
Wenne, wenne, wenchichenne A|D

Repetition, assonance, and near end-rhyme make for an aurally striking opening and a powerful first command to the wen, as does the use of a D-type b-verse. While scholars have commented on the direct, imperative nature of this first line,¹⁷⁸ it is not merely a triple invocation but is in fact a variant of a traditional formula found in German, Dutch, Scandinavian, and Middle English charms. Many Middle and modern English charm-types begin with this kind of reduplicated invocation (e.g. 'Ashentree, ashentree'), and numerous German and Scandinavian charms name the addressee twice, followed by a third alliterating word that supplies further description (e.g. the Swedish *Mara mara minne* and *Bölde bölde blå*, the German *Rose rose ruhre dich*, the Dutch *Tand tand tauwe* and *Meetje meetje mijn*).¹⁷⁹ Charm 12 is the only example of a charm of this type which follows a pattern *noun, noun, noun+diminutive*, but it clearly belongs to this three-part formulaic category, and is similar in its root repetition to the German charm-formula *Wuth, wuth, du wuthende wuth* [Fury, fury, you furious fury]. Charms of the *noun, noun, adjective* type described above alliterate on all three words, but also consistently feature a vowel change in the final descriptor (*mara ... minne, rose ... ruhre, wuth ... wuthende* etc.), and the compound *wen-chichenne* provides such a vowel change in its middle syllable. All of these charms of direct address are repetitive in structure and exhibit significant sound patterning, and Charm 12 is no exception.

Employing a traditional formula with inherent invocatory weight, the charmer asserts his authority over the wen in a mode that both participates in a magical tradition and

¹⁷⁸ Sandmann, 63; Bozóky, 112.

¹⁷⁹ Roper, *Charms*, 132.

demonstrates aurally-ornamented imperative power.

The compound *wen-chichenne* can be literally interpreted as ‘wen-chicken’, *cicen* referring to a chick or young bird specifically.¹⁸⁰ Numerous scholars have noted that the word *cicen* here functions as a diminutive, a verbal reduction of the *wen* — perhaps a kind of abuse or belittlement — which asserts the charmer’s absolute power over the disease.¹⁸¹ Often, however, commentators have suggested that ‘chicken’ is not the intended sense of the diminutive, and that it should simply be interpreted as meaning ‘little *wen*’ or even ‘ugly little *wen*’.¹⁸² Indeed, there are no other instances in the extant Old English corpus of *cicen* being used as a diminutive, though the word serves as a disparaging or abusive synonym for ‘child’ in Middle English.¹⁸³ The use of ‘chicken’ as a compound element in Charm 12, however, makes the word’s condescending intent clear. It also metaphorically corresponds to the charm’s stated purpose of forcing the *wen* to shrink, briefly transforming the swelling from a dangerous, penetrative disease-agent into a domestic bird, easily tamed, controlled, and killed. Using the word *cicen* specifically to convey the charmer’s minimizing approach to the *wen* is also a stylistically-appropriate choice. The compound *wen-chichenne* is a D-type half-line that both alliterates and rhymes with the vocative *wenne*, and fits the alliteration and vocalic patterning required by the invocatory formula, which in its broadest form might be described as *noun, noun, qualifying descriptor*. *Cicen* may not have otherwise functioned as a diminutive, and may have been transformed into a diminutive purely for the purposes of this

¹⁸⁰ *DOE s.v.* “Cicen”.

¹⁸¹ Storms, 157; Schneider, “Zaubersprüchen”, 284; Nelson, *Structures*, 50; Sandmann, 63; D. Fry, “*Wulf and Eadwacer*: A Wen Charm”, *TCR* 5 (1971), 247-63 [251].

¹⁸² Nelson, *Structures*, 50; Dobbie, 128; Griffiths, 194; Schneider, “Zaubersprüchen”, 284; Abernethy, 168.

¹⁸³ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Cicen”; *MED s.v.* “Chiken”. The diminutive becomes affectionate in the early modern period (*OED s.v.* “Chicken”). Chickens are mentioned infrequently in the Old English corpus. *The Wonders of the East* describes incendiary chickens; Riddle 40 describes a cock and hen copulating; dreams of hens signify good economic fortune in prognostics; the birds are mentioned in Gregory’s *Dialogues* and Ælfric’s *Zoology*. However, these brief references do not demonstrate consistent thematic associations that could aid in an interpretation of Charm 12. For citations, see *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Coc”, “Hana”, Hæna”, “Henn-”.

single line, but its selection need not be interpreted as an arbitrary one. It was not necessarily ‘plucked out of the air’, as Vaughan-Sterling asserts,¹⁸⁴ but seems to have been chosen to serve specific formulaic, ornamental, and metrical purposes.

The use of ‘chicken’ as a belittling descriptor for the wen is also of a piece with the charm’s prosaic imagery, which focuses specifically and vividly on the farmyard and the personal dwelling. Pails of water, coals on the hearth, animal dung, and, of course, chickens are images associated with the *tun*, the enclosed yard surrounding an individual dwelling.¹⁸⁵ As line 2 makes clear, the wen has attempted to build its own *tun* within the patient’s body, invading the flesh and displacing its correct owner. The removal of disease from the body is equated with the expulsion of the disease-agent not only from its own inappropriate homestead, but away from social and domestic spaces and into the deadly wilderness represented by the mountain, hill, or burial mound. As Magennis points out, portrayals of community in Old English poetry consistently contrast the warmth and security of the civilized hall with the alienation and danger of the wilderness around it, in which monsters live and into which outlaws and exiles must be cast.¹⁸⁶ The *tun* of Charm 12 represents a homely version of the public hall, and the banishment of the wen from the human body is a ‘cleansing’ of the kind Beowulf performs in Heorot.¹⁸⁷ Various items essential to the functioning of the early medieval English home — coal, water, domestic animals — are employed to shrink the wen because they stand in ideological opposition to invasive supernatural agents, whose homes and kin are located outside the walls of the enclosed homestead. To call the wen a ‘chicken’ is not only to diminish it but, in some sense, to bring

¹⁸⁴ Vaughan-Sterling, 195.

¹⁸⁵ *BT s.v.* “Tun”.

¹⁸⁶ Magennis, *Images*, 3, 33-4, 128-30.

¹⁸⁷ Vb. *gefælsian*; *Beowulf* ll. 825, 1176, 1620. See also *Fates of the Apostles* l. 65.

the curative, normative power of life-giving domestic space to bear on an unwanted supernatural interloper. The charm’s use of the poetic ‘beasts of battle’ motif four lines later marks this homestead as an archetypal battleground in the struggle to preserve human bodies and spaces as inviolate strongholds.

Line 2 displays a similar level of alliterative ornament:

x x x x / \ x x x x / / x
 hēr ne scealt þū timbrien ne nenne tūn habben

The first line’s D-type is followed here by light d-type and C-type half-lines, creating a metrically striking cluster at the charm’s opening. The repetition and ornamental alliteration of *ne ... ne nenne* underscores the line’s actively prohibitory command, as does the use of the verb *sculan*, which denotes compulsion, command, and obligation.¹⁸⁸ Arguably the line also features ornamental, if not structural, transverse alliteration (*her ... timbrien ... tun habben*), which highlights the wen’s inappropriate building, its unwanted dwelling, and the location from which it must be prohibited. By building a *tun* inside a patient’s flesh, the wen is constructing a mockery of early medieval English domestic life, a kind of malicious parody or inversion of human home and community, and creating its own enclosure within an already-enclosed space from which it should rightly be expelled — much in the way Grendel occupies Heorot.¹⁸⁹

The wen is indeed expelled in the following lines:

x x x / ☹ x x x / x / x
 ac þū scealt north eonene to þan nīhgan berhge **C|hypermetric A**

x x x x / x / x / x
 þēr þū hauest, ermig, ēne brōþer. **a|A** (ll. 3-4)

The disease-agent is commanded to go north — a direction emphasized by the line’s

¹⁸⁸ Pettit, II, 193. See also *BT s.v.* “Sculan”.

¹⁸⁹ *Beowulf* ll. 145, 166 (vb. *eardian*).

alliteration, associated with cold, darkness, and bodily suffering elsewhere in Old English poetry and prose.¹⁹⁰ The wen is also commanded to go to *þan nihgan berhge*, to the nearby hill or burial mound. The wen is thus exiled both to a liminal space in the wild and to the deadly space of the grave. Several characters are exiled to a *beorg* or other mound in Old English literature and art, a narrative trope associated with isolation or emotional distress.¹⁹¹ Indeed, the charm's reference to a solitary, northern, wild space recalls the physical abjection of exile depicted in Old English poetry.¹⁹² The wen is made to suffer like a human outcast, banished outside the *tun* and all it represents. It is returned to the deadly spaces to which it correctly belongs, just as Grendel is banished back *on feonda gewæld* [into the power of fiends].¹⁹³ The restoration of the boundaries of the healthy body is predicated on the reinforcement of the conceptual boundaries between the settlement and the wild.

The wen has a relationship with the chaotic, inhuman forces of the hill or burial mound that is not just of kind, but of kin. The presence of the wen's lone brother at the mound indicates, again, that the wen's proper location is outside the human domestic sphere with other liminal, hostile forces. The alliterative emphasis on the wen's *ane* [one] brother highlights the punitive near-isolation of its exile, while a potential plurilinear echo between *berhge* and *broþer* draws attention to the appropriateness of the banishment. Indeed, the word *ermig*, a late spelling of *earming* [miserable, wretched], is used most often in Old English

¹⁹⁰ DOE Corpus, Simple Search, "Norþ". See, for example, *The Wanderer* l. 104; *The Seafarer* l. 31; *Beowulf* l. 547; Blickling Homily XVI. See also the *Visio Pauli*, a potential source for both *Beowulf* and Blickling XVI (Orchard, *Prodigies*, 39-42). Wright (*Tradition*, 129) notes that the location of Hell in the north is commonplace in literature of the medieval north Atlantic.

¹⁹¹ On the Franks Casket, the figure Hos sits on a *hearm-beorg* [injury/grief mound], a situation imposed on her by another. The narrator of *The Wife's Lament* is exiled to an *eorðscræf* [cave, grave, mound]. Guthlac chooses voluntary exile to a *beorg* in *Guthlac A*, and while Guthlac's hill is portrayed as a pleasant place, the poem also emphasizes its desolation and populates it with demons (Magennis, *Images*, 181-3). Gerðr is threatened with exile to a hill in *Skirnismál* st. 27.

¹⁹² Abernethy, 178. See *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, among others. On Old English exile motifs, see S. B. Greenfield, "The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of Exile in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *Speculum* 30 (1955), 200-6; Magennis, *Images*, 127, 177.

¹⁹³ *Beowulf* l. 808.

religious texts to describe sinners, demons, and those who have committed particularly evil acts.¹⁹⁴ The wen, a supernatural agent fundamentally opposed to Christian humanity, is being rightly punished for its transgressions.

The ‘brother’ is apparently instrumental to the wen’s destruction:

x x x / x / x / x
Hē þē sceal legge lēaf et hēafde. a|A

The assonance of *leaf* and *heaf-* draws attention to this enigmatic, but evidently important, action; the charm pivots after this line from banishing the wen to diminishing it to nothing. As in Charm 3, a supernatural agent’s sibling is commanded by the charmer to operate against its kin; like affects like, as one monstrous force destroys another. Laying a ‘leaf’ at the ‘head’, however, is an opaque image. The ‘head’ could belong to the wen: the word *heafod* is used in charters to denote the highest point of rising ground, and elsewhere it means ‘top’ or ‘summit’, and thus could refer to the ‘head’ of the cyst, boil, or tumor in question.¹⁹⁵ It could also belong to the patient: the brother lays, as a cure for the wen, a leaf at the head of its victim. Either way, as the wen begins to shrink immediately afterwards, the laying down of the ‘leaf’ is clearly a symbolic oppression of the disease-agent. The word *leaf* can mean both the leaf or shoot of a plant, and a folio of a book.¹⁹⁶ Given that the imagery of Charm 12 is largely prosaic, that the word *leaf* in the Old English medical texts refers exclusively to plant material, and that expensive parchment belonged to the aristocratic and monastic spheres far more than to the kind of early medieval English homestead depicted in the charm, it is more probable that the leaf here refers to a plant.

Numerous scholars have suggested that the objects under whose influence the wen

¹⁹⁴ *DOE s.v.* “Earming”. On spelling, see Dobbie, 128.

¹⁹⁵ *BT, DOE s.v.* “Heafod”.

¹⁹⁶ Cameron, *Medicine*, 156; Meaney, *Amulets*, 19. See *BT s.v.* “Leaf”. There is only one mention of parchment in the Old English medical corpus (*DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, Cameron Number B21, “Leaf”, “Bocfel”).

shrinks — the leaf, the ‘wolf’s’ foot, and the eagle’s feather and claw — were material amulets, placed on the wen during the recitation of the charm to reduce it.¹⁹⁷ Archaeological evidence suggests the existence of both herbal and animal amulets, including claws and talons.¹⁹⁸ There is, however, no evidence in the text itself that the leaf, foot, feather, and claw were material objects required for its ritual function. We cannot assume that the charm performance involved anything other than an incantation. Whether these amuletic items are literal or metaphorical, however, the charmer invokes a series of synecdochical objects that embody the most powerful aspect of the living beings they represent. The leaf or shoot of the tree indicates its greenness and growth; the foot of the wolf suggests its speed and the rending ability of its claws; the eagle’s feather represents its power of flight and the talon its predatory nature.

Indeed, the application of a ‘leaf’ to the wen may invoke any of a number of sympathetic magical pairs. If the leaf represents the regenerative fertility of green plants, then this positive growth works to undo the unwanted, deadly growth of the swelling. Like affects like: one symbol of growth has power against another. Simultaneously, unlike negates unlike: fertility triumphs over death. Many later cures for wens and warts call on trees and other plants to remove the unwanted swellings, as in the traditional formula ‘Ashentree, ashentree, pray buy these warts from me’, suggesting that the use of a symbol of natural growth to remove swellings is a plausible magical mechanism.¹⁹⁹ Old English poetry abounds with leaf imagery used to convey growth, fertility, and the beauty of natural life, but in several notable instances leaf imagery also suggests the inevitable end of such life, as leaves themselves must

¹⁹⁷ Storms, 158; Nelson, *Structures*, 59; Meaney, *Amulets*, 19; Fry, 251; Cameron, *Medicine*, 156; Niles, “Survivals”, 136. The animal parts could also have been used to apply a salve to the wen.

¹⁹⁸ Meaney, *Amulets*, 32, 135; Pollington, 429.

¹⁹⁹ J. Hardy, “Wart and Wen Cures”, *FR* 1 (1878), 216-28; Roper, *Charms*, 137.

fall and wither.²⁰⁰ Whether or not the charmer applies a literal leaf to the patient's body, a single leaf removed from a plant will inevitably shrivel up. If the charm does refer to this kind of image, the withering of the leaf perhaps forces the wen to do the same.

The symbols that diminish the wen in lines 6-7 are still more multivalent:

x x / / x x x ☉x / x
Under fōt wolues, under ueþer earnes C|C

x x / x / / x x / \ x
under earnes cleā ā þū geweornie.²⁰¹ B|A

Wolues is an emendation of the manuscript *uolmes*. According to Charm 12's own orthographic system, the word should be *folmes*, 'of the palm of the hand'. However, the phrase *fot folmes* [the foot of the palm of the hand], makes little sense — especially because the Old English *fot* does not have the metaphoric meaning 'base' or 'bottom', as in the modern 'the foot of the mountain'.²⁰² The word *fotwelm* or *fotwolma*, meaning 'the sole of the foot', is attested in Old English, but it is a compound noun, not a phrase; the genitive ending of *uolmes* would thus render the entire compound a genitive, and 'under of the foot sole' is meaningless.²⁰³ Zupitza has argued the lines are too damaged to be reconstructed — though only the word *uolmes* is a crux, and the line is grammatically complete.²⁰⁴ The scribe clearly had difficulty with this word, as he did with the spellings of other words elsewhere in the charm text, and any emendation is necessarily uncertain. Yet, given the legible presence of the eagle in these lines, the likeliest reading, supported by the *DOE*,

²⁰⁰ For images of life, see *The Phoenix* l. 39; *The Rune Poem* l. 54; *Elene* l. 1225. For images of death, see *Maxims I* l. 26; *Solomon and Saturn II* ll. 136-8; Blickling Homily V. On the falling-leaf motif, see T. D. Hill, "The Falling Leaf and Buried Treasure: Two Notes on the Imagery of *Solomon and Saturn* 314-322", *NM* 71 (1970), 571-6.

²⁰¹ The adverb *a* also bears stress in the headstave of a b-verse in *Christ II* l. 582.

²⁰² *DOE* s.v. "Fot", "Folm".

²⁰³ *DOE* s.v. "Fotwolm".

²⁰⁴ J. Zupitza, "Ein Zauberspruch", *ZdAdL* 31 (1887), 45-52.

remains Grendon's emendation to *wolues* [of the wolf].²⁰⁵ The pairing of the eagle and the wolf is a common one in Old English and Old Norse poetry and belongs, of course, to the 'beasts of battle' motif.

Scholars have defined the 'beasts of battle' motif in Old English and Old Norse with great specificity and only recognize it in descriptions of literal martial aggression, which is perhaps why Charm 12 is never discussed in examinations of the 'beasts'. Yet the pairing of the eagle and wolf in the charm undoubtedly belongs to this widespread poetic theme. The Old English 'beasts of battle' motif typically evokes the eve or aftermath of a great battle between armies, in which the raven, eagle, and wolf — or, on occasion, only the wolf and the eagle — devour, or express their eagerness to devour, dead human flesh.²⁰⁶ The Old Norse motif is a description of a successful warrior: the subject of a praise poem is described as feeding the eagle, the raven, and the wolf through his battlefield exploits.²⁰⁷ The motif is so common in Old English poetry that every depiction of a battle between armies in the extant corpus mentions the beasts.²⁰⁸ An invocation of the eagle and the wolf, therefore, immediately locates Charm 12 in a nexus of conflict imagery and raises the spectre of violence and carrion consumption.

The likely formulaic nature of these lines may explain their irregularity. The clause constituted by lines 6-7 violates Kuhn's Laws. The clause-initial dip in line 6a (*Under...*) does not contain a particle; the verb *geweorne* is stressed by displacement, but the pronoun

²⁰⁵ Grendon, 216; Fry, 251; Griffiths, 197; Cameron, *Medicine*, 156. Schneider ("Zaubersprüche", 288) asserts that the word is an unattested OE noun **wolm* [?'ravager], to support his suggestion that the line refers to the ON god Heimdallr in eagle shape.

²⁰⁶ M. Griffith, "Convention and Originality in the Old English Beasts of Battle Typescene", *ASE* 22 (1993), 179-99; F. P. Magoun Jr., "The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *NM* 56 (1955), 81-90; T. Honegger, "Form and Function: The Beasts of Battle Revisited", *ES* 79 (1999), 289-98; R. E. Diamond, "Theme as Ornament in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *PMLA* 76 (1961), 461-8.

²⁰⁷ J. Jesch, "Eagles, Ravens, and Wolves: Beasts of Battle, Symbols of Victory and Death", in *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. J. Jesch (Woodbridge, 2002), 251-80.

²⁰⁸ Griffith, "Beasts", 183.

þu in line 7b is also displaced from a clause-initial position, and therefore should also bear stress. Yet in order for line 7b to scan — and to maintain the vocalic alliteration of the line, on the adverbial particle *a* — it must be scanned as I have done above, without ictus on *þu*. Line 7b is also a type 1A2b(ii), which is unusual in itself, as this is a type only found in the a-verse in *Beowulf*.²⁰⁹ It is possible, however, to make these lines adhere to Kuhn's Laws, if we grammatically reassign the prepositional phrases of lines 6-7a to the clause constituted by line 5. In other words, the charm would read, *He þe sceal legge leaf et heafde, under fot wolues, under ueþer earnes, under earnes clea. A þu geweornie*. In this reading, the brother's laying of the leaf would happen under the influence, aegis, or rule of the 'beasts of battle', whose power forces the 'brother' to diminish the wen. The preposition *under* can indeed bear this metaphorical meaning.²¹⁰ The command that the wen perpetually shrink (7b) would stand grammatically on its own, the consequence of the brother's action. This is an attractive solution from a metrical and grammatical point of view, and the 'beasts of battle' remain magically essential to the charm, whether they force the wen's kin to diminish it or act directly on the wen itself. Either way, like affects like: one predator acts against another. It is also possible, however, that the beasts of battle are invoked separately from the 'brother', and these lines simply do not adhere to Kuhn's Laws. The correlative *under ... under ... under* construction is a repetitive, incantatory tripartite unit that may allow for abnormal poetic syntax.²¹¹ Practicality — the importance of this three-part repetition and the need to include the shrinking command — takes precedence over metricality. These lines also include two 2C1b type half-lines in a row, as well as end-linked vocalic alliteration between line 6b and 7a. Regardless of our grammatical interpretation of the charm, this invocation of the beasts of

²⁰⁹ Bliss, *Metre*, 125.

²¹⁰ *BT s.v.* "Under".

²¹¹ R. J. Pascual, pers. comm., 06/02/19.

battle is emphatic, both stylistically and magically effective.

This charm's use of a poetic battle motif suggests that the physicians and patients who employed Charm 12 (like Charms 4 and 7) conceived of treating disease as engaging in military conflict with an array of supernatural opponents, though this particular battle takes place in a distinctly homely arena. In yet another example of the principle of sympathy, predatory agents of death are deployed against another such agent, perhaps 'dismembering' it with their claws.²¹² The beasts of battle have archetypal significance in the early medieval English and Norse worldview: wolves and eagles in this martial context are symbols of consummate strength and of an ambivalent ferocity that is both destructive and desirable to human warriors. Wolf and eagle claws appear to have been used as amulets, judging by their presence in multiple early medieval English burial sites as well as Norwegian and Danish grave mounds; *earn* and *wulf* are the only animal terms aside from *hun* [bear] to appear in Old English personal names, suggesting an appropriation or celebration of the qualities of apex predators.²¹³ Yet the beasts of battle motif is almost certainly based on real experiences on the battlefields of the medieval northwest, where wolves, ravens, and eagles were still relatively common and could be seen feeding on human corpses in the aftermath of violence.²¹⁴ These animals are thus also signs of slaughter and mortality, frequently treated as emblems of human destruction, including on an eschatological scale: carrion birds and wolves appear in Old English homilies as representatives of Satan and symbols of greed or the eternal death of sinners.²¹⁵ In a similarly apocalyptic context in the Old Norse corpus,

²¹² Storms, 85; Meaney, *Amulets*, 19; Fry, 251; Nelson, *Structures*, 58.

²¹³ Meaney, *Amulets*, 32, 135; Griffiths, 151; K. von See *et al.*, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda Band 5: Heldenlieder* (Heidelberg, 2005), 583.

²¹⁴ Honegger, 289; Griffith, "Beasts", 184; Thompson, 138. For realistic depictions of carrion-eating ravens, see *Fortunes of Men* ll. 33-42; London, British Library, Cotton MS Claudius B.iv f. 15r.

²¹⁵ R. DiNapoli, *An Index of Theme and Image to the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (Hockwold, 1995), 19, 28, 94.

both an eagle (*Hræsvelgr*, ‘corpse-swallower’) and several wolves appear in the account of *ragna rök* offered by *Völuspá*.²¹⁶ To invoke the beasts of battle is, therefore, to invoke universal forces of devouring and dismemberment, to turn archetypal forces of death against the immediate threat of disease.

These flesh-consuming animals also tap into a persistent anxiety prominent in Old English literature: a fear of the body being eaten. Vivid depictions of man-eating and cannibalism mark the monsters of Old English literature, from Grendel to the hybrid creatures of *Wonders of the East* to the *wyrmas* who devour corpses in the grave in numerous prose and verse texts.²¹⁷ Old English poets could have chosen to signify, describe, or imply battlefield slaughter in any number of ways, but by far the most common way to do so is to invoke the consumption of human corpses by animals.²¹⁸ The beasts of battle are a reminder of how easily the body becomes carrion. These anxieties, I suggest, are both microcosmic and macrocosmic. The flesh is vulnerable not only to being invaded, but to being consumed by creatures that come from the wild, outside the human community — the ‘wolf of the forest’, the worms of the grave, the monster from the fen, the ‘mighty women’ and the wen from the burial mound. The worms of the *Soul and Body* poems bore through the eyes, crack open the head, and chew holes in the neck: the early medieval English fear of being eaten is, at its core, a fear of being entered, laid open, and exposed.²¹⁹ Flesh-eating motifs in Old English poetry are a particularly bloody iteration of the general fear of bodily violation. Deploying

²¹⁶ Jesch, 263.

²¹⁷ Griffith, “Beasts”, 186; Thompson, 132. For devouring worms, see *Soul and Body I and II*, *The Rhyming Poem*, *The Grave*, *The Lord’s Prayer II*, *The Soul’s Address to the Body*, and, especially, Vercelli Homily IV ll. 265-6, which connects the beasts of battle conceptually with worms by addressing the body as *ðu wyrma gecow 7 wulfes geslit 7 fugles geter* [you thing chewed by worms and bitten by wolves and ripped by birds].

²¹⁸ Magoun (“Theme”, 84) lists all examples of the motif: *Battle of Brunanburh*, *Beowulf*, *Elene*, *Exodus*, *The Fight at Finnsburg*, *Genesis A*, *Judith*, *Battle of Maldon*, and *The Wanderer*. *Fortunes of Men*, *Judgment Day II*, and *Instructions for Christians* also depict the consumption of the body by animals.

²¹⁹ *Soul and Body I* ll. 119-24.

the wolf and eagle against a wen is thus profoundly congruent. Creatures who seek to break open and consume the human body are turned, instead, against another agent who has also inappropriately broken into the patient's flesh.

The beasts of battle motif does not appear in its usual poetic form in Charm 12: the animals are represented only by their body parts. These incantatory lines serve as a kind of synecdochic distillation of the beasts, a repetitive shorthand used to harness their power as part of an effective remedy. This listing of animal body parts, in order to control the forces those animals represent, is likely a magical formula in its own right. A similar list can be found in a collection of Norse poetic material in the Codex Regius that scholars have named *Sigrdrífumál*.²²⁰ The verses in question — which may be significantly older than the surrounding text — present a narrative of the origins of the runic alphabet, in which runes are carved on and imbued with power from various cosmic symbols: *á bjarnar hrammi ... á úlfs klóm / ok á arnar nefi, á blóðgum vængjum* [on the bear's paw ... on the wolf's claw and the eagle's beak, on bloody wings].²²¹ As in Charm 12, the most salient body parts of predatory animals — feet, claws, wings — generate harnessable symbolic or magical power. In the *Kalevala*, too, the sorcerer Väinämöinen seeks magic words inscribed on the body parts of a variety of animals, suggesting this particular concept may have been widespread.²²² Charm 12 represents the only extant attestation of this putative magical formula in Old English, and it transforms a poetic motif into an incantation, a literary trope into an effective ritual.

The wen continues to shrink in the following lines, but under the influence of very different forces: the natural processes of the farmyard. Dobbie lineates lines 8-10 such that

²²⁰ von See *et al.*, V, 497. Grendon (216) and Meaney (*Amulets*, 19) note the similarity between Charm 12 and *Sigrdrífumál*. On the *Sigrdrífumál* material as a whole, see C. Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnostic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford, 1993), 86-93.

²²¹ *Sigrdrífumál* st. 17. On the age of st. 13-19, see von See *et al.*, V, 580.

²²² von See *et al.*, V, 583.

the a-verses are non-metrical, placing the caesura before *alswa* in each line.²²³ If they are lineated as follows, however, they form a series of regular A types:²²⁴

/ x x / x	/ x / x
Clinge þū alswā	cōl on heorþe
/ x / x / x x / x	
scring þū alswā	scerne awāge,
x / x / x $\overset{\curvearrowright}{\times}$ x / x	
and weorne alswā	weter on anbre.

Cross-alliteration in line 10 (*weorne ... alswa ... weter ... anbre*), repetition of *s* and *w* in line 9 that echoes the alliteration on *w* in line 10, the rhyming verbs *clinge* and *scring* in lines 8-9, and syntactic repetition across all three lines create a heavily ornamented anaphoric unit, not unlike the *ne* structure found in Charm 7.²²⁵ Such incantatory effects link the three commands together and emphasize the magical diminishment of the wen.

This tripartite shrinking command is the first of two, in this final section of the charm, operating on the principle of sympathy. These formulae may have traditional roots. The vast majority of medieval and early modern wart-cures in English include diminishing curses of this type, and similar Scandinavian charms command disease to shrink like coal in an oven or in ashes.²²⁶ The only other ritualized wen cure in the Old English medical corpus also involves the principle of diminution: a virgin draws running water from a stream and pours out three cupfuls into another vessel, representing the shrinking of the wen either by the pouring away of the water or by its eventual evaporation.²²⁷

Lines 11-13 present a second triad of shrinking formulae, in which the wen is

²²³ Dobbie, 128.

²²⁴ Suggested by M. Griffith, pers. comm., 26/03/18. Abernethy rejects this lineation as ‘unattractive’ (174). The a-verse of line 10 is a hypermetric A type.


²²⁵ The repetition of *alswa* is similar to the repetition of its OHG cognate *sose* in Merseburg Charm 2 (Stanley, “Ornament”, 205). On *swa ... swa* structures in OE poetry, see Steen, 128.

²²⁶ Hardy, 221; Roper, *Charms*, 137-8. For Scandinavian examples, see Sandmann, 70.

²²⁷ Harley 585 f. 189r. On this remedy, see Pettit, II, 349; Grendon, 237; Garner, “Performance”, 32-3. Fry (253) suggests that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is a wen charm, but this view has not been widely accepted.

commanded to become progressively smaller until it becomes nothing:

x / x x x / x x x / x \
 Swā lītel þū gewurþe alswā linsetcorn

x / x / x x x x x / \ x  \
 and miccli lesse alswā ānes handwurmes hupebān

x x x / x x x / x x x / x x / x
 and alswā lītel þū gewurþe þet þū nāwiht gewurþe.

The division of lines 12-13 is my own. Line 11 is a regular long line consisting of an A type with anacrusis and a light d type, but Dobbie prints lines 12-13 as prose, as they do not alliterate, and he suggests they cannot be scanned. When lineated as I have done here, however, lines 12-13 are largely scannable. Line 12a is a type a1a(2A1a). If we do not place secondary stress on *-ban*, 12b is a type a1d(3A2), and if *-ban* bears secondary stress it is a type 2A4(ii) with irregular anacrusis. 13a is a type a1c(1A*1b), which does not appear in *Beowulf* but is theoretically possible within Sievers–Bliss scansion, and 13b is a type a1b(1A*1a). The fact that these lines can be scanned is surely relevant to our assessment of the charm as a poetic text, but does not mean these lines are classically ‘verse’. This scansion requires line 13a to violate Kuhn’s Laws,²²⁸ and neither line alliterates across the caesura, though line 12 features double alliteration in the off-verse and line 13 contains ornamental alliteration on *w* (*gewurþe ... nawiht ... gewurþe*). These lines also feature notable ornamentation: echoing *l-* and *i-* sounds link all three lines, the *wen*’s disappearance is emphasized by the repetition of *gewurþe* and *þu*, and the lines grow longer, heavier, and more hypermetric as the *wen* contrastingly becomes smaller.²²⁹ Storms has argued that Charm 12 is not in verse because it lacks alliteration in ‘the last and decisive line’.²³⁰ As the present study has already demonstrated, however, the metrical charms frequently exhibit irregularities in

²²⁸ The particle *þu* falls after the first dip in l. 13a, but cannot bear stress if the verse is to scan.

²²⁹ Nelson, *Structures*, 59; Symons, 134.

²³⁰ Storms, 156.

lines in which the climactic moment of healing occurs, and indeed these lines represent the actual annihilation of the wen. Lines 12-13 continue on grammatically, semantically, and even magically — as part of a three-part shrinking command — from the preceding line, without break from the rest of the verse. It is unlikely that the charm abandons verse markers entirely at the climactic moment of healing and in the middle of an incantatory, formulaic structure. Rather, given that the text here is aurally ornamented, nearly-alliterative, and hypermetric, we can conclude that the charm continues in broadly poetic long lines which can be described as ‘verse-adjacent’, if not verse *per se*.

Moreover, as in Charms 4 and 7, the use of a specific, traditional formula may take precedence over metrical regularity in the moment of healing. The command that an object or disease become so little that it ceases to exist appears in numerous other medieval and modern English and European charms, particularly remedies for warts, tumors, and swellings.²³¹ Annihilation formulae evidently lend particular effectiveness to remedies for wens and related ailments. Indeed, multiple Swedish charm texts reduce disease to the size of a mustard or linseed grain, specifically, before commanding it to become nothing.²³² The notable similarity between these incantations and Charm 12’s bid to reduce the wen to nonexistence — especially its invocation of the *linsetcorn* — suggests that these lines are formulaic or that some aspect of their word choice is prescribed. Charm 12’s final lines thus contain traditional content essential to the incantation’s function, which suggests in turn that their irregularities may be due to prescribed word choice or inherited phrasing. Charm 12, like Charms 4 and 7, demonstrates that the so-called ‘irregularities’ of the metrical charms

²³¹ Roper, *Charms*, 138; Hardy, 217. See also the Old English charm *Wið Cyrnel*, which has numerous classical, medieval, and modern analogues that all apply the principle of *reductio ad nihilum* to a swelling. For discussion and text, see Pettit, II, 292-7; Storms, 153; Cameron, *Medicine*, 151; Roper, *Charms*, 93; Grendon, 218; Bonser, *Background*, 252; F. P. Magoun, Jr., “*Nopðæs sweoster*, ‘Need’s’ sisters: An Old English Counting-Down Charm”, *ANF* 60 (1945), 98-106.

²³² Sandmann, 70.

dovetail not only with their narrative structure but with their use of magical formulae, indicating that these irregularities are not lapses or errors but functions of the charms' pragmatic purposes.

Line 12b potentially contains an irregular four syllables of anacrusis, accommodating the essential structural repetition of *alswa*, as well as the article *anes*. It also introduces an image not found in any of Charm 12's analogues — the *handwurmes hupeban*. Line 12b breaks the long line's alliteration to accommodate these two compounds. They alliterate with one another, feature a pattern of assonance (*handwurm ... hupeban*) and illustrate possibly the charm's most vivid image, the invisibly minuscule hipbone of a parasite. The inclusion of this unusual, ornamented phrase may have either taken precedence over, or compensated for the lack of, adherence to regular metre. The *handwurm* appears in both the *Lacnunga* and the *Leechbooks*, and likely refers to the scabies mite, which burrows into the clefts of the fingers.²³³ The charm again invokes the spectre of flesh-consumption, and again turns the man-eating creature against the wen rather than the patient. Just as the eagle and the wolf's predatory attentions are directed onto the disease-agent rather than the human body, the incursive *handwurm* becomes the measure of another invasive ailment's displacement and shrinkage. The term *wurm* represents a spectrum of dangerous creatures, including maggots, parasites, snakes, and dragons.²³⁴ *Wyrmas* are a common cause of disease in the Old English medical corpus: they penetrate patients (*smeawyrmas*), grow inside patients (*on men weaxe*), and eat flesh (*flæsc etað*).²³⁵ They are persistently linked to death, disease, consumption of the body, and, in Ælfric, the postlapsarian vulnerability of man's body to attacks by other

²³³ DOE s.v. "Handwurm"; Pettit, II, 269; Storms, 155.

²³⁴ Thompson, 132; M. Ogura, "OE *Wurm*, *Nædre*, and *Draca*", *JEL* 21 (1988), 99-124.

²³⁵ Dendle, *Possession*, 45; Bonser, *Background*, 277; Meaney, "Causes", 14-15. For citations, see *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, Cameron Number B21, "Wurm-".

creatures.²³⁶ Their semantic link to snakes and dragons, too, renders them an existential, anti-Christian threat. Given that intestinal parasites were likely endemic to early medieval English communities,²³⁷ *wyrmas* may have also been perceived as an inescapable threat, evidence of the fragility of the body and the constant menaces to which it was subject. Like affects like: one invader destroys another. Anxiety over the eating of human flesh is raised, but in a context over which the charmer has total mastery. The wen shrinks to the point of oblivion.

Charm 12 thus provides a fitting conclusion for this discussion of disease-agents and the protection of the vulnerable body in the Anglo-Saxon medical charms. The reiteration across these charms of the same magical principles, the same relationships to the supernatural, the same anxieties over human vulnerability, and the importance of the same conceptual boundaries, makes clear that these ideas are essential to early medieval English understandings of the body: the body in disease and health, in performance of gender and engagement with sexuality, as the victim of monsters and a vessel for a relationship with the divine, and as a microcosm of the human struggle in a hostile supernatural landscape. This study now turns to a persistent theme in these texts that requires further examination, and that reaches its rhetorical peak in Charm 2, the ‘Nine Herbs Charm’: the tendency of the metrical charms to harness ambivalent, dangerous, or monstrous forces to combat other such forces, rather than exclusively drawing on the support of benevolent allies.

²³⁶ Thompson, 93. See J. C. Pope, ed., *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, vol. 2 (London, 1968), XVII, l. 39.

²³⁷ Thompson, 136.

Chapter Three

Harnessing Ambivalent Forces in Charm 2

While the majority of the medical metrical charms are concerned with commanding, exorcising, and destroying agents of disease, Charm 2, ‘The Nine Herbs Charm’, directly addresses multiple agents of healing. This charm does name a range of incursive supernatural enemies, but it achieves effectiveness through breadth rather than specificity, and it trains its narrative focus firmly on the nine plants it commands to battle poisons, *wyrmas*, and devils. Given this focus on forces controlled by the charmer, it is unsurprising that Charm 2 offers a definitive example of the charms’ collective interest in coercing and co-opting ambivalent or negative forces to combat other malevolent actors. A purely benevolent ally to the charmer and patient — Christ — features in the text, but does not participate in the central, present-moment act of healing. The charm instead foregrounds the personal power of the speaker and his ability to manipulate dangerous natural forces that are, through repetition, word choice, and metrical emphasis, allied with the antagonists against which they fight. Charm 2 is organized almost entirely around the principle of sympathy and arguably represents the apotheosis of that magical concept in the Old English literary and medical corpus.

Charm 2 has received significant critical attention, but scholarship has largely focused on proposing emendations to and re-orderings of the manuscript text, identifying the nine herbs, examining the text’s ‘animism’, or discussing the presence of a figure named ‘Woden’

in one of the charm's narratives.¹ Pettit expresses significant reservations about our ability to parse the text, stating, 'The history of scholarship on this charm is not marked by major advances in understanding ... in view of the obscurity of almost all of the charm's allusions, the lack of any known written sources, [and] the uniqueness and difficulty of much of its vocabulary'.² Such difficulties are genuine and substantial — yet close reading and rigorous stylometric analysis, again, offer insight into the magical mechanisms and worldview by which the text operates, and in some cases clarify its meaning.

The charm appears on ff. 160r-163v of the *Lacnunga*, in between two remedies for haemorrhoids. The manuscript text does not distinguish between the end of the verse incantation and the beginning of the prose instructions except by the use of a punctus between *geblawe* and *mucgwyrt*, though the beginning of the incantation is marked by a notably large capital and begins on a new line.³ There is little doubt, however, that the incantatory portion of Charm 2 is in verse. The prose instructions identify the incantation as a *galdor* and use the poetic verb *singan* to describe its performance.⁴ The charm text includes *hapax legomena*, poetic vocabulary (e.g. *felamihtig*, *witig*, *werðeod*), and formulaic half-lines (*witig Drihten*, *ofer sæs hrycg*).⁵ Aside from a handful of non-alliterating or otherwise unusual lines, the vast majority of the charm scans regularly according to the rules of

¹ Storms, 188-97; Grendon, 227-8; Grattan and Singer, 52-4, 151-7; Bonser, *Background*, 214-18; Niles, "Survivals", 137; Jolly, *Religion*, 127-8; Nelson, *Structures*, 61-4; Sandmann, 194-229; Glosecki, "Vipers"; M. Nelson and C. Dennis, "The Nine Herbs Charm", *GNR* 38 (2006), 5-10; H. Bradley, "The Song of the Nine Magic Herbs (Neunkräutersegen)", *ASnL* 113 (1904), 144-5; W. Braekman, "Notes on Old English Charms, I", *Neophilologus* 64 (1980), 461-9; A. Giraudo, "La Formula Anglosassone Delle 9 Erbe", *Aevum* 54 (1980), 283-6; H. Meroney, "The Nine Herbs", *MLN* 59 (1944), 157-60; L. S. Chardonnens, "An Arithmetical Crux in the Woden Passage in the Old English Nine Herbs Charm", *Neophilologus* 93 (2009), 691-702. Compare Pettit, II, 100-246; Banham, "Herbs"; Weston, "Language", 181-5; L. A. Garner, "Rhetoric and Remedies: Or, How to Persuade a Plant in Anglo-Saxon England", in *Public Declamations: Essays on Medieval Rhetoric, Education, and Letters in Honor of Martin Camargo*, ed. G. Donavin and D. Stodola (Turnhout, 2015), 231-52.

² Pettit, II, 100.

³ Harley 585 ff. 160r, 163v.

⁴ Bredehoft, "Boundaries", 149.

⁵ Vaughan-Sterling, 196; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Sæs hrycg/gc", "Wæteres hrycg/gc", "Witig drihten", "Witig god".

Sievers–Bliss, though the charm does often allow verbs to take precedence over nouns in the alliterative scheme.⁶ Frequent alliterative emphasis on verbs, however, is a stylistically relevant choice. For example, verb alliteration in line 15 (*stond heo wið attre, stunað heo wærce*) emphasizes the fierceness of the herb’s actions against pain and poison. The charm also offers a high number of light and hypermetric verses, a poetic feature — hypermetric verses allow more complex syntax, while light verses draw attention to a singular moment of full ictus — or even, hypothetically, a compositional preference. In the concluding prose, the charmer is told to sing the charm first onto each of the herbs three times before using them, and then into the mouth, ears, and wounds of the patient, for a total of at least thirty-one times, or 1,953 lines of verse.⁷ In the initial stages of the performance, different poetic features would likely become noticeable to the practitioner and patient upon each recitation; in the later stages, the charm might become a kind of continuous aural backdrop to the healing action.

Charm 2 in Context

The medical function of the Nine Herbs Charm is unclear, although the prose instructions mention ‘wounds’. The uses of the charm’s nine plants in other Old English remedies are multifarious and have little overlap, though several of them appear in remedies involving supernatural beings.⁸ Charm 2’s antagonists are a variety of ill-defined, but evidently related, agents and forces. *Onflyge* [on-flier] presumably refers to diseases that travel through the air;

⁶ Stanley, “Ornament”, 197.

⁷ Beechy, “Bind”, 55.

⁸ Pollington, 90. In the OE medical corpus, mugwort is a travel amulet and a treatment for evil bodily fluids, devil-sickness, and *yfelra manna eagan* [the eyes of evil men], among other ailments. Plantain is a remedy for pain, wounds, and *fleogendum attre* [flying poison], *attorlaðe* for *bræcseocnes*, *feondseocnes*, pain, and poison. *Finul* appears in numerous remedies dealing with supernatural beings. Nettles appear in several salves. The other herbs appear rarely or, in the case of *stune*, not at all. *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Mucgwyr”, “Wegbrad-”, “Attorlað”, “Stune”, “Fille”, “Lombes/lambes cyrse”, “Mageþe/Mægðe”, “Netele”, “Finul”.

these fliers, like the nine ‘poisons’ frequently mentioned, suggest infection, potentially of a wound, with attendant discolouration, festering, or sores — perhaps meriting the identification of differently ‘coloured’ poisons and numerous ‘blisters’.⁹ Other remedies for *fleogende attor* [flying poison] appear in the Old English medical corpus, generally involving liturgical quotation and the use of symbols of purity and perfection, suggesting that ‘on-fliers’ and ‘flying poison’ are yet another category of incursive disease agent.¹⁰ Indeed, the prose instructions require the charm to be sung into the patient’s mouth and ears, presumably to send the words of the charm into the body, to attack and remove the disease that has inappropriately entered it.¹¹ These poisons may not be anthropomorphised, but nevertheless demonstrate intention, seeking out the body as they fly through the air. The ‘loathsome one that travels throughout the land’ is a personified agent, but aligned in its pervasiveness with ‘on-fliers’ and poisons. Indeed, Charm 2 here echoes a marginal eleventh-century remedy against *æghwīlcum uncuþum yfele ægðer ge fleogendes ge farendes* [every unknown evil whether flying or travelling], suggesting this particular collocation was considered apposite and exhaustive in early medieval English medicine.¹² The preposition *geond* [throughout, among, all over] in Charm 2’s phrase *geond lond fereþ* connotes diffusion, distribution, and permeation. The enemies of Charm 2 are persistent and omnipresent, borne over the land and in the air, seeking flesh open to influence and invasion, perhaps literally ‘opened up’ by wounds vulnerable to infection.

⁹ Meaney, “Causes”, 16. Banham (“Herbs”, 192) and Abernethy (57) suggest the prose instructions are for a wound salve. Storms (193) suggests snakebite.

¹⁰ Meaney, “Causes”, 15; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, Cameron Number B21, “Fleog/Flyg ... Attor/Attre”. See for example Harley 585 ff. 134r, 174v. *Leechbook I* (f. 55r) notes that bloodletting — that is, opening up the body — is inadvisable when poisonous things are flying.

¹¹ Other remedies involving singing into a patient’s orifices include Charm 3; Harley 585 ff. 136v-137r, 146v-151r, 151r. Remedies in which a text is sung over a drink include *Leechbook III* ff. 125v-126r; London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A.xv f. 140r.

¹² Cotton Caligula A.xv f. 136r; Pettit, II, 125.

The charm also frequently refers to *wyrmas*, which are, as noted in Chapter 2, archetypal and inescapable consumers of human flesh. Mention of the *wyrm* may also suggest that Charm 2 was designed to treat haemorrhoids or anal fistula, like the remedies on either side of it — one of which refers to *se wyrm ... nybergewend* [the worm turned downwards].¹³ Haemorrhoids and, especially, anal fistula are conditions that involve boundary violation: swellings and abscesses, like wens, suggest the presence of something unwanted under the skin, while rectal prolapse causes flesh that belongs inside the body to become exposed in an intimate place of perceived bodily impurity. Given the semantic range of the charm and its interest in numerous diffuse and unavoidable enemies, Charm 2 is unlikely to be merely a haemorrhoid treatment, but such a treatment may well belong to its range of putative functions. We cannot assume these various disease agents — worms, flyers, loathsome travellers — are identical with one another, but as pervasive, permeating, malevolent forces they have significant conceptual overlap.¹⁴ As with Charm 4, the remedy's lack of specificity may grant it flexibility. The incantation could reasonably counter any flying danger, any kind of poison, any travelling threat.

Scholarship on Charm 2 has consistently involved debates over how many herbs are named in the charm and whether the herb lists found in the verse and prose match one another.¹⁵ Two possible solutions have the significant advantages of accommodating both verse and prose, taking into account the syntax of the verse in ascribing by-names to each herb, and maintaining the order of plants presented in both the verse and prose portions of the charm. In the first, the herbs are *mucgwyr*t (also called *una* in the verse), *wegbrade*, *stune*/

¹³ Harley 585 f. 163v. See Cameron, *Medicine*, 147; Pettit, II, 132.

¹⁴ Dendle, *Possession*, 99. Cf. Neville (*Representations*, 118-9), who argues these forces are all synonymous.

¹⁵ For various opinions, see Storms, 196; Bradley, 144-5; Grattan and Singer, 151; Giraud, 285; Bonser, *Background*, 334; Payne, 138; Sandmann, 197; Meroney, "Herbs", 157-9; Pettit, II, 110-11; Nelson and Dennis, 5; Banham, "Herbs", 192.

lombes cyrse (also called *stiðe* in the verse), *attorlaðe* (with the ‘greater’ and ‘lesser’ varieties counted as a single herb), *mægðe*, *wergulu/netele*, (*wudusur*)*æppel*, *fille*, and *finule*.¹⁶ In the second, the herbs are *mucgwyrt/una*, *wegbrade*, *stune/lombes cyrse/stiðe*, greater *attorlaðe*, lesser *attorlaðe* (though the two kinds are treated as one herb in the prose), *mægðe*, *wergulu/netele*, *fille*, and *finule*, with the apple not counted as a ‘herb’.¹⁷ The verse portion of the charm uses elevated, imagistic names for two of the plants — *stune* and *stiðe* for *lombes cyrse*, and *wergulu* for *netele* — perhaps to enhance poetic diction, and certainly in both cases to bear alliteration and draw attention to wordplay.¹⁸ It is also possible that the prose portion of the charm provides prosaic names in place of archaic or poetic titles in order to render the actual preparation of the remedy legible and practical.¹⁹ On the whole, the apple seems to be one of the nine herbs. The word *wyrt* often simply means ‘plant’ in the medical corpus, and blackberry and hazelnut are both called *wyrtas* in remedies.²⁰ More importantly, the apple takes on a dramatic and climactic role in an archetypal battle against the *wyrm*, in one of the longest narratives found in the charm.

Just as scholars have debated the identities of the *nygon wyrtas* invoked in the charm, the correct order of the charm’s verse lines has been a consistent subject of discussion.

Numerous scholars have proposed re-orderings of the verse text, often dramatic ones, to remedy perceived aesthetic deficiencies or continuity errors in the text.²¹ There is little scribal

¹⁶ Proposed by Bradley (144), Storms (196), Payne (138), and Sandmann (197). Bradley (145) and Pettit (II, 135) note that *wergulu* cannot refer to the apple.

¹⁷ Proposed by Pettit (II, 135).

¹⁸ Vaughan-Sterling, 192.

¹⁹ Pettit, II, 108; Banham, “Herbs”, 192.

²⁰ Pettit, II, 110. See *Herbarium* ch. 89; Harley 585 ff. 139r, 141r. The prose instructions seem to separate the herbs from the apple, but the apple is prepared separately from the other plants (Pettit, II, 111). There is also a second preparation of fennel, however, that is not referred to separately.

²¹ Storms (188-9), Grendon (228), Sandmann (196), and Pettit (II, 112) propose re-orderings; Grattan and Singer (151-4), Braekman (461), Bonser (*Background*, 125), and Jolly (*Religion*, 125-7) break the charm into three texts.

or codicological evidence for reordering, and only one instance of a potential continuity error, discussed below; indeed, transpositions often create new continuity errors and grammatical problems.²² Perhaps most importantly, however, the charm in its current manuscript iteration functions as a poetic and magical unit. Charm 2 is marked throughout by parallelism and by repetition of words, phrases, and ideas; each short narrative echoes previous and subsequent narratives. The charm also has a remarkably neat tripartite structure.²³ If we assume apple is one of the nine herbs and the two kinds of *attorlaðe* are counted as one plant, as in the prose, then the first twenty-two lines are devoted to four herbs, that is, half of the list of nine plants, beginning with the command *gemyne ðu* [remember]. The next twenty-two lines cover the second half of the list — the remaining five plants — and also start with the command *gemyne ðu*. The third part, the remaining nineteen lines, is devoted to the enactment of the cure; this third part itself arguably contains three sections (the list of coloured poisons, the list of blisters, and the summative curing acts on the part of the charmer). These tripartite structures chime with the repetition throughout the charm of the number three and multiples of three. As nine is an odd number, it is not possible to have exactly the same numbers of plants in the same numbers of lines, but it is remarkable that the first four herbs and subsequent five herbs are each given exactly twenty-two lines of verse; it is also reasonable that the charm quickens its pace, spends fewer lines on each herb, and loosens in structure as it approaches its exhaustive, curative climax.²⁴ Regardless of whether previous transmissions of Charm 2 presented the verse lines in a different order, this iteration of the charm is stylistically coherent and may have provided a blueprint for subsequent performances. I thus analyse the charm in the order in which it appears in the manuscript.

²² Pettit, II, 113.

²³ Pettit, II, 114. Cf. Weston (“Language”, 181), who proposes a bipartite structure.

²⁴ Weston, “Language”, 184.

Within this tripartite structure, the charm consists of a string of *historiolae*, short narratives taking place in the legendary or mythic past, illustrating these plants' previous exercises of power and invoking them as agents subject to the charmer's will in the present. The charm is animistic insofar as it imbues nine plants with power, will, and intention, with an energy that can be harnessed by a qualified practitioner.²⁵ Indeed, Charm 2 belongs to an early medieval English tradition of invoking herbs by name, requesting and co-opting their healing power. On ff. 146v-151r of the *Lacnunga*, a remedy for a *haligre sealfe* [holy salve] begins with an alliterative list, featuring assonance and echoing, of the names of nearly sixty herbs. The remedy as a whole involves elements similar to ideas found in Charm 2, in addition to the invocation of herbs in a verse-like recitation: the physician must spit in and blow on the salve, which in Charm 2 is an evident gesture of banishment and expulsion; the remedy battles poisons and includes a *wyrngealdor* [worm-charm]; the salve's use of liturgical excerpts and a *lorica*-like prayer, along with symbols of purity such as a cow of one colour, suggest the conceptual importance in both texts of restoring the body to an inviolate state and shoring up the patient's spiritual defenses. Another alliterating herb list found in *Lacnunga* (ff. 138v-140r) and two prayers asking God to sanctify healing plants (f. 192r) suggest this kind of herbal invocation was a recognized remedy type in the Old English medical corpus. Two Old English translations of Latin prayers to castor oil and periwinkle also appear in the *Herbarium*, supplicatory texts invoking the power of God to render the plants medically effective.²⁶ Such prayers exist outside the Old English and Insular Latin tradition as well: the *Precatio omnium herbarum*, which accompanies the oldest surviving manuscripts of the *Herbarium of Pseudo-Apuleius*, implores healing plants to bestow favour

²⁵ Jolly, "Father", 231; Dendle, "Plants", 50; Pettit, II, 100.

²⁶ Garner, "Rhetoric", 238-41.

on the healer and permit him to gather them.²⁷ Mandala 10, Hymn 97 of the *Rig Veda* invokes herbs that sprang up in the earliest times, addresses them as ‘mothers’, and describes a past event in which the plants spoke and promised that no harm would come to men who consumed them as remedies. The speaker bribes and persuades these collective plants to save his patient, and orders disease to fly before the power of his medicines.²⁸ Given the similarities between this hymn and Charm 2 — a past declaration of healing power on the part of supernaturally-empowered plants, some of which are associated with feminine forces, and the flying or fleeing of illness — the metrical charm may be an early medieval English iteration of a more widespread narrative or set of tropes associated with herbal healing.

In contrast to these texts, however, Charm 2 does not supplicate, petition, or bribe the plants to which it is addressed; it commands, and demands. The herbs are ordered to remember, to withstand, to stand against enemies, to put disease to flight. Scholars have argued that because the speaker of Charm 2 does not worship the herbs or treat them as superior forces, he in fact treats them as equals, and that the herbs are heroic allies, filled with divine energy, standing ready to burst forth with power for humankind.²⁹ Yet for many of the herbs, there is no sign in the text that they desire to participate in the physician’s remedy, or have volunteered to do so. *Mucgwyrt* and *mægðe* must be ordered to remember their own declarations and reminded of their own past deeds.³⁰ Indeed, the imperative form of the verb *gemunan* and the phrase *gemunan... ðu* is used in the Old English corpus by angels speaking to men, parents speaking to children, bishops speaking to priests, and homilists speaking to

²⁷ For text, see J. McEnerney, “*Precatio terrae* and *Precatio omnium herbarum*”, *RMfP* 126 (1983), 175-87. For discussion, see M. Collins, *Medieval Herbals: The Illustrative Traditions* (London, 2000), 228.

²⁸ Text in R. T. H. Griffith, ed. and trans., *The Hymns of the Rigveda*, 2 vols, 3rd ed. (Varanasi, 1920-26). See also Pettit, II, 102; Sandmann, 200.

²⁹ Garner, “Rhetoric”, 244; Dendle, “Plants”, 53.

³⁰ Compare the emphasis on fulfilling previous boasts, the shame of failing to do so, and the exhortations to reluctant or doomed warriors to remember (*geman*, *gemunab*) the vows they made over mead when faced with difficult battle in *Beowulf* (esp. ll. 2633, 2864-76) and *Maldon* (esp. ll. 211-15).

their errant flocks.³¹ The phrase suggests an authoritative command delivered by a powerful agent to a subordinate agent. *Stune* and *wegbrade* are similarly reminded that they withstood aggressive attacks in the past, then told that they must now do so again. *Attorlaðe* is simply ordered to put disease to flight, while *wergulu* was sent to act by another agent. These plants may be uniquely qualified to ‘stand against’ poison, but there is no evidence in the charm itself that they desire to do so. *Fille* and *finule* are an exception, created by Christ for the express purpose of curing human patients. Yet this *historiola* is so different in this respect from the other narratives that it throws them into sharp relief: nowhere does the charm describe the other seven plants as designed for benevolent purposes, or willing to minister to human patients without the charmer’s express command and coercion.

Charm 2 also offers individual narratives for each named herb, unlike its analogues. The text focuses on each herb as a distinct agent, and thus on the need to persuade or demand a performance from each plant involved. These short narratives may be enigmatic, but they draw on imagery with a wide poetic currency in the Old English corpus. They are not gibberish, as scholars have argued, but vivid depictions of conflict and assault.³² Perhaps more importantly, in these narratives the plants themselves are often portrayed as dangerous or ambivalent. Charm 2 may command rather than supplicate because the herbs are not, in fact, natural allies of humanity. Indeed, as the following stylometric analysis will demonstrate, the charm’s imagery, narrative content, and stylistic ornamentation collectively link the nine herbs to the malevolent forces and beings they stand against, in a dramatic

³¹ *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Gemyn-... þ/ðu”. See particularly *Precepts* l. 93; *Instructions for Christians* ll. 31-2; *Old English Bede*, Book 2, ch. 9; Book 3, ch. 13; Book 4, ch. 30; along with numerous mentions in the *Catholic Homilies*. The phrase is used in prayer only three times in the extant corpus. Far more often, God is asked generally to be (*beo*, *wes*, *sie*) *gemyndig* of the supplicant, and is not directly commanded to ‘remember’. Even this less-imperative language may reflect a sense of gift-exchange obligation placed on God himself (see S. Clark, *Compelling God: Theories of Prayer in Anglo-Saxon England* [Toronto, 2018]).

³² On Charm 2 as ‘nonsense’, see Beechy, “Bind”, 55; Glosecki, “Vipers”, 97.

illustration of the principle of sympathy.

Stylistic Analysis

A close reading of Charm 2 demonstrates the ambivalence of the nine herbs as natural forces and highlights the text's focus on diffuse and pervasive threats. The charm opens with a command to the first herb, *mucgwyr̥t*:

x ^úx x / \ x x x / \ x
 Gemyne ðū, Mucgwyr̥t, hwæt þū āmeldodest, A|d

x x / \ x x ^úx \ x
 hwæt þū rēnadest æt Regenmelde. d|d

/x x / x / x / x
 Ūna þū hāttest, yldost wyr̥ta; A|A

x x x / x x x / x
 ðū miht wið III [þrie] 7 wið XXX [þrītig], e|a

x x x / x x x / \ x
 þū miht wiþ āttre 7 wið onflyge, a|d

x x x x / x x x / / x
 þū miht wiþ þām lāþan ðe geond lond færeð. a|C (ll. 1-6)

The first half-line is a type A1 with an allowed single syllable of anacrusis on a prefix. Bliss would consider this verse a light verse, and would not stress the undisplaced, alliterating verb unless the verb alone bore the alliteration of the line. Yet placing ictus on the undisplaced finite verb allows for a two-stress verse with the double alliteration that often accompanies anacrusis in an a-verse, and both highlights and intensifies the charmer's command that the herb remember its previous actions. The fact that mugwort's remembrance of its own vows must be demanded so emphatically, and its past actions called to mind with multiple alliterating verbs (*gemyne*, *ameldodest*, *renadest*), suggests that the plant must be summoned with significant magical and verbal force, and is thus perhaps a reluctant or doubtful ally. Indeed, these lines offer a profusion of ornamentation, enhancing the charmer's perceived

power to command. *M* and *w* words proliferate throughout this section, and the verbs describing mugwort's past action — *ameldodest* and *renadest* — echo the location or event where those actions occurred, *Regenmelde*.³³ These lines include two successive anaphoric patterns: first *hwæt þu*, then *þu miht wip ... and wip*.³⁴ Numerous light D types create a consistent rhythm and emphasize the foes mugwort is able to defeat, while the concluding declaration of the herb's power against an incursive, all-pervading enemy is a C type.

The charm's previous actions occurred at *Regenmelde*, a name which literally means 'great, mighty, or intense proclamation or declaration'. The echoing between *ameldodest/renadest/Regenmelde* suggests that the compound 'encapsulates ... the events that occurred there', as Pettit notes.³⁵ Scholars have debated whether *Regenmelde* refers to an event (a particular proclamation) or is a place name.³⁶ The echoing formulae *Gemyne ðu, Mucgwyrt, hwæt þu ameldodest* (l. 1) and *Gemyne þu, Mægðe, hwæt þu ameldodest* (l. 23) could suggest either that *Regenmelde* is a location, parallel to *Alorforda* [alder-ford] (l. 24), or that *Regenmelde* refers to the event that took place at *Alorforda*, at which both plants made a proclamation. The exact repetition of these lines strongly implies a link between the original declarations made by mugwort and camomile. It is reasonable to assume that these proclamations occurred at the same imagined event, as they are reiterated in precisely the same language — suggesting in turn that *Regenmelde* and *Alorforda* refer to a single narrative happening, naming first the event and then its location. The general unity of the

³³ Pettit, II, 122; Bradley, 144.

³⁴ Weston, "Language", 181.

³⁵ Pettit, II, 122.

³⁶ On *Regenmelde* as a place name, see Braekman, 464; Glosecki, "Vipers", 96; Grendon, 227; Bradley, 144; Dobbie, 209. On *Regenmelde* as an event, see Storms, 194; Banham, "Herbs", 189; Pettit, II, 122. Those who suggest the word is a place name cite the ON noun *reginþing* ['main or mighty assembly place'] in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* st. 51, but the ON word is descriptive rather than titular (see K. von see *et al.*, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda Band 4: Heldenlieder* [Heidelberg, 2004]). Pettit (II, 123) and Sandmann (199) suggest that, based on the related ON noun *reginn* [great powers, gods], OE *regen* has to do with divine powers. However, a 'divine' valence to the OE word cannot be proved by citation of its ON counterpart.

charm's herbs (referred to repeatedly as a group of nine) and the text's repetitive structure, which links each plant through verbal echoing, anaphora, and imagery to the previous one, suggests that the herbs operate collectively in the present and may well have done so in the past. Certainly, *Regenmelde* and *Alorforda* both belong to a kind of mythical geography, a landscape in which nonhuman forces gather, speak, take magical action, and interact with one another. The plants of Charm 2 belong to the visible, human landscape: many of these herbs grow in Britain and most would have likely been available to physicians and in monasteries.³⁷ Yet these plants also evidently belong to the supernatural world. *Wegbrade* grows next to roads, a prosaic and realistic location,³⁸ yet in that space the plant engages in archetypal struggles with symbolic actors, emerging victorious and imbued with power. Nettle or *wergulu* travels over the sea, a normal geographical feature granted supernatural significance. *Alorforda* is the name of several real locations in early medieval England,³⁹ but is also the scene of a powerful magical happening. The nine herbs belong to the tangible world around the physician and patient, a world most often treated as threatening and difficult to navigate in Old English verse, but this dangerous natural landscape is hostile precisely because — as in the other metrical charms — it also contains the supernatural nonhuman.

Mugwort, in these opening lines, is ambiguous in its moral valence. The verb *ameldian* can mean 'to expose, denounce', with the specific senses of betraying a secret or legally denouncing another, and the noun *melda* (as in *Regenmelde*), can correspondingly mean 'denunciation' or 'betrayal' as much as 'proclamation'.⁴⁰ There is a distinctly negative aspect to the words used to define the herb's actions, emphasized by both structural

³⁷ Voigts, 259-60; Cameron, *Medicine*, 104.

³⁸ Pettit, II, 127; Pollington, 83; Dendle, "Plants", 53.

³⁹ J. Roper, "Personal and Place Names in English Verbal Charms", *INT* 8 (2006), 65-75 [73].

⁴⁰ *DOE* s.v. "Ameldian"; *BT* s.v. "Melda". Noted in Banham, "Herbs", 191.

alliteration and ornamental echoing. The charmer's address to mugwort sets the tone for the subsequent invocations: the plant is referred to as *una* [one, first, alone] and as *yldost wyrta*, which may mean both the 'oldest' herb and the 'chief, leading' herb, much as Beowulf is *se yldesta*.⁴¹ Mugwort offers a magical precedent for those plants that follow it, and the opening lines of the text seem to treat it as an uncertain or dangerous ally. The declaration itself may have been a betrayal of another or an unwilling exposure of its own power, which may have previously been kept secret or intentionally unavailable for human use. The plant belongs to, and demonstrates its power in, the supernatural world of the disease agents it is turned against. If mugwort serves the charmer, it may be an ally in the same way that the *sweostar* of Charm 3 is an ally, coerced by the charmer's magically-effective speech into following his commands.

The anaphoric refrain *ðu miht wið III 7 wið XXX, / þu miht wiþ attrē 7 wið onflyge, / þu miht wiþ þam laþan ðe geond lond fereð*, which appears multiple times and in multiple forms in the charm, deploys the ambiguous herb against more obviously malevolent forces. The use of the collocation *þrie ... þritig* seems to be an instance of alliterating numerical multiples suggesting vastness and completeness, conveying that the herbs are effective against opponents of any number, rather than a literal statement that the nine herbs are capable of battling exactly thirty-three malevolent actors.⁴² *Attor* [poison] and *onflyge* [an on-flier], as mentioned above, represent broad categories of diffuse, invasive disease agents, which emerge from unknown spaces outside human control. The concluding, climatic image of *þam laþan ðe geond lond fereð* [the loathsome one that travels throughout the land] is a

⁴¹ *Beowulf* l. 258. Noted in Pettit, II, 124.

⁴² Scholars who read this line as meaning 'thirty three' include Grendon, 227; Pettit, II, 124; Dobbie, 209. Those who read this line as referring to any number of opponents include Glosecki, "Vipers", 99; Storms, 99; Sandmann, 199. For use of the collocation in both senses, see *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "þrie/þreo ... þritig". See also *Solomon and Saturn II* l. 113.

resonant one. The same phrase appears nearly exactly in Charm 11 and is not dissimilar to *Maxims II*'s declaration that *þeof sceal gangan þystrum wederum. Þyrs sceal on fenne gewunian, / ana innan lande* [a thief must go about in dark weather. A monster must dwell in a fen, alone within the land].⁴³ Charm 2's malevolent enemy of humankind permeates the tangible and supernatural landscape. The 'loathsome one', like the flying poisons it accompanies or like the women of Charm 4, travels from and through wild space, heading inward, crossing the boundary between civilization and wilderness, inside and outside, eventually breaching the defenses of the flesh.

The second named plant is similarly aligned with the marginal forces it battles:

x x / \ x / x / x
Ond þū, Wegbrāde, wyrta mōdor, **d|A**

/ x ∪ x / x / x x
ēastan opene, innan mihtigu; **A|D**

x x x ∪ / x x x x / x / x
ofer ðy cræte curran, ofer ðy cwēne rēodan, **C|hypermetric A**

x x x / x ∪ x x x x / x / x
ofer ðy brýde bryodedon, ofer þy fearras fnærdon; **hypermetric A types**

x x x x x / x x x ∪ x
eallum þū þon wiðstōde 7 wiðstunedest. **a|a**

x x x / x / x x / \ x
Swā ðū wiðstonde āttre 7 onflyge **hypermetric A|d**

x x / x x x / / x
7 þæm lāðan þe geond lond fēreð. **a|C** (ll. 7-13)

Numerous metrical features define these lines as a poetic unit and draw attention to yet another anaphoric structure, describing *wegbrade*'s encounters with various antagonists. These lines make use of the same metrical pattern for several verses in a row: lines 7b and 8a are type 2A1a(i), and lines 9b-10b and 12a are type a1c(2A1a). The list of *wegbrade*'s encounters with carts, women, and bulls also begins with a dramatic C type (9a), and the

⁴³ Charm 11 l. 5; *Maxims II* ll. 42-3. See Meaney, "Causes", 20.

subsequent, shortened version of the charm's refrain concludes with one (13b). Alliteration on *w* — structural in line 7, ornamental in line 11 — frames the *historiola* in an envelope pattern, again emphasizing the importance of the herb's past battles, and the paronomasia and echoing on *w* and *st* in lines 11-12 creates a seamless transition from *historiola* to refrain.

Wegbrade ['waybroad', greater plantain] is introduced here as *wyrta modor* [mother of herbs], a designation elsewhere associated with mugwort.⁴⁴ The femininity of these herbs is thus evidently more than merely grammatical, and both plants were arguably understood as female beings or forces. The text emphasizes that plantain is assaulted by female agents (*cwene, bryde*), so introducing the plant itself as *wyrta modor* creates a sympathetic dynamic: the herb is a female being acted upon by other, aggressive, female beings, and the plant is thus conceptually aligned with its foes.⁴⁵ Plantain may here have been assigned mugwort's usual epithet precisely to emphasize the herb's similarity to the antagonists who attack it, and to highlight the charm's emphatic adherence to the principle of sympathy. The fact that plantain is 'open' on its eastern side is enigmatic: the image suggests both receptivity and vulnerability. The east, direction of the rising sun, is a source of supernatural power in Charm 1 and other medical remedies, suggesting that plantain is both capable of receiving supernatural influence and necessarily exposed.⁴⁶ Yet the plant is also 'mighty within', in possession of secret power. As noted in Chapter 2, female agents are rarely ascribed *miht*, and those who do possess *miht* are monstrous. *Wegbrade* is a potentially dangerous agent.

Three of the four half-lines documenting *wegbrade*'s encounters with violent antagonists feature double alliteration on paired nouns and verbs, including line 10b — yet another instance of double alliteration in an off-verse in the metrical charms. The inflectional

⁴⁴ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Mucgwyr".

⁴⁵ Glosecki, "Vipers", 100, and *Shamanism*, 132.

⁴⁶ Charm 1 ll. 24, 26; *Leechbook I* f. 44r; Harley 585 ff. 139v, 189r. Noted in Pettit, II, 128.

verb endings chime with one another (*curran ... reodan ... bryodedon ... fnærdon*). These ornamental features may aurally compensate for the fact that line 10 lacks cross-caesura alliteration. Specifically, double alliteration in 10a and 10b, as in Charm 4 line 14 (*Syx smiðas sætan, wælspera worhtan*), may replace structural alliteration, and maintains the two half-lines as a balanced, contrasting pair. Indeed, this anaphoric structure is not dissimilar to those found in Charms 4, 7, and 12: prioritization of incantatory repetition and parallelism may allow for abnormal poetic syntax. The naming of these particular agents is, stylistically speaking, central to the invocation of *wegbrade*, and thus likely magically central as well.

Indeed, these interactions are symbolically loaded. Carts ‘creaking’ over the plant is a physical assault, linked to its location on roadsides. *Cwene* [queens, women, wives] riding over the plant is similarly a physical attack, but also specifically a violent exercise of female power. The choice of the word *cwen* suggests a woman with influence, command, or social control. Both *cwen* and *bryd* can mean ‘wife’, but the latter term more specifically means a woman about to be married or newly married.⁴⁷ *Cwen* suggests a woman in her sexual majority, *bryd* a liminal woman on the cusp between virgin and adult sexual partner to a husband.⁴⁸ The depiction of a group of riding women in Charm 4, as discussed in Chapter 2, conveys danger, aggression, and gender transgression; the mounted queens of Charm 2 are similarly violent in their trampling of *wegbrade*. Both the ‘queens’ and ‘brides’ of Charm 2 are unequivocally aggressive female antagonists, implicitly imbued — certainly in the case of the word *bryd* — with erotic power, aligned with the incursive, sexualized threats faced by the other medical metrical charms.

The verb *bryodedon* is most likely the plural past tense of the verb *breodian* [to cry

⁴⁷ DOE s.v. “Bryd”, “Cwen”.

⁴⁸ Glosecki (“Vipers”, 101) notes the potential sexual references in this section of the charm, but his equation of the herbs with dryads and his suggestion that intercourse is linked to healing in Old English medical thought are not supported by evidence from the corpus or the text of Charm 2.

out], though it could also be an erroneous or unusual form of *breodwian* [to strike, trample], which, though less orthographically likely, would associate the brides' aggression with that of the queens.⁴⁹ In *Vainglory* line 28, the other extant instance of the verb *breodian*, a mind cries out (*breodað*) in pain. The brides' cries apparently constitute a kind of assault on the plant, but the women themselves also seem to be expressing pain or strong emotion. Given that they are labeled *bryde*, their 'crying out' may be related to the loss of virginity. The charm assigns female sexuality, or the transition from virgin to wife, some kind of belligerent power, which injures the plant in an unspecified way. The fact that the brides are followed in the next half-line by snorting bulls, archetypal symbol of male fertility and aggression, suggests these agents possess a specifically sexual and gendered power.⁵⁰ The brides and bulls are opposed — there is no cross-caesura alliteration to connect them — but also perfectly balanced across their metrically and syntactically identical half-lines. Intercourse is transmuted into violence, transitively causing incursive damage to the vulnerable, 'open' herb.

The polyptoton of *wiðstode/wiðstunedest/wiðstonde* connects the fact that plantain 'withstood' its enemies with its ability to 'withstand' poison in the future. Like affects like: the herb must be assaulted in order to become assaultive, aligning the plant conceptually with the forces that attack it. Plantain draws on the power of the carts, queens, brides, and bulls who commit violence against it into order to fight poison, just as the charmer then draws on the violent, 'crashing' power of the herb. Indeed, it is worth noting that a cross is written in the margin next to the phrase *Ond þu, Wegbrade*. The cross itself is a multivalent sign in the manuscript text of this charm. Every time the word *wyrm* is used, and in the single instance of

⁴⁹ For *breodian*, see *DOE* s.v. "Breodian"; Glosecki, "Vipers", 101; Dobbie, 209; Abernethy, 24; Storms, 188; Jolly, *Religion*, 125; Grendon, 228. For *breodwian*, see Pettit, II, 129; Banham, "Herbs", 189.

⁵⁰ Bulls appear infrequently in Old English literature. The term *fearr* is used in biblical glosses and translations, saints' lives, and homilies as an object of sacrifice or symbol of idolatry (*DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Fearr"). The sheer fact that mentions of bulls specifically are rare, while references to 'oxen' in general are common, suggests the word is used here to highlight the bulls' maleness.

the phrase *minra wihta* [evil creatures], a cross has been added to the margin or within the text of the charm, apparently to ward off these disease agents as they are named — suggesting the charm’s supernatural antagonists were understood as demonic.⁵¹ A cross in a notably different style appears next to Christ’s name in line 58. The cross next to *wegbrade*, similar in style to the crosses warding off *wyrmas*, may signal the start of a new section, but the beginnings of most sections in the charm are unmarked. I suggest that the cross acts as a kind of prophylactic against the very herb the charmer calls on, guarding the practitioner against the forces he harnesses.

Punning on *stod/stun/stond* and repetition of the *st-* phoneme, introduced in the *wegbrade* section, becomes the defining motif of the next invocation:

$\acute{\times}$ x x x / x x / x x /
 Stune hætte þeos wirt, hēo on stāne gewēox; ?|B

/ x x / x $\acute{\times}$ x / x
 stond hēo wið ātre, stunað hēo wærce. A|A

/ x x / x x $\acute{\times}$ x / x
 Stīde hēo hātte, wiðstunað hēo ātre, A|A

$\acute{\times}$ x / x / x x / x
 wreceð hēo wraðan, weorpeð ūt ātor.⁵² A|A (ll. 14-17)

The dramatic E-type half-line *Stune hætte þeos wirt* is not attested in *Beowulf*. It is not, however, irregular: it obeys Kuhn’s Law and is closest to type 2E1b, which appears in *Beowulf* in another ‘naming’ verse (l. 343b, *Beowulf is min nama*). Very similar, and similarly unattested, E-type naming verses with expanded drops appear in *Soul and Body I* (l. 116a, *Gifer hatte se wurm*) and Charms 5 and 10 (l. 1, *Bæðleem hatte seo buruh*). These verses are evidently variations of an Old English naming formula, an E-type verse with a flexibly-sized drop to accommodate names of different lengths. Unattested verses in the charms, again, need

⁵¹ Pettit, II, 132.

⁵² This line could also be scanned as a type 2A3a (/ \ / x) with syncope of the verb inflection.

not imply corruption or deficiency: this metrical pattern may not be attested in *Beowulf*, but it is demonstrably traditional in the extant poetic corpus.

This section's paronomasia on *stune/stane/stond/stunað/stiðe*, with alliterative emphasis on several verbs, is a striking aural cluster that enforces the relationship between the plant, its unforgiving habitat, its past suffering, and its current capability for aggressive action.⁵³ As with *wegbrade*, the herb has suffered and so is now empowered as a supernatural assailant. Alliteration on *w*, first ornamental, then structural, is interlaced with the *st*-alliteration, creating cross alliteration in line 14 that highlights the connection between the herb's aggressive capacity — *stune* presumably means 'crashing' or 'striking' — and its past suffering in a treacherous environment (*stane geweoð*).⁵⁴ *Stiðe* is almost certainly the same herb as *stune*, because the pronoun *heo* (l. 16) can only take *wyrt* (l. 14) as its referent. This second epithet means 'stiff, sturdy, severe, resolute', and it, too, suggests a linked capacity for endurance and violence.⁵⁵ The repetition of *attor* three times in four lines, and the near-rhyme of *hatte/attre*, serves as a reminder of the constancy and severity of the external threat.

The refrain follows, preceded by a brief description of another of *stune*'s past battles. This line almost certainly belongs to the preceding *stune* rather than the subsequent *attorlaðe* because it comes before the refrain, continues the *w* alliteration of the previous line to create a plurilinear unit, and does not offer a new name for the herb in question, whereas every other plant in the charm (aside from the apple, a notable exception) is named at the beginning of its *historiola*:⁵⁶

x x x / x x / x /
 Þis is sēo wyrt sēo wiþ wýrm gefeaht; e|B

⁵³ Nelson, *Structures*, 62; Nelson and Dennis, 7; Pettit, II, 130-32; Frank, 209.

⁵⁴ *BT s.v.* "Stunian"; Banham, "Herbs", 189; Pettit, II, 130.

⁵⁵ *BT s.v.* "Stiðe"; Pettit, II, 130.

⁵⁶ Cf. Nelson and Dennis, 7.

x x x / x x x x / \ x
 þeos mæg wið āttre, hēo mæg wið onflyge, a|d

x x x x / x x x / / x
 hēo mæg wið ðām lāðan ðe geond lond fēreþ. a|C (ll. 18-20)

The herb is turned against the macro- and microcosmic *wyrm*, which is also warded off by the cross that immediately precedes the long line. The charm alludes to what Dendle describes as an ‘elemental battle between root and worm’ — not between the forces of good and evil, but between two ambivalent, equally-matched foes.⁵⁷

The charm then commands action from the herb *attorlaðe*. The name ‘poison-loather’ seems to imply that the plant is a natural ally to the practitioner, aligned with humanity against poison. The compound, however, also invokes the names of the charm’s two major antagonists — *attor* and *þam laþan*.⁵⁸ In a charm concerned with echoing and repetition, such a connection cannot be overlooked:

x x x / \ x x / x x / x
 Flēoh þū nū Āttorlāðe⁵⁹ sēo læsse ðā māran, d|A

x / x x / x x x / x / /
 sēo māre þā læssan, oððæt him bēigra bōt sȳ. A|? (ll. 21-2)

The ‘flying’ disease must be ‘put to flight’ by the plant, in yet another sympathetic gesture. There is an inherent dangerousness, but also rich paronomasia, in the fact that *attorlaðe* causes already-airborne poisons to ‘fly’. It sends them back into the air from whence they came, but implicitly also sets them ‘flying’ elsewhere to seek new victims.

Lines 21-2 both lack regular cross-caesura alliteration. The second compound element *laðe* in line 21a alliterates with *læsse* in line 21b; such echoing could be considered a substitute for regular cross-caesura alliteration, though syllables bearing secondary stress are

⁵⁷ Dendle, “Plants”, 59.

⁵⁸ Weston, “Language”, 182.

⁵⁹ The epenthetic vowel of *attor* is syncopated.

not usually candidates for structural alliteration. Line 22b is an unattested hypermetric. The clause's semantic and grammatical completeness, however, as well as the presence of several compensatory ornamental features, suggests that these irregularities are not necessarily the result of error, corruption, or loss. The lack of cross-caesura alliteration in these lines frames and highlights the exact, inverted pairing of 21b-22a. This rhetorical structure operates disruptively across two long lines rather than within one, introducing the principle of antithesis (unlike negates unlike). This conceptual counterpoint to the principle of sympathy that dominates the rest of the charm is, fittingly, presented in a phrase that is syntactically set apart from the rest of the clause and interrupts regular metre. The section is stylistically unusual, but its structure emphasizes the plant's particular power.⁶⁰ Line 22b draws attention to the curing of the patient (*bot*), the importance of battling both (*beigra*) greater and lesser poisons, and the displaced subjunctive verb, which, in conjunction with the adverb *oððæt* [until], suggests the ongoing nature of the remedy. *Attorlaðe*'s cooperation is incomplete, and the herb's service must be continually commanded. The text's metrical irregularities highlight and clarify its central concerns and the magical dynamics at play.

At the midpoint of the herb list — the transition between the fourth and fifth plants — the second twenty-two-line section of the text begins with a close echo of the charm's opening lines:

x $\overset{\curvearrowright}{\times}$ x / x x x x / \ x
 Gemyne þū, Mægðe, hwæt þū āmeldodest, **A|d**

x x x / \ x x $\overset{\curvearrowright}{\times}$ \ x
 hwæt ðū geændadest æt Alorforda, **d|d**

x x x x x / x / x x / x
 þæt næfre for gefloge feorh ne gesealde **a|A**

⁶⁰ Garner, "Rhetoric", 248.

x x x x / x x \acute{x} x \acute{x} x
 syþðan him mon Mægðan tō mete gegyrede. a|A (ll. 23-6)

The name *Alorford* is stylistically central: an appropriately alliterating verb is here substituted for line 2's *renadest*, and the *f* of the second compound element becomes the structural alliteration of the subsequent line. *Alorford* [alder-ford] is almost certainly a place name, given the existence of places called *Alorford* in early medieval England and the use of alder trees to designate charter boundaries.⁶¹ The alder tree has no known, specific connotations in Old English literature, and the name itself is prosaic — once again collapsing the boundaries between tangible and supernatural space in the early English landscape. Alliteration on *gefloge* and *feorh* reinforces the deadliness of the flying venom, while preparing *mægðe* as food, either for the patient or for the poison, sends the herb into the patient's flesh to destroy the resulting disease. Yet *mægðe*, like mugwort, must be reminded of its own actions, described again with the multivalent verb *ameldian*. The herb may serve a benevolent purpose, but there is no suggestion that it possesses an inherently benevolent nature.

The *historiola* attached to the subsequent herb draws upon the principle of sympathy, illustrating the potential malevolence of these nine plants in clear terms:

x x x / x / x / x
 þis is sēo wyrð ðe wergulu hātte;⁶² e|hypermetric A

x x / x / x x / / [x]
 ðās onsænde seolh ofer sæs hrygc[e], B|C⁶³

/ x / x / x x / x
 ondan āttres oþres tō bōte. A|A (ll. 27-9)

The introduction to the herb is highlighted by a rare light E type in the on-verse, with

⁶¹ *DOE s.v.* “Alor-”; Roper, “Names”, 73.

⁶² The second syllable of *wergulu* is syncopated.

⁶³ The pattern *xx//* is unattested in *Beowulf*. If Fulk's Contraction is implemented (*History*, 114-15), the line could scan as a B type. Alternatively, a grammatically-correct emendation to *hrygce* makes the line a C type. Neither may be required, however, as *xx//* verses appear in the *Metres of Boethius* (Thornbury, *Poet*, 224), and Fulk (*History*, 251-2) suggests the pattern is a feature of late verse.

alliterative emphasis in the off-verse on its evocative name. *Wergulu* is a form of *weargol* [evil, malignant]; it shares a root with *wearg* [n., villain, criminal, monster; adj., evil, vile, accursed].⁶⁴ *BT* offers numerous examples of the word used to describe evil spirits, devils, and the halls of hell, and in *Beowulf* the term is applied to Grendel.⁶⁵ This plant is monstrous, aligned with forces opposed to humanity. Moreover, in the legendary past it was made to operate *ondan attres opres to bote* [as a cure for the harm of another poison]. The text is clear: *wergulu* is itself a poison, just like the ‘on-fliers’ the charm seeks to combat. The plant has been made to work against its kin in the past, and the charmer now calls upon it to work against its kin again. The line puts alliterative emphasis on *attres* [poison] and *opres* [other, another], an unusual use of an indefinite pronoun to bear the alliteration of the line.⁶⁶ The charm thereby focuses on the fact that *wergulu* is *another* poison, drawing attention to its malignant nature and the turning of one monstrous force against another. The phrase *ondan attres opres to bote* is the essence of the principle of sympathy, and of the principle of ‘harnessing the monster’ to which the metrical charms adhere with such consistency.

The reference to a seal who sends the plant over the surface of the sea is obscure, and the line may refer to a narrative that does not survive, though its importance is highlighted by the poetic formula *ofer sæs hrygc*.⁶⁷ The salient feature of the story may be that the herb has traveled from across the sea, suggesting its foreignness and otherness, and the seal is simply an alliterating marine animal who could make such a gesture. The ocean is a polyvalent symbol in the Old English corpus, but most often represents the uncontrollable, untamable,

⁶⁴ *BT* s.v. “Wergulu”, “Weargol”, “Wearg”, “Weargolness”.

⁶⁵ *BT* s.v. “Weargol”; *Beowulf* l.133.

⁶⁶ See *Beowulf* l. 789, where alliteration on demonstrative pronouns emphasizes thematic content.

⁶⁷ Pettit (II, 135) and Sandmann (217) argue this line refers to the narrative in Snorri’s *Prose Edda* in which Loki and Heimdallr fight in seal form, but there is no suggestion of a battle between seals in the charm, nor mention of a plant in the ON narrative. Abernethy (65) and Vaughan-Sterling (196-7) note the formulaic half-line.

and elemental.⁶⁸ The sea is a locus for human suffering, exile, and isolation in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, the dwelling-place of numerous monsters in *Beowulf*, the gulf between heaven and hell, or a feature of hell itself, in several homilies, and the limits of the known world in Bede's writings and on various pre-Conquest English maps.⁶⁹ *Wergulu's* origin across the ocean might, then, emphasize both its dangerousness and the suffering it endured on its journey, which — like *wegbrade* and *stune* — may have endowed it with corresponding power. In addition, an Old Norse healing charm found on a thirteenth-century runestick from Ribe states that nine disease agents (lit. *naudir*, 'needs, torments') live on a stone in the middle of the sea and will suffer greatly until the patient is well again.⁷⁰ Given the relevant textual and thematic parallels between the Old English and Old Norse charm corpora, it is theoretically possible the early medieval English also believed the sea could be a dwelling-place for malevolent forces, explaining the need to send a cure 'across the water'. Later Norse texts cannot, however, be relied upon to parse the specifics of Old English narrative.

Alternatively, the seal itself may be the salient actor, though there are only a few mentions of seals in the Old English corpus: the name of the animal appears in kennings for the sea, and Cuthbert blesses a group of pregnant seals in Bede's metrical *vita*.⁷¹ Such a miracle, however, serves in the *vita* to demonstrate the saint's ability to return to a benevolent

⁶⁸ Neville, *Representations*, 170-75.

⁶⁹ See W. Rudolf, "The Spiritual Islescape of the Anglo-Saxons", in *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, ed. S. Sobocki (Cambridge, 2011), 31-57. On the limits of the world, see T. O'Loughlin, "Living in the Ocean", in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, ed. C. Bourke (Dublin, 1997), 11-23. On Bede, see F. L. Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford, 2006), 128. On the sea as symbol of spiritual turmoil, see J. Mullins, "Herimum in Mari: Anglo-Saxon Attitudes Towards *Peregrinatio* and the Ideal of the Desert in the Sea", in *The Maritime World of the Anglo-Saxons*, ed. S. S. Klein et al. (Tempe, 2014), 59-73.

⁷⁰ Macleod and Mees, 124; McKinnell et al., 142.

⁷¹ Text in *Bedas metrische Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, ed. W. Jaeger (Leipzig, 1935), 92. Two *animalia maritima* [sea animals] venerate Cuthbert in Bede's prose *vita*; see B. Colgrave, ed. and trans., *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge, 1940), 80-81.

prelapsarian relationship with the natural world, and does not suggest that seals are inherently benevolent animals.⁷² Indeed, seals are associated in Old Norse prose narratives with revenants, magic, and illicit sexuality, though it is impossible to say whether the animal had similar connotations in early medieval England.⁷³

This enigmatic narrative is followed by a reminder to the audience of the nine ambiguous allies and nine enemies with which the charm engages:

x ūx / x x ūx / x
 Ðās VIII ongan wið nygon ātrum. (l. 30)

This striking declaration consists of two C types (both 2C1a) and features cross alliteration. *Ongan* is probably the plural of the noun *anga*, meaning ‘sting, dart, arrow’, referring metaphorically to the shoots or sprouts of the nine herbs, which assault their nine counterparts.⁷⁴ Some scholars have chosen to emend *ongan* out of a belief that the line is missing a verb.⁷⁵ As Pettit notes, however, ‘no verb is necessary in a bald statement of opposition’.⁷⁶ Indeed, the two half-lines are perfectly balanced and the meaning is clear without a verb: nine against nine. Several scholars have also argued that this line is misplaced in the charm, and should appear later in the text, after all nine herbs have been named.⁷⁷ Pettit suggests that the statement looks both forward and backward, anticipating communal action, but still concludes that the line is misplaced.⁷⁸ I argue that not only is this line both

⁷² B. Brooks, *Restoring Creation: The Natural World in the Anglo-Saxon Saints’ Lives of Cuthbert and Guthlac* (Cambridge, 2019), 27-31, 82-4.

⁷³ E.g. *Selkollu þátr* in *Guðmundar saga biskups*, in *Biskupa sögur*, 2 vols, ed. Jón Sigurðarson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Copenhagen, 1859-78); *Eyrbyggja saga* chs. 20, 147; *Laxdæla saga* ch. 41, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík, 1934). See also K. Murray-Bergquist, “To Talk of Many Things: Whales, Walrus, and Seals in Medieval Icelandic Literature” (unpublished MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2017).

⁷⁴ *DOE* s.v. “Anga”, with attested spelling “Onga”; *BT* s.v. “Onga”. Supported by Bradley, 145; Pettit, II, 137; Banham, “Herbs”, 190.

⁷⁵ Storms (188-9) and Dobbie (210) emend to *magon*.

⁷⁶ Pettit, II, 137.

⁷⁷ E.g. Bradley, 145; Storms, 190.

⁷⁸ Pettit, II, 112.

retrospective and anticipatory, it is also in fact crucially placed in the charm. The audience is reminded that the nine herbs are ‘darts’ or ‘shoots’, and that they fight nine poisons, immediately before the charm presents a narrative that is almost certainly about how those nine poisons came to be, and potentially how the nine ‘shoots’ were first used. This section begins, unusually, with the *historiola* rather than the naming of the plant:

/ x / x x / x /
Wyr̥m cōm snīcan, tōslāt hē nān, **A|B**

x x / / x ∘x / \ x
ðā genam Wōden VIII wuldortānas,⁷⁹ **C|D**

x x x / x x x ∘x x /
slōh ðā þā næddran þæt hēo on VIII tōflēah. **a|B** (ll. 31-3)

The snake — both a *næddre* [viper, adder] and a *wyr̥m*, symbol of antihuman evil — struck by the figure ‘Woden’, flies apart into nine pieces, in a section marked by repeated *s* and *n* sounds. The fact that the snake *tofleah* [flies apart] into nine when struck with nine *wuldortanas* [glory-twigs, sprouts, or shoots] is telling. The charm is concerned with battling nine flying poisons, which are described in line 45 as *wuldorgeflogenum* [glory-fleeing ones]. The text thus strongly suggests that these nine flying pieces of serpent are the source of the nine poisons, and that Woden creates and spreads diseases by splitting the snake.⁸⁰ The serpent itself seems not to have harmed mankind prior to Woden’s violent intervention: while some editions emend to *man*, the manuscript text clearly reads *toslat he nan* [it tore apart no one].⁸¹ The charm presents an origin story for the precise categories of human suffering it combats.

The *wuldortanas* used to strike the snake have been interpreted in a variety of ways.

⁷⁹ The epenthetic vowel is syncopated.

⁸⁰ Skemp, 301; Grattan and Singer, 53; Barley, 68; Pettit, II, 140-41; Pollington, 463; Olsen, “Sources”, 25. Chardonnens (696) argues that striking a snake with nine twigs should create ten pieces of snake, but also suggests the text may be more interested in numerical parallelism than exactitude.

⁸¹ Those editors who do not emend include Pettit, I, 62; Storms, 189; Grattan and Singer, 154. For emendation to *man*, see Dobbie, 210; Pollington, 217; Grendon, 228.

The word *tan* refers to lot-casting sticks in the *Old English Bede* and some religious texts, but there is no suggestion here that Woden is practicing divination.⁸² Rune-sticks were used for magical practice in medieval Scandinavia, as were (potentially) staves, rods or branches called *gambanteinar*, but there is no evidence of analogous English practices.⁸³ Sticks inscribed with the names of the evangelists or the Pater Noster are called for in Old English remedies, but it is unlikely that a figure called ‘Woden’ would use Christian inscriptions to create forms of human suffering. Rather, the nine glory-twigs, glory-sprouts, or glory-shoots are most likely the nine herbs themselves, given the charm’s insistent repetition that nine herbs stand against nine poisons — *wyrta* against *wuldorgeflogenum* — and the fact that the term *tan* very often denotes plants and plant imagery (sprouts, shoots) in the extant Old English corpus.⁸⁴ Woden uses the nine plants to strike the serpent and create nine diseases, which are now best combatted by the same herbs that created them. The implication of the herbs themselves in the creation of disease is consistent with the ambiguous presentation of the plants in the rest of the charm and the text’s adherence to the principle of sympathy. C and D types, as well as cross alliteration, in line 32 draw attention to Woden’s ‘taking up’ of the herbs and their essential role in the action. The plants’ power can be harnessed to create disease as well as battle it, and they remain in some way magically bound to the malevolent agents they released into the world. The declaration *Das VIII ongan wið nygon attrum* is thus well-placed in the charm: it reminds the audience that nine ‘shoots’ (*ongan*) can stand against nine poisons because these ‘shoots’ (*tan*s) created them.

⁸² *BT s.v.* “Tan”; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Tan-”. Cf. Grattan and Singer, 53. Tacitus mentions the use of sticks to cast lots in his *Germania* (ed. and trans. J. Rives [Oxford, 1999], 10).

⁸³ *Contra Storms*, 195; Olsen, “Sources”, 25; Sandmann, 219; Meaney, “Woden”, 110. There is also no evidence that the term *tan* in compounds refers to a sword (cf. Chardonnens, 697). On the archaeological reality of *gambanteinar*, see N. S. Price, *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala, 2002). See also *Skirnismál* st. 32; *Hárbarðsljóð* st. 20. Glosecki (“Vipers”, 111; *Shamanism*, 121-3) argues that the twigs are the ‘spears’ the charmer hurls at the mighty women of Charm 4, but the twigs in Charm 2 are not used as projectiles. For a refutation of Glosecki’s argument, see Pettit, II, 144-5.

⁸⁴ *BT s.v.* “Tan”; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Tan-”; Pettit, 144-5; North, *Gods*, 87.

Numerous scholars argue that ‘Woden’ here is a pagan god and hero, fighting the serpent on behalf of mankind.⁸⁵ Yet the charm makes clear that the snake did not attack anyone before Woden took up the glory-twigs, and his actions seem to result directly in the creation of diseases that attack human flesh. It is possible that the creation of disease is the accidental result of a necessary battle with the serpent, symbol of death, but if this is the case, Woden’s ‘heroism’ is still neither straightforward nor free of negative consequences.⁸⁶ Nor is the Woden of Charm 2, arguably, a pre-Christian god. There is no extant narrative in which Óðinn/Woden/Wodan battles a serpent.⁸⁷ Wodan is named as a healer in Merseburg Charm 2, and Óðinn is implied to be one in some Scandinavian runic inscriptions, but these charms do not provide close analogues to the action of Charm 2.⁸⁸ Little to no evidence remains of the features or worship of the English ‘Woden’, and certainly no such belief would have persisted beyond superstition after the late eighth century, much less four hundred years after the conversion with the copying of Charm 2.⁸⁹ Woden was euhemerised as a pagan ancestor as early as Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*, and he appears in poetry only as a deceitful idolator — either human or demonic, but certainly not divine — and in place names associated with hills and barrows, which are, as mentioned in Chapter 2, loci of supernatural danger.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Storms, 195; Glosecki, “Vipers”, 96, and *Shamanism*, 121-3; North, *Gods*, 87-8; Stürzl, 77; K. T. Kia-Choong, “Practical Magic and the Literary Archaeology of the Pagan Past in Two Anglo-Saxon Charms”, *IG* 29 (2009), 69-84. Griffiths (22) and Jolly (*Religion*, 128) suggest Woden is an ancestor or magician, rather than a god, though they still label him a benevolent hero.

⁸⁶ Grattan and Singer (53), Barley (68), Pollington (462), and Pettit (II, 142) suggest that disease arises from the snake fragments, but that Woden should still be read as slaying a deadly serpent. It is worth noting that the Middleton and Rothbury crosses depict naked men battling dragons, serpents, or *wyrmas*, but as Thompson (155-5) notes, these depictions seem to represent the fight against sin, death, and the devil — see for example *Christ and Satan* l. 131, where men struggle with *wyrmas* in hell.

⁸⁷ *Contra* North, *Gods*, 87-8; Singer, 15.

⁸⁸ Merseburg Charm 2 ll. 1, 5. See, for example, an eighth-century inscription from Ribe (MacLeod and Mees, 25-7; McKinnell *et al.*, 64-6).

⁸⁹ Meaney, “Woden”, 109; Crawford, “Evidences”, 99-100; Banham, “Herbs”, 192. For this reason, there is also no need to assume that the narrative was created to reject Woden’s divinity (cf. Olsen, “Sources”, 27). Compare those scholars who consider the charm to have a pagan core, including Storms, 195; Glosecki, “Vipers”, 96 and *Shamanism*, 121-3; Grattan and Singer 54-5; Pettit, II, 100; Niles, “Survivals”, 137.

⁹⁰ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Woden”, “Wodnes”. See also Meaney, “Woden”, 106; Olsen, “Sources”, 24; *Maxims I* l. 132.

Indeed, Charm 4 depicts *ese* [gods] as disease-shooting antagonists, similar to *ylfe* and demons. Like the other medical metrical charms, Charm 2 is a text suited to the late Old English period — perhaps drawing on a superstitious tradition in which Woden is a devil or broadly malevolent magical practitioner, and certainly acknowledging the unmatched power of Christ and simultaneously turning to the areligious power of amoral natural forces.

There is, in fact, an analogue to this *wyrm*-fighting narrative in the hyper-scholarly Christian poem *Solomon and Saturn II*.⁹¹ Saturn recounts the story of Wulf, a ‘friend of Nimrod’ and thus potentially a participant in the gigantomachia associated with the building of the Tower of Babel.⁹² Wulf enters an Avernian ‘poisonous place’ in the field of Shinar (location of the Tower of Babel), kills twenty-five dragons, and subsequently perishes.⁹³ The text states: *Danon atercynn ærest gewurdon, / wide onwæcned, ða ðe nu weallende / ðurh attres oroð ingang rymað* (ll. 42-4) [From there poison-kind first arose, widely spread, those which now, surging through poisonous breath, make spacious the entrance]. Wulf’s killing of *wyrmas*, whether heroic or otherwise — the text does not make clear whether his dragon-slaying is necessary to protect a human population, or if he simply seeks out the dangerous field — leads to the distribution of poisons throughout the world. These poisons now ‘make spacious the entrance’. The phrase is opaque unless we consider the emphasis in Old English medical texts on the breaking-open of the body: these poisons seek to enter into places in which they are not allowed, and potentially to penetrate human flesh specifically. The Wulf episode is tied to a Biblical narrative frequently interpreted by early medieval English writers

⁹¹ Barley, 68-9; Grendon, 228; Stürzl, 86.

⁹² Anlezark, *Dialogues*, 119-20; R. J. Menner, “Nimrod and the Wolf in the Old English Solomon and Saturn”, *JEGP* 37 (1938), 332-54; T. Major, *Undoing Babel: The Tower of Babel in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Toronto, 2018), 14-19.

⁹³ On this motif, see D. Anlezark, “Poisoned Places: The Avernian Tradition in Old English Poetry”, *ASE* 36 (2007), 103-216. On this narrative’s similarities to *Beowulf*, see Orchard, *Prodigies*, 120; Anlezark, *Dialogues*, 121.

as one of pride, disobedience, and collapse. Indeed, the fall of Babel is generally considered to be the origin of widespread pagan wickedness in pre-Conquest English texts, and the narrative is strongly associated in *Solomon and Saturn II* with an imaginary Eastern paganism.⁹⁴ The closest Old English analogue to Woden's striking of the serpent, then, suggests that Charm 2's narrative similarly deals with sin, a pagan warrior's prideful action, and its negative consequences for humanity. Two crosses frame this *historiola* (immediately before *wyrm* and immediately after *būgan*), suggesting that the episode as a whole refers to evil that must be warded off from the practitioner and patient.

One of the nine plants must engage further with the serpent, either assisting Woden or compensating for his act in some way:

x x / \ x / x x / x
 þær geændade Æppel 7 āttor d|A

 x x x x x / x x / / x
 þæt hēo nāfre ne wolde on hūs būgan. a|C (ll. 34-5)

The only potential referent for the female pronoun *heo* is the *næddre* mentioned two lines above.⁹⁵ The charm also states that 'apple *and* poison' brought about the result that the snake would never enter a dwelling, with the singular past tense verb suggesting that this double subject refers to a single entity.⁹⁶ The 'apple' is expanded in the prose as *wudusuræppel*, wild or crab apple. The raw crabapple is a highly bitter fruit, poison-like in its inedibility and astringency. *Æppel 7 attor* may thus be best translated as 'Apple and its poison' or, with some license, 'Apple and its bitterness', as the word *attor* is also used to gloss *bilis* [bile, gall].⁹⁷ As with *wergulu*, a 'poisonous' plant is turned against an archetypal producer of venom. One source of poison averts another; like affects like. Once again, the plants of Charm 2 are

⁹⁴ Anlezark, *Dialogues*, 119-20; Major, 8, 18-19, 26, 149-57.

⁹⁵ Dobbie, 210.

⁹⁶ Pettit, II, 146; Bradley, 145; Banham, "Herbs", 190. Cf. Skemp, 301; Grendon, 195; Abernethy, 24.

⁹⁷ Pettit, II, 146; Cockayne, III, 35; *DOE s.v.* "Attor".

aligned with the forces they fight.

Apple and its poison prevent the snake either from entering human dwellings and causing harm, or from returning to its own nest.⁹⁸ If the apple prevents the snake from entering human buildings, then the snake or its nine pieces are exiled to the wild, undomesticated spaces to which they belong, as in Charms 4 and 12. If the apple prevents the snake from returning to its own nest, such banishment might kill it and thus its poison. An inability to return to its nest, however, may also force the snake or pieces of snake to move throughout the world, spreading disease as they go. The apple may thus either assist Woden in the creation of disease, or use its own ‘poison’ to attenuate the effects of his striking of the snake. Regardless, the plant is at best a dangerous and uncertain ally. The outcome of the apple’s actions is highlighted by a line lacking cross-caesura alliteration. *Heo* and *hus* potentially echo one another, but to stress *heo* would require that the following particles also bear stress, according to Kuhn’s First Law. Such scansion would be disallowed in Old English poetry even by the standards of the metrical charms. It is possible that *hus bugan* may originally have been *wic bugan*, as *wic* is a close synonym of *hus* and the phrase *wic bug[an]* appears three times in the Old English poetic corpus, while *hus bugan* appears only in Charm 2.⁹⁹ Given that the line makes grammatical sense and contains a C-type verse, however, it is possible that it is simply irregular, and its very irregularity may draw attention to the importance of the apple’s crucial, ambiguous action.

The apple appears in numerous mythologies — the apples of discord and of the Hesperides in Greek myth, Iðunn’s apples of youth in Snorri’s *Edda* — but by far its most relevant iteration occurs in Genesis, a narrative explicitly associated with the origin of disease

⁹⁸ DOE s.v. “Hus”.

⁹⁹ DOE Corpus, Boolean Search, “Wic ... Bug-”. Suggested by M. Griffith, pers. comm., 06/03/19.

in Old English interpretations. The extant Old English corpus offers multiple narratives for the creation and dissemination of evil or venomous agents. As noted above, the fall of Babel is considered an origin point for the proliferation of sin, poison, and death, while in *Beowulf*, the rise of *untýdras ealle* [all evil progeny], including disease-causing *ylfe*, is ascribed to the survival of Cain's descendants after the Flood.¹⁰⁰ The creation of disease specifically, however, is described as the result of Adam and Eve's consumption of forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. In *Genesis A*, God curses Adam to live in toil *oð þæt þe to heortan hearde gripeð / adl unliðe þe þu on æple ær / selfa forswulge. Forþon þu sweltan scealt* [until cruel disease, which earlier you yourself consumed in the apple, grips you severely at the heart. For that reason you must die].¹⁰¹ Disease — formerly unknown to mankind — was contained in the apple, entered Adam's body when eaten, and now dwells in his flesh. Bede states in his *In Genesim* that Adam's consumption of the apple leads to the death of all human flesh, and adds that poisonous plants were created as a result of the Fall and the newfound hostility between man and nature.¹⁰²

The narrative presented in Charm 2 involves an apple, the creation and proliferation of poison and disease, and the banishing of a serpent. The fact that the snake is prevented from entering a dwelling in line 35 suggests the enmity between mankind and the serpent described in Genesis 3:15 — a conflict which was indeed 'brought about' by an apple. This short *historiola*, then, may intentionally recall the creation of disease through original sin. The preceding narrative in which Woden strikes the snake, however, does not correspond neatly with the Genesis story. Though the identification of 'Woden' as a devil or accomplice of Satan is relatively uncomplicated, his 'striking' of the snake aids its purpose of bringing

¹⁰⁰ *Beowulf* ll. 111-12; Anlezark, *Dialogues*, 121.

¹⁰¹ *Genesis A* ll. 936-8; citations from A. N. Doane, ed., *Genesis A: A New Edition, Revised* (Tempe, 2013).

¹⁰² Bede, *In Genesim*, trans. C. B. Kendall (Liverpool, 2008), 128, 135.

death into the world, while God's 'striking' of the snake onto its belly and mankind's 'crushing' of its head are punishments, and the language used in the charm is not echoed in *Genesis A* or *In Genesim*. Woden's action corresponds far more closely with the Babel-related narrative put forward in *Solomon and Saturn II*. Charm 2 thus does not offer a recounting of Genesis, though the echo is notable. Rather, it puts forward a multilayered narrative that draws on the various Christian stories about the origin of poison and disease available to an early medieval English audience, and reiterates their central themes, including heathen arrogance, original sin, and the persistence of the devil. Charm 2 is interested in the etiology of illness in a way that the other metrical charms are not: the text attempts to combat disease by identifying those forces present at or related to the moment of its conception. The apple can banish poison because it helped to bring poison into the world; it can battle the serpent because it was once the serpent's tool.

If disease is created by the Fall, then the Passion serves as its remedy. Unlike the preceding seven plants, the final two herbs are presented as inherently benevolent due to the source of their potency:

/ x x \acute{x} x \acute{x} \ x /
 Fille 7 Finule, felamihtigu twā:¹⁰³ A|E

x / x x / / x / x
 þā wyrte gescēop wītig Drihten, B|A

/ x x \acute{x} x x x / \ x
 hālig on heofonum, þā hē hongode; A|d

/ x x / x x \acute{x} \acute{x} x
 sette 7 sænde on VII [seofon] worulde A|C

/ x x / \ x / x x / x
 earmum 7 ēadigum eallum tō bōte. A|A (ll. 36-40)

The herbs' particular holy power, made and directed by Christ, is announced with an E-type

¹⁰³ The fourth syllable is syncopated.

b-verse and the adjective *felamihtig*, a term used exclusively to describe God in Old English poetry.¹⁰⁴ The phrase *witig Drihten*, too, is a poetic formula that appears in several other verse texts.¹⁰⁵ Though the exact narrative described here is unknown, later attestations suggest the existence of traditions in which Christ reveals healing powers to the faithful while hanging on the cross (drawing on Mark 16:18), and in which healing plants spring up from Christ's blood.¹⁰⁶ Despite the fact that Christ apparently *hongode* [hung] in the heavens when he made this declaration, there is little evidence that this narrative refers to or is inspired by the story of Óðinn hanging for nine nights on Yggdrasill in order to achieve knowledge of runes — especially given the charm's negative portrayal of a figure called 'Woden' only two lines earlier.¹⁰⁷ Scholars who read the charm as pagan argue this section is a late interpolation.¹⁰⁸ However, no evidence aside from the Christianity of the passage itself exists to support this claim. *Fille* and *finule* are not unusual or late terms in the Old English plant lexicon, and Charm 2 evidently draws on Latin textual traditions (e.g. its use of the name *Una*).¹⁰⁹

By invoking Christ, the charm calls for the first time on a purely benevolent ally, who does not need to be coerced and cannot be commanded, and whose nature is to aid mankind. Yet even Christ's power to create healing plants derives from suffering: like the trampled *wegbrade*, or *stune* grown on stone, Christ is able to send healing to mankind *þa he hongode*, at the height of the Passion. As elsewhere in Charm 2, an encounter with darkness generates sympathetic power. Perhaps more interestingly, the charmer does not address or supplicate

¹⁰⁴ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Felamihtig".

¹⁰⁵ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Witig drihten", "Witig god".

¹⁰⁶ Braekman, 463; Pettit, II, 104-5.

¹⁰⁷ *Contra* Grattan and Singer, 54; North, *Gods*, 87; Chardonnens, 694; Bonser, *Background*, 125; Kia-Choong, 5; Jolly, *Religion*, 128; Banham, "Herbs", 192. There is no evidence to suggest that the story found in the ON *Hávamál* was known in England, and *Hávamál* may itself demonstrate Christian influence. See J. McKinnell, "Wisdom from the Dead: The *Ljóðatal* Section of *Hávamál*", *MÆ* 76 (2007), 85-115 [90] and "The Making of *Hávamál*", *VMS* 3 (2007), 75-116 [113]; K. von See, "*Disticha Catonis* und *Hávamál*", *BGdSL* 94 (1972), 1-18.

¹⁰⁸ Storms, 195; Meroney, "Herbs", 159; Giraud, 285; Bonser, *Background*, 334-5; Sandmann, 221-2.

¹⁰⁹ Pettit, II, 100, 149; Pollington, 82, 109.

Christ himself, and Christ does not directly intervene on behalf of humanity. Christ's action took place in the past; he is not present in the immediate action of the charm, and is not called upon to repeat his former deeds. Instead, the charmer speaks only to the plants, persuading or ordering them to intercede for a patient. The text deals not with God but with his intermediaries; as in Charm 4, he is named, but removed from the central act of healing.

The echoing patterns of *sette 7 sænde* and *earmum 7 eadigum*, and the reuse of the phrase *to bote* (previously found in line 29 and recalling the formula *þis þe to bote*), emphasize the description of Christ's distribution of the healing herbs. His sending of the plants *on VII worulde* is obscure. The geocentric Ptolemaic model of the universe, known in early medieval England, involves seven moving celestial orbs, but there is little evidence that these bodies were conceived of as 'worlds' rather than simply heavenly objects.¹¹⁰ Perhaps more relevant is the Seven Heavens Apocryphon, a narrative describing souls experiencing purgation by moving through seven different 'heavens', each with a distinct landscape. This apocryphon was known in early medieval England from Irish sources, and is referred to casually in several homilies and sermons, suggesting the idea was widespread.¹¹¹ Also known in early medieval England was a tradition of Genesis commentary derived from IV Ezra, which divides the earth into seven parts.¹¹² Though neither 'seven heavens' nor 'seven parts of the earth' corresponds exactly to Charm 2's 'seven worlds', the existence of these cosmological schemas suggests the phrase is a symbol of completeness. Indeed, the number seven is associated in several scholarly Old English religious texts with the perfect, sevenfold

¹¹⁰ Versions of the Ptolemaic model noting the seven celestial orbs can be found in Bede's *De natura rerum* (*On the Nature of Things and On Times*, trans. C. B. Kendall and F. Wallis [Liverpool, 2010]), Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* (ed. M. Lapidge and P. S. Baker [Oxford, 1995]), and Aldhelm's *Liber de septenario* (*Epistola ad Acircium, sive liber de septenario, et de metris, aenigmatibus, ac pedum regulis*, PL vol. 89).

¹¹¹ Wright, *Tradition*, 31, 76, 149-50, 218-19.

¹¹² Wright, *Tradition*, 186.

work of God in creating the world.¹¹³ Christ apparently made healing herbs available throughout the known universe, truly *earmum 7 eadigum eallum to bote* [for the miserable and the fortunate, as a remedy for all].

The refrain that follows the invocation of these final herbs, completing the second twenty-two line section of the charm, is a rearrangement of the previous refrain, containing both repeated and novel elements, variation, and a loosening of the order found above:¹¹⁴

/ x x / x ☺ x x / x
Stond hēo wið wærce, stunað hēo wið ättre, A|A

x x x / x x / x
sēo mæg wið III 7 wið XXX, e|a

x / x / x x / \ x
wið fēondes hond 7 wið f[æ̅r]b[r]egde B|d

x / \ x / x / x
wið malscrunge minra wihta. d|A (ll. 41-4)

The *st-* phoneme appears again, in an exact syntactic reversal of line 15 above, with a similar play on *stond* and *stun-*.¹¹⁵ Several scholars have suggested that this section is misplaced because the verbs *stond* and *stunað* are singular, while the joint subjects *fille 7 finule* should presumably take the plural.¹¹⁶ Yet the double subject *æppel 7 attor* takes a singular verb in line 34. These are the only herbs in the charm to be treated as a pair and, like *æppel 7 attor*, they may constitute two parts of a single subject. Alternatively, the singular verbs could refer to each herb in turn: *fille* stands against pain, while *finule* dashes against poison.¹¹⁷ Even if this section did belong to an earlier part of the charm, reinserting it after a section filled with Christian references is apposite. The phrase *feondes hond* appears in numerous religious

¹¹³ S. Rauch, “Patristic Number Symbolism in Anglo-Saxon England”, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University College Dublin, 2016), I, 173, 229, 296; II, 195, 227, 388. For the importance of the number seven in the Bible beyond Genesis, see for example Revelations 1:4, 1:20.

¹¹⁴ Weston, “Language”, 184.

¹¹⁵ Nelson, *Structures*, 64.

¹¹⁶ Storms, 188-9; Grattan and Singer, 151; Grendon, 228; Sandmann, 196; Pettit, II, 112-13.

¹¹⁷ Abernethy, 70.

poetic and prose texts, referring to the power of Satan and devils as well as literal enemies; the cross placed next to *minra wihta* [vile creatures] suggests these beings were understood to be demonic as well.¹¹⁸ An iteration of the refrain is also appropriate at this point in the poem. These lines bring the list of nine plants to a close, and some kind of concluding repetition seems necessary to finish the section. The refrain appears repeatedly in the first half of the charm, but largely does not appear in the second half, and its reintroduction at the end of the herb list joins the two halves together. It is thus likely that this section either does belong at this point in the charm, or was moved here intentionally.

The manuscript text of line 43 is clearly a case of scribal eye-skip: *wið feondes hond 7 wið þæs hond wið frea begde*. Though numerous emendations have been proposed for the final phrase, the most likely are *wið freabregde* [against ?lordly treachery, deceit, cunning] and *wið færbregde* [against sudden treachery, deceit, cunning].¹¹⁹ The first requires less emendation, but because *bregd* is a noun, *frea* cannot be an intensifying prefix (e.g. ‘mighty, great’), as it is usually translated.¹²⁰ The word would instead be a compound, best translated as ‘lord-treachery’, a concept perhaps unsuited to the medical context of Charm 2. Moreover, *frea* is rare as a first compound element, and those few *frea* compounds that do exist are mostly pleonastic (e.g. *freadryhten*). Numerous compounds, however, include *fær* as a first element — including the *færstice* of Charm 4 — and mounting a defense against the ‘sudden treachery or cunning’ of malevolent agents is reasonable in a medical charm.¹²¹ This emendation is therefore preferable. Regardless, however, the verse certainly describes the

¹¹⁸ *DOE s.v.* “Feond”; *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Feondes ... Hond/Hand”. Compare the focus on Grendel’s hands in *Beowulf* ll. 746-8.

¹¹⁹ For the first emendation, see Pettit, II, 151; Grattan and Singer, 153-4; Storms, 188-9; Banham, “Herbs”, 190. For the second emendation, see Grendon, 228; Dobbie, 211; Bradley, 145; *DOE s.v.* “Færbregd”.

¹²⁰ *DOE s.v.* “Frea-”. *Frea-* is an intensifying prefix only for adjectives, adverbs, and verbs.

¹²¹ *DOE s.v.* “Færbrægd”.

machinations of supernatural enemies, and is followed by another description, highlighted by a transverse pattern of *w* and *m* sounds, of supernatural assault. The Old English term *malscrung* glosses the Latin *fascinatus* [charmed, bewitched] as well as *festinatio*, presumably an error for *fascinatio*, and thus may well refer to the ‘evil eye’, an ailment caused by a supernaturally-empowered person or being looking at a victim with malicious intent.¹²² The premise of the ‘evil eye’ is that looking at someone is a kind of touch, a way of reaching into another’s body with the gaze. Any interaction with the nonhuman supernatural is dangerous to the flesh, and leaves it open to penetration.

The final section of the charm begins with a metrically-irregular reiteration that the nine herbs battle nine flying poisons:

x x x x \acute{x} / x x \acute{x} / x \ x x
 Nū magon þās VIII wyrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum,¹²³ C|?


x \acute{x} / x x x \acute{x} / \ x
 wið VIII ātrum 7 wið nygon onflognum... C|D (ll. 45-6)

Both lines feature cross-alliteration, owing to the fourfold repetition of the number *nygon*, and the b-verses make use of homeoteleuton (*geflogenum ... onflognum*). Both a-verses are C types, and line 45b is unattested in Sievers–Bliss. These lines do not seem to constitute a traditional formula, but they are an essential part of the cure, and the beginning of an incantatory section of hypermetric A types that performs the patient’s healing in real time. These two lines represent the transition from descriptive exhortation to enactment. The insistent repetition of *wuldorgeflogenum* [glory-fled ones] and *onflognum* [on-fliers], as well as the reiteration of the collocation *attre ... onflyg*, sums up the invocatory material that precedes it, suggests again that the flying pieces of serpent created by ‘glory-twigs’ are the

¹²² *BT s.v.* “Malscrung”; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Malscrung”. See also Meaney, “Causes”, 23; Dendle, *Possession*, 32; Pettit, II 153. The fact that mugwort is a cure for ‘the eyes of evil men’ (see n. 8) suggests the translation ‘evil eye’ is not anachronistic.

¹²³ The epenthetic vowel is syncopated.

nine flying diseases, and highlights the airborne nature of these illnesses. The cure then begins in earnest:

x x / x / x wið ðy rēadan āttre,	x x / x / x wið ðā runlan āttre,
x x / x / x wið ðy hwītan āttre,	x x / x / x wið ðy wēdenan āttre, ¹²⁴
x x / x / x wið ðy geolwan āttre	x x / x / x wið ðy grēnan āttre,
x x / x / x wið ðy wonnan āttre	x x / x / x wið ðy wēdenan āttre,
x x / x / x wið ðy brūnan āttre	x x  x / x wið ðy basewan āttre ... (ll. 47-51)

All of these lines feature cross alliteration and are type a1b(2A1a). As a result, this section of verse is incantatory and insistently rhythmic. The colour-based magic expressed here may have been traditional. Halpern and Foley document numerous Serbo-Croatian folk charms in which nine ‘winds’, each of a different colour, are named as the causes of nine apposite diseases (e.g. erysipelas is caused by the ‘red wind’, eczema by the ‘white wind’). The only cure for such illnesses is for the charmer to command a supernatural agent of the same colour to fetch the disease and carry it across the sea.¹²⁵ Sandmann notes a Swedish charm in which the charmer states *Jag blåser på dig* [I blow on you] — as in Charm 2, line 63 — for a variety of coloured poisons and *flygande etter* [flying poison], nine overall.¹²⁶ The similarities between Charm 2 and these analogues — the use of the number nine, the enumeration of coloured and airborne poisons, the harnessing of a dangerous supernatural agent linked to the disease — suggest the Old English text may draw on a wider European tradition of anti-venom magic. The colour magic seems to indicate something about the nature of the poisons

¹²⁴ Here, as in l. 50 below, the syllable *-de-* is syncopated.

¹²⁵ Halpern and Foley, 908, 912, 923.

¹²⁶ Sandmann, 229.

that is now lost to us, and to enact magical effects through the power of enumeration.¹²⁷

The charm continues in this exhaustive vein in the subsequent three lines:

$x \ / \ x \ \backslash \quad x \ \overset{\curvearrowright}{\times} \ x \ \backslash$
 wið wǫrmgeblæd, wið wætergeblæd,
 $x \ / \ x \ \backslash \quad x \ / \ x \ x \ \backslash$
 wið þorngeblæd, wið þystelgeblæd,
 $x \ / \ x \ \backslash \quad x \ / \ x \ \backslash$
 wið ȳsgeblæd, wið ättorgeblæd¹²⁸ ... (ll. 52-4)

The word *blæd* means ‘a puff of air, breath, or fire’, while the verb *geblædan* means ‘to puff up’.¹²⁹ These compounds, then, seem to refer to blisters or swellings, perhaps related to the ‘wounds’ mentioned in the prose.¹³⁰ Again, all three lines feature cross alliteration, and nearly all are type d4a. 53b is an unattested type because of the extra syllable in the dip (*þystel* being the most likely emendation for the meaningless MS *þys*¹³¹) but maintenance of the plurilinear anaphoric structure is evidently more important than adhering to perfect metrical regularity in individual half-lines. It is reasonable to assume that these blisters or swellings are related to the first element of their compound names, but given that Charm 2 deals with existential threats, it is unlikely that a *þorngeblæd* is caused by being pricked with a literal thorn, or that *wætergeblæd* results from being burned by boiling water.¹³² These blisters are more likely signs of infection, and almost certainly have symbolic weight. Framing this section are *wǫrmgeblæd* and *ättorgeblæd*, whose imagistic relevance is, by this point in the text, obvious. *Wætergeblæd* may well refer to an ailment like the watery blisters of *wæterælfadl*, liquid-

¹²⁷ Storms, 102; Pettit, II, 154. Pollington (30) suggests the colours are ‘humoral’, but there are no recorded instances of blue, green, or brown humors in classical humoral theory.

¹²⁸ The epenthetic vowel is syncopated.

¹²⁹ *DOE* s.v. “Blæd”, “Geblædan”.

¹³⁰ Cf. Grattan and Singer (154), who translate the term as ‘magic blast’.

¹³¹ Dobbie, 211; Pettit, I, 67. Cockayne (III, 37) suggests *þyrsgeblæd*, ‘ogre-blister’. The *þyrs* is a disease agent in several ON rune charms, but does not appear in any other OE charm texts.

¹³² Pettit, I, 67. Cf. Bonser, *Background*, 377.

filled sores caused by a malicious agent. The thorn and thistle are non-curative, non-useful plants battled by empowered herbs. The thistle is an agent of cursing in Charm 9 line 17, in which a thief is condemned to become *swa breðel ... swa bystel* [as brittle as a thistle], suggesting the plant itself connotes infertility, withering, and death. The thorn is a consistent agent of suffering and symbol of malevolence in religious texts, including the Old English psalms and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*.¹³³ Ice is linked to imagery of suffering and constraint in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and other poems.¹³⁴ These 'blisters' seem to be caused by, and to represent, an array of hostile natural forces.

This section ends by defending the patient from poison flying in from multiple directions:

x x x / x \acute{x} / x / x
 gif ænig āttor cume ēastan flēogan, **B|A**

x x x x / x \acute{x}
 oððe ænig norðan cume, **B**

x x x x / x x x / \ x
 oððe ænig westan ofer werðēode. **a|d**¹³⁵ (ll. 55-7)

Line 56a is unpaired and the cardinal direction 'south' is missing from this list, which is perhaps odd in an incantatory section that relies on exhaustiveness. Unpaired half-lines do appear in Old English poetry without necessarily signalling a lacuna, however, and it is possible that the south was left out of this list intentionally. South is portrayed as a positive direction in several Old English poems: *Beowulf* and *The Phoenix* state that there will be peace when the sun is in the south; the sun will be in the southeast when Christ returns at

¹³³ DOE Corpus, Simple Search, "Þorn".

¹³⁴ *The Wanderer* ll. 24, 57; *The Seafarer* l. 32; *Andreas* l. 1261; *Maxims I* l. 72; Riddle 31. See B. K. Martin, "Aspects of Winter in Latin and Old English Poetry", *JEGP* 68 (1969), 375-90.

¹³⁵ Bliss labels this scansion a type d2b, but in Sievers' scansion the verse is type C.

Judgment Day (*Christ III*); the wind that parts the Red Sea arrives from the south (*Exodus*).¹³⁶

The south is also linked to heavenly winds in the Psalms.¹³⁷ South thus seems to be a benevolent direction from which evil does not approach, so the patient may not require any south-facing protection. It is possible that a half-line is indeed missing, as the cardinal directions appear complete in both Charms 5 and 10 and several Swedish analogues to Charm 2.¹³⁸ However, given the possibility that 56a is an unpaired half-line, any emendations are necessarily speculative.

The charm's enigmatic conclusion focuses on the charmer's secret knowledge and exceptional ability:

/ x x x / x / x \ x
 Crīst stōd ofer alde ængancundes. A|A

 x / x / / \ x
 Ic āna wāt ēa rīnnende, B|D

 x x ☺x / x x / x
 7 þā nygon nādran behealdað; e|A

 x x x x / x / / x x / x
 mōtan ealle wēoda nū wyrstum āspringan, B|A

 / x / x x / / x
 sæs tōslūpan, eal sealt wæter,¹³⁹ A|C

 x x x x / x / x x / x
 ðonne ic þis āttor of ðē geblāwe. a|A (ll. 58-63)

Numerous interpretations have been proposed for the difficult line *Crist stod ofer alde*

ængancundes.¹⁴⁰ *Alde* may mean 'old or ancient ones', or it may plausibly be an error for

¹³⁶ DOE Corpus, Simple Search, "Suþ/ð". See *Beowulf* l. 607; *The Phoenix* l. 186; *Christ III* l. 899; *Exodus* l. 289; *The Husband's Message* l. 26.

¹³⁷ DOE Corpus, Simple Search, "Suþ/ð"; see Ps. 77:26, 125:4. There are very few instances in the OE corpus in which south is a dangerous direction, and they are literal rather than figurative: for example, a *superne gar* strikes Byrhtnoth in *Battle of Maldon* l. 134, but the spear is usually understood to be Frankish.

¹³⁸ Charms 5 and 10, prose; Sandmann, 226. For various emendations, see Storms, 192; Grattan and Singer, 157; Pettit, II, 157; Dobbie, 211.

¹³⁹ Resolution on *wæter* is suspended.

¹⁴⁰ See Storms, 191; Banham, "Herbs", 190; Pettit, II, 158; Pollington, 217; Dobbie, 211; Sandmann, 225; Cockayne, III, 39.

adle [disease], while *ængancundes* may be a genitival adverbial compound meaning ‘in a way that is unique’ or a weak adjective with a genitive, meaning ‘of any/every kind’.¹⁴¹

Scholars have not previously discussed this line, however, in relation to the well-known motif derived from Ps. 90:13 of ‘Christ treading on the beasts’, most often including a serpent or dragon.¹⁴² These beasts traditionally represent sin and the elemental forces of destruction, subjugated by the resurrected redeemer of man. The motif was resonant in early medieval England: it appears in multiple manuscript illuminations, and Christ’s feet rest on the heads of two animals on both the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses.¹⁴³ The image of Christ ‘standing over’ malevolent forces in Charm 2, then, may refer to this theme. If previous portions of the charm allude to the Fall and the Passion, this line invokes the Last Judgment, the ultimate defeat of evil and death — and therefore of illness. Whether Christ stood over ‘old ones’ or ‘disease’, he triumphs over the forces that infect the body in Charm 2 (including a serpent). Whether Christ stood over ‘all’ of these forces of evil, or stood over them in a ‘unique way’, this line conveys the absolute power of the Christian God and his absolute opposition to the forces that threaten humanity. The image may simultaneously invoke the common concept of Christ as true medic.¹⁴⁴ A cross appears in the margin next to Christ’s name, suggesting either a marking of his power or a warding-off of the evil forces over which he stands.

Yet again, Christ is invoked only in the past, and the text turns immediately to the

¹⁴¹ *DOE* s.v. “Ængancundes”.

¹⁴² Perhaps a reference to the binding of the serpent in Rev. 20.

¹⁴³ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 296 f. 40r; London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius C.vi f. 126v; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.I.23 f. 195v; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg.Lat. MS 12 f. 98r. On the crosses, which may depict the ‘treading’ motif or the related motif ‘Christ’s divinity recognised by beasts’, see M. Schapiro, “The Religious Meaning of the Ruthwell Cross”, *AB* 26 (1944), 232-45; K. E. Haney, “The Christ and the Beasts Panel on the Ruthwell Cross”, *ASE* 14 (1985), 215-31; M. Hilmo, *Medieval Images, Icons, and Illustrated English Literary Texts: From the Ruthwell Cross to the Ellesmere Chaucer* (Aldershot, 2004), 39-59; E. Ó Carragáin, “Christ Over the Beasts and the Agnus Dei: Two Multivalent Panels on the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses”, in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. P. E. Szarmach and V. D. Oggins (Kalamazoo, 1986), 377-403.

¹⁴⁴ On this motif, see Meaney, “Practice”, 223.

power of the charmer instead, with the declaration *Ic ana wat*. The phrase *ana wat* appears fourteen times in the extant Old English corpus. In no fewer than eleven of those instances, the subject of the phrase is God.¹⁴⁵ *Ic ana wat*, however, appears only in Charm 2. This phrase, then, is a variation on a formula, in which the use of the first person pronoun would be a noticeable substitute for *God*, *drihten*, or *meotud*. By making such a substitution, the charmer declares that he possesses unique, godlike knowledge, that he is a lone conduit for healing.¹⁴⁶ The charmer may draw his power from Christ, but God is not immediately involved in the curing of the patient. The speaker declares knowledge of an evidently magical source of running water — which appears in other Old English remedies as a purifying agent — beheld by nine snakes, presumably referring to the flying poisons or the pieces of the serpent, looking upon the source of their destruction and the demonstration of the charmer’s power.¹⁴⁷

Having established his secret knowledge, the charmer exercises his power by commanding: *motan ealle weoda nu wirtum aspringan*. Numerous interpretations have been proposed for this line.¹⁴⁸ The two most grammatically and semantically straightforward are ‘all weeds must now perish from among plants’ and ‘all woods must now spring up with herbs.’¹⁴⁹ The former is perhaps to be preferred: *wirt*, as noted above, often simply means ‘plant’ rather than specifically ‘herb’ in the Old English medical corpus, and woods are already filled with plants. A forest could conceivably be commanded to spring up with ‘useful plants’, but the text has no such modifier. ‘To die, pass away, perish’, ‘to dwindle’, and ‘to

¹⁴⁵ *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Ana wat”.

¹⁴⁶ Weston, “Language”, 185; Jolly, *Religion*, 127.

¹⁴⁷ Pettit, II, 159. For running water in medical remedies, see Charm 6; Harley 585 ff. 137r-138r, 186r, 189r; *Leechbook I* f. 28v, 39v; *Leechbook III* ff. 123r-123v.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. Storms, 191; Banham, “Herbs”, 190; Pettit, II, 159-60; Grendon, 228; Grattan and Singer, 157.

¹⁴⁹ See *DOE s.v.* “Aspringan”.

fall away’ are all well-attested meanings of *aspringan*.¹⁵⁰ Regardless of its exact meaning, however, this line describes a gesture of purification and cleansing. Wild spaces become domesticated; useless plants are replaced with useful ones. The charmer seeks to redefine boundaries between order and chaos, wilderness and cultivation. Indeed, the charmer is now able, at the climax of the charm, to control unpredictable natural spaces and beings: weeds (or forests) and the ocean itself. The charmer commands the sea to slip apart or open up (*toslupan*) to receive or swallow the poison.¹⁵¹ The ocean is, as noted above, an indifferent and untamable force in much Old English literature, and the charmer’s control over it is comparable in the corpus only to that of saints who cause sea-related miracles. Disease is once again banished back to the wilderness to which it belongs.

The poison is also returned to the air from which it came in the final, declarative verse line, in which the charmer blows (*geblawe*) the poison from the patient. Blowing and spitting as a ritual action, designed to purify, exorcise, or banish, appears in several other Old English remedies.¹⁵² The final half-line of the charm, *of ðe geblawe*, violates Kuhn’s Laws. The preposition *of* bears the vocalic alliteration of the line immediately after the caesura, and so must bear stress — meaning that the displaced pronoun *ðe* must be unstressed if the half-line is to scan. The line is grammatically and semantically intact, so it is difficult to infer error or corruption. Rather, the alliterating preposition and displaced pronoun emphasize the phrase *of ðe* — ‘from you’. This unusual metrical formation in fact highlights the essence of the curative act. As in the half-line *eft wille sændan* in Charm 4, which also does not comply with Kuhn’s Laws, and as with numerous other unusual lines in the charms, an apparent metrical

¹⁵⁰ *DOE* s.v. “Aspringan”. Banham’s translation ‘grow away from’ (“Herbs”, 190) is unattested.

¹⁵¹ Storms, 196; Glosecki, “Vipers”, 105-6; Pettit, II, 159.

¹⁵² See for example Charm 6; *Leechbooks I-II* ff. 13v, 28v, 116r; Harley 585 ff. 136v-137r, 146v-151r. One remedy calls for liquid to be blown onto a wound with a reed (*Leechbook III* f. 119v).

irregularity emphasizes the crucial moment of healing.

Conclusion

Charm 2 contributes significantly to our understanding of the medical metrical charms. The charm expands on the principle of sympathy that guides Old English medical magic, creating a multivalent, narrative meditation on the power of harnessing inhuman and poisonous forces to combat their kin, invoking Christian imagery without inviting a truly benevolent agent to be present in the actual moment of healing. A close reading of Charm 2, as with the other metrical charms, also demonstrates that the aesthetic standards of modern scholarship can do ‘unusual’ Old English poetry a disservice, failing to identify and appreciate the moments in which these texts deviate meaningfully from discursive norms.

The model of incurable disease outlined over the past three chapters is necessarily also a gendered one. An individual’s role in sexual intercourse is also an essential part of their gender performance in early medieval thought: the ‘masculine’ or ‘male’ partner penetrates the ‘feminine’ or ‘female’ partner, and to do otherwise is generally treated as suspect in early medieval texts.¹⁵³ Given the equation of disease with unwanted sexual penetration in certain Old English remedies, it seems clear that to take the ‘receptive’ role usually assigned to women in medieval understandings of the sex act was to become vulnerable, to threaten the integrity of the body. When a man falls prey to a supernatural disease agent that enters his flesh, his gendered body has, on an ideological level, failed to function correctly. The treatment of the sick body as one that is ridden, stabbed, shot, and colonized — that is,

¹⁵³ R. M. Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, 3rd ed. (Abingdon, 2017), 5-8, 29; D. Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford, 2009), 65; R. D. Fulk, “Male Homoeroticism in the Old English Canons of Theodore”, in *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder*, ed. C. B. Pasternack and L. M. C. Weston (Tempe, 2004), 1-34.

defeated in an aggressive altercation — and whose boundaries must be reasserted through superior martial force is in line with this understanding of gender. To emerge superior in battle is to confirm one's specifically masculine-coded strength. For female patients, however, illness becomes a kind of metaphorical sexual assault, but without an implied violation of normative gender roles on the part of the patient. If this is the case, we should expect to see the female body in the Old English medical corpus treated as inherently vulnerable to disease, and even as dangerous and contaminating in itself. The medical texts' repeated focus on feminine disease agents who aggress against others implicitly or explicitly (the *mære*, the *mihtigan wif*, the *deores sweostar*, Charm 2's brides and queens, *leodrunan*) or on persons whose sexual openness is itself dangerous ('those with whom the devil has intercourse') suggests just such a dynamic and gestures towards the medical danger of femininity. The following chapter examines these themes and explores their consequences for the female or feminine patients, practitioners, and natural forces found in Charms 6 and 8.

Chapter Four

Feminine Patients, Practitioners, and Presences in Charms 6 and 8

The model of incurative disease identified in the previous chapters has implications for the way female patients and practitioners are perceived and presented in the medical corpus, and for the ways in which the metrical charms deal with feminine forces, beings, and bodies. This chapter examines the treatment of female patients in Charm 6, a series of childbirth remedies, and the manipulation of a feminine resource in Charm 8, a ritual addressed to bees swarming to seek a new hive. A close reading and stylometric analysis of these poems suggests that the female body is imagined as a source of illness, dysfunction, and contamination in the metrical charms, as well as in related medical texts. Charm 6 and other pregnancy remedies associate the uterus with the grave, treat mother and foetus as entangled, liminal entities, and disconnect pregnancy conceptually from fertility, wifeness, and motherhood. Charm 8 treats the feminine bees as dangerously wild animals prone to abandon their divinely-mandated duty of social care. While female bodies and beings are essential to the charms' magical purposes, and to fertility and resource production in the material world of their practitioners, women and feminized forces must be tamed, coerced, or commanded (like the monsters and poisonous plants of the medical charms) in order to render them useful to the community in which they participate. In contrast to the arguments of some scholars, this chapter will argue that charms are in keeping with the normative misogyny of medieval Christianity in their fear and mistrust of — and desire to control and regulate — feminine beings. The English were not proto-feminist exceptions to the cultural norms of early medieval Europe, and though the charms are stylistically unusual, they are influenced by the standard attitudes towards the female body found in classical medicine and patristic thought.

Metrical Charms 6a-6c

The collection of remedies referred to as Metrical Charm 6 appears on ff. 185r-185v of Harley 585, in the concluding section of the manuscript copied by a third hand distinct from the two identifiable earlier in the codex.¹ These remedies are all intended for a woman struggling with aspects of pregnancy, childbirth, and/or breastfeeding, and most editions present the text as a single charm.² Some scholars suggest, however, that the text in fact consists of three remedies, copied together in *Lacnunga* because of their similar titles and related content, and the manuscript evidence supports this conclusion.³ The first remedy begins a new leaf, with the bottom third of the previous leaf left blank, and each of the three remedies begins with a capital letter. Such formatting elsewhere in Harley 585 is used to demarcate separate texts. All three remedies could theoretically be used by one woman at different times in the course of her pregnancy, but presumably could also be used individually, and there is no suggestion that they must be performed in a certain order.⁴ For ease of reference, I will refer to the three remedies in this chapter as Charms 6a, 6b, and 6c.

Any understanding of the treatment of women in Old English texts must take into account the oppositional notion of gender to which the Old English textual record adheres: *fæder and modor, / wif and wæpned* [father and mother, woman and man], as the poet of *Genesis A* puts it.⁵ Old English and Anglo-Latin medical, legal, and literary texts largely assume that physical sex and socially-constructed gender are binary and conflated — that is,

¹ “Harley MS 585”, Digitised Manuscripts.

² Grattan and Singer, 188-9; Grendon, 234; Sandmann, 96; Abernethy, 121-2; M. Nelson, “A Woman’s Charm”, *SN* 57 (1985), 3-8.

³ Storms, 198; Griffiths, 191-3; Pettit, II, 318.

⁴ Pettit, II, 319. Cf. Storms, 198; Meaney, “Practice”, 234; Sandmann, 96.

⁵ *Genesis A* ll. 194-5. See also, for example, *Maxims I* ll. 23-5; *Fortunes of Men* ll. 1-9.

an assessment of a person's physical sex based on genitalia and perceptible secondary-sex characteristics determines that individual's expected gender performance.⁶ Though early medieval English individuals undoubtedly navigated oppositional sexual and gendered norms in a variety of ways, and though scholars of gender theory and queer theory have thoroughly demonstrated that both dimorphic sex and binary gender are a matter of social construction, the vast majority of Old English texts hold to ideas of binary sex and gender.⁷ Of necessity, therefore, this chapter uses 'woman' and 'female' to refer to those both sexed and gendered as such in early English society, and 'man' and 'male' in similar ways. This medieval understanding of gender is also, of course, hierarchical: women in early medieval England had some legal rights, including property ownership and the right to consent to a marriage, but did not have the political, economic, and sexual freedoms men possessed. Moreover, women's exercise of such rights was largely contingent on their marital status and relationships with men.⁸ The archaeological record, too, indicates that social understandings of the female life course dovetailed closely with biological markers (first menstruation, childbirth), while the male life course was less biologically-determined; women were granted

⁶ Karras, *Sexuality*, 6-8; Clark, *Men*, 14; J. Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge, 1993), especially 167-78; J. E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality", in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. V. L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage (New York, 2010), 81-102; H. Magennis, "'No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons'?: Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry", *LSE* 26 (1995), 1-27; C. A. Lees, "Engendering Religious Desire: Sex, Knowledge, and Christian Identity in Anglo-Saxon England", *JMEMS* 27 (1997), 17-46. For general discussions of sexuality in early medieval England, see C. B. Pasternack and L. M. C. Weston, eds, *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder* (Tempe, 2004); D. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge, 2010).

⁷ On the constructed nature of sex and gender, see, for example, J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990); A. Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York, 2000); R. Alsop et al., *Theorizing Gender* (Oxford, 2002).

⁸ S. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, 1992), 2; C. Cubitt "Virginitly and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England", *GH* 12 (2002), 1-32; P. Stafford, "Women and the Norman Conquest", *TRHS* 4 (1994), 221-49; *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997); J. Crick, "Women, Posthumous Benefaction, and Family Strategy in Pre-Conquest England", *JBS* 38 (1999), 399-422; A. L. Klinck, "Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law", *JMH* 8 (1982) 107-21; P. Wormald, "*On þa wæpnedhealfe*: Kingship and Royal Property from Æthelwulf to Edward the Elder", in *Edward the Elder, 899-924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. Hill (London, 2001), 264-79; M. P. Richards and B. J. Stanfield, "Concepts of Anglo-Saxon Women in the Laws", in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. H. Damico and A. H. Olsen (Bloomington, 1990), 89-99.

social status based on the onset of fertility, engagement in childcare, and maternity.⁹ Though some scholars have suggested that the early English period was a ‘golden age’ for women,¹⁰ on balance the evidence suggests that England was not an exception to the prevailing male-dominated Christian culture of Europe in this period.

Given these patriarchal legal, economic, and cultural structures, it is unsurprising that women are marginalized in Old English medical texts, both as practitioners and as patients. All physicians whose names survive in the historical record from this period are male. There is evidence that early medieval English women practiced medicine and midwifery in private settings, but such activities are largely attested in penitential and homiletic texts, which condemn them as inappropriate.¹¹ The Old English medical corpus survives in manuscripts made at ecclesiastical centres, and their literate audiences were predominantly (though perhaps not entirely) male.¹² More importantly, extant Old English medical texts demonstrate a notable lack of interest in female patients and female bodies. A chapter of women’s

⁹ N. Stoodley, “From the Cradle to the Grave: Age Organization and the Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite”, *WA* 31 (2000), 456-72; D. Sayer and S. D. Dickinson, “Reconsidering Obstetric Death and Female Fertility in Anglo-Saxon England”, *WA* 45 (2013), 285-97. See also M. Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England* (Basingstoke, 2000), 53; R. D. Smith, “Anglo-Saxon Maternal Ties”, in *This Noble Craft: Proceedings of the Xth Research Symposium of the Dutch and Belgian University Teachers of Old and Middle English and Historical Linguistics, Utrecht, 19-20 January, 1989*, ed. E. Kooper (Amsterdam, 1991), 106-17.

¹⁰ On the ‘golden age’, see C. E. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1984); Stacy Klein, “Introduction: Feminism and Early English Studies”, in *New Readings on Women and Early Medieval English Literature and Culture: Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Honour of Helen Damico*, ed. H. Scheck and C. Kozikowski (Leeds, 2019), 1-20.

¹¹ Women’s healing practices are described as heathenism in the *Scriftboc*, the *OE Penitential*, and the *Canons of Theodore* (X16.02.01, B78.01.02, Y44.16.01), *De Auguriis* (ll. 148-50), Assmann Homily XI ll. 123-7, and the homily on f. 65 of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 115 (texts in Rudolf, “Preaching”). On the persistent association of women with dangerous magic, see A. Meaney, “Old English Legal and Penitential Penalties for ‘Heathenism’”, in *Anglo-Saxons: Studies Presented to Cyril Roy Hart*, ed. S. Keynes and A. P. Smyth (Dublin, 2006), 127-58, and “Women”, 21; A. Lawrence-Mathers, “The Problem of Magic in Early Anglo-Saxon England”, *RMS* 33 (2007), 87-104; L. M. C. Weston, “Women’s Medicine, Women’s Magic: The Old English Metrical Childbirth Charms”, *MP* 92 (1995), 279-83. Illustrations of female midwives appear in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, pp. 53, 62, 63.

¹² Weston, “Medicine”, 281-2; Meaney, “Women”, 29; Dendle, *Possession*, 88; C. Voth, “Women and ‘Women’s Medicine’ in Anglo-Saxon England, From Text to Practice”, in *Feminist Approaches to Old English Studies*, ed. R. Stephenson *et al.* (Turnhout, forthcoming), here 1-27 [2]; R. A. Buck, “Woman’s Milk in Anglo-Saxon and Later Medieval Medical Texts”, *Neophilologus* 96 (2012), 467-85, and “Women and Language in the Anglo-Saxon Leechbooks”, *WL* 23 (2000), 41-50; M. H. Green, “Women’s Medical Practice and Healthcare in Medieval Europe”, *Signs* 14 (1989), 434-73, “Gendering the History of Women’s Healthcare”, *GH* 20 (2008), 487-518. On nuns’ access to manuscripts, see S. Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600-900* (Cambridge, 2006) and *Veiled Women*, 2 vols (Aldershot, 2000).

medicine has been lost from *Leechbook II*, but even if that chapter had survived, it is minimal compared to the eight chapters *Leechbook II* devotes to the liver alone, or the seven it devotes to the spleen.¹³ A handful of female-specific remedies can be found scattered across the Old English medical texts, focused largely on the promotion of fertility, the regularization of menstruation, and the prevention of prolonged labour, but they represent a small percentage of the corpus as a whole.¹⁴ Numerous scholars have suggested that Charms 6a-6c represent a popular tradition distinct from male-oriented literate medicine, created by female practitioners for female patients, but there is no textual evidence that such a conscious agenda informed these remedies' composition.¹⁵ If a women-centered tradition of medicine existed in early medieval England and influenced the female-specific remedies in the extant Old English corpus, then that tradition has been co-opted by texts produced largely for male audiences at scriptoria accessible largely to men.

There is also evidence that the Old English medical corpus conceived of the female patient as sub-normative. Several scholars have argued that the medical texts are 'gender-neutral' because they most often refer to the patient with the word *man(n)*, *mon(n)*.¹⁶ *Mann* means either 'person, human being' or 'a man, male person'. Semantic studies conclude that the term encompasses a spectrum of meaning, ranging from 'person' to 'male person' with

¹³ M. Deegan, "Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts: A Preliminary Survey", in *Medicine in Early Medieval England: Four Papers*, ed. M. Deegan and D. G. Scragg (Manchester, 1989), 17-26 [17]; M. H. Green, "Making Motherhood in Medieval England: The Evidence from Medicine", in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe 400-1400: Essays Presented to Henriette Leyser*, ed. C. Leyser and L. Smith (Farnham, 2011), 172-203. On the liver and the spleen, see *Leechbook II* chs. xvii-xxiv, xxxviii-xliv.

¹⁴ E.g. *Leechbook II* f. 64r; *Leechbook III* ff. 118v-119v. Sixteen remedies in the *Herbarium* and seven in the *Medicina* treat women specifically. There is no textual indication that any of these remedies were used to induce abortions. Use of substances as emmenagogues does not necessarily indicate use of the same substances as abortifacients (Green, "Gendering", 501-2).

¹⁵ Fisher, 215. On a putative feminine medical tradition, see Meaney, "Practice", 234; Weston, "Medicine", 281-2; Deegan, 18; L. Olsan and P. M. Jones, "Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900-1500", *BHM* 89 (2015), 406-33; M. Osborn, "Anglo-Saxon Ethnobotany: Women's Reproductive Medicine in *Leechbook III*", in *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden*, ed. P. Dendle and A. Touwaide (Woodbridge, 2008), 145-61.

¹⁶ Fisher, 197-218; Voth, 1-2; Buck, "Language", 47.

gradations of gender-specificity.¹⁷ There is no reason to believe that any of the Old English remedies for ailments that afflict all people were composed intentionally to exclude women, or that they were not used for female patients. As a result, several scholars have argued that *mann* is a ‘true neutral’ in Old English medical texts.¹⁸ The fact that *mann* can be gender-specific, however, even though the word nominally encompasses both men and women, suggests that it is rather what feminist analysts describe as ‘the masculine neutral’: a word that ostensibly refers to all people, but privileges the man as the default, average, or normative person.

Indeed, Old English *mann* is often gender-specific in the medical corpus. Voth argues that when Old English medical remedies differentiate between the sexes, women are specified by *wif* and men by *wæpned* or *wer*.¹⁹ Yet in numerous recipes, the term *wif* is in fact contrasted with the term *mann*, including in one remedy describing a man (*mann*) having intercourse with his wife (*wif*) and in another dealing with urination and genitalia, suggesting that *mann* is an explicitly sexed term.²⁰ In those rare cases when *mann* is used in female-specific remedies (e.g. those involving the uterus or vulva), in every case it appears only after the gendered word *wif* has already been employed in that remedy — but *mann* is used without any accompanying gender-specific terms in a remedy for penile swelling.²¹ Moreover, with only one exception, when *mann* appears in female-specific remedies, the compiler uses female pronouns (*heo*, *hyre*) for the patient.²² *Mann* is used with male pronouns everywhere

¹⁷ C. Rauer, “Mann and Gender in Old English Prose: A Pilot Study”, *Neophilologus* 101 (2017), 139-58; A. Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English* (Cambridge, 2003), 62-5, 162-5; Buck, “Language”, 45.

¹⁸ Fisher, 197-218; Voth, 1-2; Buck, “Language”, 47; Rauer, 154.

¹⁹ Voth, 1.

²⁰ See, for example, *Leechbook I* ff. 33v-34v; *Leechbook II* ff. 61r, 65r, 88v; *MdQ* ch. 10.14. For other citations, see *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Wif ... Man”, “Wif ... Mon”, “Wif ... Men”.

²¹ *Leechbook II* f. 64r; *Leechbook III* f. 118v; *Herbarium* ch. 82; Charm 6c. For the penile swelling remedy, see *Leechbook I* ff. 2v, 26r.

²² *Herbarium* ch. 82 is the only instance in the corpus in which *mann* is used of a woman with male pronouns. Given that elsewhere *mann* is used for women with female pronouns, this may be a case of scribal inattention.

else in the corpus. The term is thus a gender-neutral word that encompasses women, but renders them non-normative by privileging ‘man’ as the default or archetypal patient.

Leechbook II points out that *micel gedal is on wæpnedes ond wifes ond cildes lichomon* [there is a great difference in the body of a man and a woman and a child], but if texts treat the patient as presumably male, precisely those differences may be ignored, overlooked, or lost.²³

The Old English medical texts are thus similar to other medical literature of the early medieval period in their implicit misogynistic bias.

The literature of early medieval England is steeped in patristic Christian thought, which is by its nature anti-feminist. The Old English penitentials, for example, consider menstruation a state of impurity and prohibit sex with menstruating and pregnant women — a pairing which suggests that pregnancy was also a sign of feminine ‘contamination’.²⁴ Old English and Anglo-Latin religious texts treat sexuality and carnal sin as something that women possess or that is located within female flesh, a danger that can only be combatted by the maintenance of virginity.²⁵ Childbearing, in particular, is problematic in the early medieval English Christian worldview: childbirth as experienced by the ordinary human woman, painful and labour-intensive, is evidence of original sin, a reminder of Eve’s punishment after the Fall.²⁶ Indeed, a brief childbirth charm in the margins of CCCC 41 (p. 329) addresses the patient as an incarnation of Eve and appears beside a passage in Bede’s

²³ *Leechbook I* f. 31v.

²⁴ Canons on menstruation include 5.01.01, 14.04.01, 14.07.01, 44.34.01, 77.04.06. Canons prohibiting sex with pregnant women include 14.02.01, 42.21.02, 77.04.11.

²⁵ Lees, 20-21; Cubitt, 3; Dockray-Miller, 2; C. B. Pasternack, “Sexual Practices of Virginity and Chastity in Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate*”, in *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder*, ed. C. B. Pasternack and L. M. C. Weston (Tempe, 2004), 93-120.

²⁶ As stated in *Genesis A* ll. 919-24. See also Lees, 21, 24; S. S. Klein, “Parenting and Childhood in *The Fortunes of Men*”, in *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, ed. W. Rudolf and S. Irvine (Toronto, 2018), 95-119. For numerous Old English homilies on this subject, see N. Beaumont, “Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood in Late Anglo-Saxon England” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of York, 2006).

Historia ecclesiastica in which a monk desires to free himself from oppressive sin.²⁷

Some of this concern with the ‘contaminated’ or ‘threatening’ pregnant female body may also have been due to the fact that childbirth was highly dangerous in the early medieval period. Chronic anaemia heightened the chances of childbirth fatalities, and puerperal infections, haemorrhage, sepsis, and other ailments could kill women both during and after labour.²⁸ Maternal mortality may have been the cause of up to fifty percent of young female fatalities in early medieval England; every individual would have known a woman who died in childbirth.²⁹ There would almost certainly have been a strong cultural association between pregnancy and fertility on one hand and death on the other. The foetus itself was understood as a liminal and dangerous being: the text on the growth of the foetus appearing in London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A.iii notes that the foetus is *cwic* [alive, moving] in the fifth month, yet does not have a heart until the eighth month, and if it still remains in the womb by the tenth month it is no longer a child but a *feorhadle* [life-threatening illness].³⁰ The child moves between death and life, personhood and non-personhood. There is significant evidence that the pregnant woman was thought to exist in a similar state, as will be demonstrated below.

Multiple burials have survived from early medieval England that contain the bodies of both women and fetuses or neonates. These double burials were performed in visually-striking ways: neonates were laid across the shoulder and chest, between or next to the thighs,

²⁷ Olsan, “Marginality”, 147. Given the amount of space in CCCC 41, it is entirely possible that the scribe sought, in at least some instances, to relate his selected marginalia to the main text, *contra* K. E. Olsen, “Thematic Affinities Between the Non-Liturgical Marginalia and the Old English Bede in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41”, in *Practice in Learning: The Transfer of Encyclopedic Knowledge in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. R. H. Bremmer and K. Dekker (Paris, 2010), 133-45.

²⁸ Cameron, *Medicine*, 182; Thompson, 45; Deegan, 21.

²⁹ Sayer and Dickinson, 286, 293; M. Elsackers, “In Pain Shall You Bear Children (Gen. 3:16): Medieval Prayers for a Safe Delivery”, in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration* ed. A. Korte (Leiden, 2001), 179-207.

³⁰ Text in R. M. Liuzza, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A.iii* (Cambridge, 2011), 200.

across the lap, and in one case under the head, of their mothers.³¹ Several graves survive, too, of women who almost certainly died in labour. The descended, full-term foetus remains in the pelvic girdle in these burials, a practice not continued in the later medieval period, when the body of the foetus was removed for separate interment.³² In one seventh-century Worthy Park grave, a woman was buried with a foetus partly extruded from her body, with the feet still in the birth canal.³³ ‘Coffin birth’ — post-mortem expulsion of a foetus — has been demonstrated to be physiologically impossible.³⁴ Mother and child must have been buried this way intentionally, either to avoid ‘disturbing’ the bodies of the deceased, or for the benefit of the living audience. These various arrangements of women with foetuses and neonates represent a kind of entangled death. Such burials not only visually mark labour as the cause of death, highlighting its particular danger, but also obviously blur the identities of mother and child. They are at once two separate human beings and a single entity, buried in visibly intimate contact. Charm 6b suggests that a dead infant could negatively impact a woman’s future fertility: the child contaminates the mother. These burials mark the pregnant or postpartum woman as something other than an independent individual, and they suspend her eternally mid-parturition, or in the moments of first postpartum contact.

Old English and Anglo-Latin childbirth remedies never mention supernatural disease agents, suggesting that the danger of pregnancy was understood to be the ‘fault’ of the misbehaving female body. A remedy for prolonged labour appears in similar versions in *Leechbook III* and the *Herbarium*: the physician is instructed to place henbane or coriander

³¹ For grave locations and numbers, see Meaney, *Amulets*, 30; Sayer and Dickinson, 288-91; S. Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death: Burial Rites in Early England* (Stroud, 2000), 68.

³² Sayer and Dickinson, 288-91; Deegan, 17.

³³ Sayer and Dickinson, 289.

³⁴ Sayer and Dickinson, 289; cf. S. C. Hawkes and C. Wells, “An Anglo-Saxon Obstetric Calamity from Kingsworthy, Hampshire”, *MBI* 25 (1975), 47-51.

seeds on the woman's left thigh, against the vulva — or, in the *Herbarium*, to have a virgin do so.³⁵ The physician is cautioned in both texts to remove the seeds immediately after the birth, *þy læs þæt innelfe utrige* [lest the innards prolapse]. The herbal cure exerts a force so strong and indiscriminate that it may pull the woman's organs out. The patient's body, however, is inert. She does not deliver the child; it is dragged from her. The pregnant body is not treated as the creator of life or agent of deliverance. Indeed, the use of a virgin in the *Herbarium* remedy suggests that an appropriate cure for the ailing pregnant body is the presence of a body that has never been pregnant. A particular sexual 'purity', which the patient necessarily lacks, is inherently aligned with life and healing. Similar themes appear in a short incantation for prolonged labour in Harley 585, which reads *Solue iube Deus ter catenis* — an abbreviation of the phrase *solue iubente Deo terrarum petre catenas, qui facis pateant caelestia regna beatis* [Peter, who makes the heavenly kingdom open to the blessed, release by God's command the chains of the world].³⁶ The pregnant body is both passive and static here, bound up by protracted labour, and a higher power must 'unlock' the woman's flesh.³⁷ She does not create her own motherhood, and pregnancy is a deadly state of suspended animation.

This theme also appears in a charm copied into Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Junius 85, a collection of homilies and sermons.³⁸ The charm text, to be inscribed on virgin wax, is an Anglo-Latin version of the common *Peperit* charm formula, which invokes biblical mothers who experienced miraculous (virgin, sterile) and painless births.³⁹ Such invocations

³⁵ *Leechbook III* f. 118v; *Herbarium* ch. 104.2.

³⁶ Pettit, II, 301; G. H. Brown, "Solving the *Solve* Riddle in BL MS Harley 585", *Viator* 18 (1987), 45-51.

³⁷ For examples of other medieval European "unlocking" charms for pregnancy, see Pettit, II, 301.

³⁸ For text and commentary, see Olsan and Jones, 412-16; Weston, "Medicine", 292-3.

³⁹ Olsan and Jones, 415-6; Elsackers, "Prayers", 183-5. Bergen Runestick NIyR 631 is a *peperit* charm (MacLeod and Mees, 160-61; McKinnell *et al.*, 180). Pregnancy charms are mentioned in several Old Norse texts (*Fáfnismál* st. 12; *Sigrdrífumál* st. 9; *Oddrúnargrátr* st. 7).

suggest that the ideal pregnant female body is removed from sin, pain, and death in a way that an ordinary pregnant woman cannot be. The charm also addresses the foetus, concluding with a recounting of the raising of Lazarus and the command *Lazare, ueni foras* [Lazarus, come forth], evidently directed at the infant.⁴⁰ If the child is Lazarus, the female body is unequivocally the tomb. The woman herself is the place of death from which the child must be summoned into life, and the womb is not a place of creation but of mortality, a locus of death and sin. The pregnant woman is, in the moment of labour, neither a fertile sexual partner nor yet a mother. She is a grave, and she hovers somewhere between death and regeneration.

These remedies and their designation of the womb as a locus of death provide the immediate thematic, generic, and manuscript context for Charms 6a-6c. A close reading and stylometric analysis reveals the degree to which these themes and anxieties also occupy the metrical childbirth charms, in addition to highlighting the ways in which the charms' metrical irregularities are connected to, and compensated by, their aural and rhetorical ornament.

Stylistic Analysis

Uniquely among the medical metrical charms, the speaker of Charms 6a-6c is the patient, and she is instructed to treat herself, without the involvement of a physician or midwife of any gender. Nor does she call on benevolent powers to assist her: when she visits the church altar, she merely declares the child 'known' to Christ, and does not ask for divine intercession.

There is no *historiola* in these charms, and thus no archetype on which the patient is invited to pattern herself. Scholars have made much of the fact that the charms preserve the 'voice' of a pregnant woman in early medieval England, arguing that the woman's self-treatment

⁴⁰ Olsan and Jones, 415-6. On Lazarus in Old English homilies, see Thompson, 59-60.

demonstrates her personal agency.⁴¹ Yet this self-treatment is not necessarily a sign of voluntary autonomy, and may rather be a consequence of her separation from the community around her. The woman (or women) of Charms 6a-6c stands almost entirely alone in the literal and metaphorical landscape. She goes to graveyards alone, to the church alone, to the stream alone. Her husband is present for one ritual, but he is inert and may indeed be asleep. At the end of the third remedy, she goes to another house and takes food, suggesting a return to a supportive social network, but this implied connection is not addressed or elaborated on in the text. The pregnant woman operates largely in isolation, connected only with the foetus she carries. She is removed from the cycle of ordinary life, even as the remedies seek to reintegrate her into communal spaces.

All three remedies use the polysemic verb *afedan* to describe what the woman in question is unable to do. *Afedan* primarily means ‘to feed, nourish, sustain’, with the secondary meanings ‘to nurture, bring up’, ‘to gestate, bring a child to full term’, and ‘to suckle, nurse’.⁴² The verb’s semantic range elides multiple stages of pregnancy and delivery — conception, gestation, labour, first lactation — into a single act of nourishment and maintenance. These remedies are evidently designed for use during the period of time in which the foetus (and subsequently neonate) depends entirely on the mother’s body.⁴³ The repeated use of *afedan* does not necessarily indicate a lack of understanding on the part of the compiler, as some scholars have suggested; rather, the polysemy of *afedan* itself suggests an early medieval English concept of a stage in the life course of both woman and child in which the latter depends entirely on the former, and which is marked by fluid boundaries of identity

⁴¹ Weston, “Medicine”, 280; Nelson, “Charm”, 3; Olsan and Jones, 429; Voth, 27.

⁴² *DOE* s.v. “Afedan”. Abernethy (122) and Grattan and Singer (191) argue all the remedies are for nurturing a child *in utero*.

⁴³ Weston, “Medicine”, 282.

between mother and child.⁴⁴ This ‘stage’ overlaps obviously with motherhood — it evidently continues after the successful delivery of the child into early breastfeeding — but the elision of neonatal care with conception and gestation suggests a conceptual division between mothering a child before weaning and mothering a child after. The multivalence of *afedan* also makes it impossible to determine whether Charm 6a treats a woman who cannot conceive, or one who has experienced a past stillbirth. To be unable to successfully give birth to a living child is, apparently, effectively the same as failing to conceive at all.

In Charm 6a, the woman is first instructed to step three times over a dead man’s grave and say the following incantation:

x x x / x x x / x / \ x
 Þis mē tō bōte⁴⁵ þære lāþan lætbyrde

 x x x / x x x / x / \ x
 Þis mē tō bōte þære swæran swærtbyrde

 x x x / x x x / x / \ x
 Þis mē tō bōte þære lāðan lambyrde. (ll. 1-3)

As in Charm 4, the formula *þis ... to bote* appears in a series of irregular, syntactically-identical lines that feature repeating metrical patterns. The a-verses are all light A types and the b-verses are all type 1D*2 with anacrusis, but there is no cross-caesura alliteration except on a secondary compound element (*bote ... byrde*). As in other instances in the metrical charms where cross-caesura alliteration is lacking, double alliteration in the off-verses compensates for the irregularity. Alliteration on *l* and the repetition of *lāþan* in lines 1 and 3 frames the *s*-alliteration in line 2 in an envelope pattern. There is echoing on *-an* and *-byrde*

⁴⁴ On the medieval English life course, see T. Porck, *Old Age in Early Medieval England: A Cultural History* (Woodbridge, 2019); H. Soper, “Reading the Exeter Book Riddles as Life-Writing”, *RES* 68 (2017), 841-65; W. Rudolf and S. Irvine, eds, *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (Toronto, 2018); S. Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud, 1999). This argument is treated in greater detail in C. R. Batten, “Lazarus, Come Forth: Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Life Course of Early Medieval English Women”, in *Early Medieval English Life Courses: Cultural-Historical Perspectives*, ed. H. Soper and T. Porck (Leiden, forthcoming).

⁴⁵ Abernethy suggests *me* is stressed (124), but the verse is a regular light A type without placing stress on a non-alliterating, undisplaced pronoun.

in all three lines and on *swær-* in line 2, and assonance on *a* and *æ* throughout. The lack of cross-caesura alliteration means that the woman, subject of the a-verses, is not stylistically or aurally linked to the deadly possibilities enumerated in the b-verses. The secondary alliteration on *bote* and *byrde*, on the other hand, highlights the fact that it is precisely her experience of birth that she is attempting to heal. Moreover, the *þis ... to bote* formula, its medieval German equivalent, and the similar Old English phrase *þis þe libbe* only appear elsewhere in the second person.⁴⁶ Charm 6a is unique in its first-person formulation of the phrase. The woman turns the formula on herself, not simply because she is alone when she speaks, but also because her pregnant body is itself the locus of vulnerability.⁴⁷ She wards off three different, undesirable birth experiences: the *laþan lætbyrde* [loathsome late or slow birth], referring to a pregnancy gone over term or to prolonged labour, a particularly dangerous experience; the *swæran swærtbyrde* [painful dark-coloured birth], almost certainly referring to the blue or purple colour of a stillborn infant; and the *laðan lambyrde* [loathsome lame birth], describing a child born with any of a range of physical disabilities.⁴⁸ She apparently must ward off such outcomes before she has even conceived a child. The potential for death is inherently present within her body, a threat to her infant even before the infant itself exists.

Magic and rituals involving graves are rarely mentioned in the Old English corpus,

⁴⁶ Pettit, II, 322.

⁴⁷ Some scholars suggest Charms 6a and/or 6c ward off evil spirits from the woman (Nelson, "Charm", 4; Storms, 75, 201; Grendon, 120; Abernethy, 133; Meaney, "Women", 25) but no such beings are mentioned in the texts. Weston ("Medicine", 293) argues that the charm does not mention disease agents because women do not fight in battle, but given the use of battle rhetoric by virgin martyrs, there is no reason women could not metaphorically engage in martial activity.

⁴⁸ On the danger of prolonged labour, see Meaney, "Women", 24; Deegan, 20. On the semantic range of *swært* and *lam*, see *BT s.v.* "Swært", "Lam". Early medieval English graves of adults with congenital disabilities suggest that disabled children were cared for by their communities (Thompson, 10; Crawford, "Childhood", 96; Lucy, 70), but the textual record (e.g. homilies threatening fornicators with the birth of disabled infants; see Rudolf, "Preaching", 52) suggests this possibility was seen as undesirable. See further C. Lee, "Abled, Disabled, Enabled: An Attempt to Define 'Disability' in Anglo-Saxon England", *Werkstattgeschichte* 65 (2013), 41-54.

and there is no other attested grave magic in the medical texts. The singling-out of pregnancy for the ritual use of burial-places or corpses must be magically relevant, even magically sympathetic. Indeed, the correspondence between the woman who will soon contain a foetus and the grave containing a corpse is notable.⁴⁹ Pregnancy is so deeply connected to mortality that a woman facing difficult labour or the inability to conceive must, in Victoria Thompson's phrase, 'appeal to the experts, the dead'.⁵⁰ The corpse, symbol in the Old English literary corpus of sin and decay, and the burial-place, associated with disease agents in the other metrical charms, are uniquely able to transform the dangerous pregnant body. The woman's womb is a locus of mortality that is cleansed when she engages with another locus of mortality. Stepping three times over a grave is a gesture almost universally interpreted by scholars as a symbolic declaration of victory over death and an act of transference, leaving misfortune and danger at the burial site.⁵¹

Once the woman has conceived a child, she goes to her husband while he is at rest, sleeping, or in their marital bed, and steps over him just as she stepped over the grave, saying:

/ x / x / x x / x
 Ūp ic gonge, ofer þē stæppe A|A

x $\overset{\curvearrowright}{\times}$ / x x x x / \ x $\overset{\curvearrowright}{\times}$ x
 mid cwican cilde nālæs mid cwellendum [*or cwelendum*] C|d (or a)

x / $\overset{\curvearrowright}{\times}$ ⁵² x x x x / x
 mid fulborenum, nālæs mid fægan. d|a (ll. 4-6)

Many scholars consider the woman's stepping over her husband to be enigmatic or obscure, or provide no explanation for it.⁵³ Some suggest that this gesture is a 'reversal' or 'undoing'

⁴⁹ Thompson, 95; Weston, "Medicine", 289.

⁵⁰ Thompson, 95.

⁵¹ Meaney, "Women", 24; Voth, 14, 24; Jolly, *Religion*, 109; Storms, 200; Abernethy, 126; Pettit, II, 322; Nelson, "Charm", 4.

⁵² This should be a resolved secondary stress.

⁵³ Pettit, II, 323; Storms, 200; Meaney, "Women", 24; Nelson, "Charm", 5; Abernethy, 127.

of the first ritual,⁵⁴ but there is no reason for the woman to ‘reverse’ a beneficial magical action that has served to separate her from death. Others argue that the woman receives life or fertility from her husband,⁵⁵ yet she steps over him in precisely the same way she stepped over the grave, presumably a gesture of transference away from the self. She is also in no need of fertility, as she is already pregnant. Two such obviously parallel actions logically should have parallel significance. Indeed, as she steps over her husband, she declares that she ‘leaves behind’ the dangerous possibilities of a stillbirth or premature delivery (*cwellendum ... fægan*), suggesting that this action, too, is about superseding or abandoning a previous state. Stepping over her husband is not a reunification with him or a sharing of his life-force: it is a casting-off. The woman metaphorically leaves her husband behind, just as she left death behind in the grave. She steps out of her role as sexual partner to her husband in their marital bed, and into the liminal space of pregnancy. Indeed, according to the penitentials, her husband should soon stop having sex with her at all. She moves out of the course of normal life and into the marginal space of expectant, but not yet realized, motherhood. The vocalic alliteration on *up* and *ofer* emphasizes precisely this ‘stepping out’ of normative roles and spaces.

Lines 4-6, like the previous incantation, feature anaphora and syntactic repetition. Structural alliteration highlights the antithetical pairs in lines 5-6 (*cwic ... cwell, fulborn ... fæg*).⁵⁶ The ‘doomed’ child, contrasted with the ‘full-born’ one, is evidently a child too premature to survive. Hence, for example, the Old English translation of the *Pastoral Care* notes that women who give birth to children before they are *fulborene* fill graves rather than

⁵⁴ Grattan and Singer, 191; Rubin, *Medicine*, 123.

⁵⁵ Jolly, *Religion*, 109; Thompson, 95; Weston, “Medicine”, 289.

⁵⁶ Nelson, “Charm”, 5; Vaughan-Sterling, 198. On antithesis, see Quirk, 58; Bartlett, 14.

houses.⁵⁷ Editors are divided on whether to emend MS *cwellendum* [killing one] to *cwelendum* [dying one], but both interpretations make sense: the woman may be warding off either a stillbirth or deadly labour complications, which can lead to double fatalities.⁵⁸ Both woman and child are closer to death than to life, and in this second incantation the woman pushes away the possibility of her own mortality while also maintaining her separation from life and fertility as represented by her husband, sustaining her own precarious state.

It is only when the woman *gefefe þæt þæt bearn si cwic* [feels that the child is alive] that the charm refers to her as *seo modor* [the mother].⁵⁹ This remedy seeks to guide the patient through the transition from woman and wife to mother, and she confirms her new status by approaching the church altar and saying:

/ x x / x x x / x
Crīste, ic sǣde, þis gecyþed. A|a

There is no evidence that this ritual is an interpolation or a revision of a pagan practice.⁶⁰ Visiting the church in a time of personal need would have been an ordinary activity in early medieval England. The fact that the woman visits first a grave, then a marital bed, then the altar of a church establishes a clear magical pattern: these locations symbolize the power of, or exert power over, life and death. The woman also moves from marginal space (the graveyard) to private space (the marital bed) to public space (the church), returning to the communal ideological centre both literally and metaphorically.

Following Mitchell's analysis of the line's syntax and the *DOE* definition of the participle *gecyþed*, the most appropriate interpretation of this declaration is 'To Christ, I have

⁵⁷ *DOE* s.v. "Fullboren"; Pettit, II, 324. The Latin reads *plene formentur* [fully formed].

⁵⁸ Thompson, 95; Pettit, II, 324. On double fatalities, see Sayer and Dickinson, 292.

⁵⁹ Weston, "Medicine", 289.

⁶⁰ *Contra* Storms, 200; Grattan and Singer, 189-91; Grendon, 153; Sandmann, 104.

said, this is made known'.⁶¹ The statement seems to be one of acknowledgement, thanksgiving, and perhaps even dedication; the woman may be requesting Christ's recognition of her child, or perhaps obliquely promising its future baptism.⁶² The verb *secgan*, however, is in the past tense, suggesting that the woman is referring to a statement she has already made and must reiterate in the church. The text does not instruct her to speak any additional incantations, yet the sense is one of repetition.⁶³ The actual moment in which she makes the child known to Christ, and in which she is returned to Christian life and wholeness, is elided. Her motherhood seems to be re-declared in the church because its original declaration is somehow elusive; the repeated reestablishment of her presence in the Christian community suggests that her pregnant body is still in some way unknowable and unmanageable. Even her act of reintegration is grammatically suspect.

Charm 6b also draws on the power of grave magic, this time to exorcise the lingering effect of a deceased child on a woman's subsequent fertility. Her body is evidently contaminated by her previous loss, her womb marked as deadly rather than life-sustaining. The instructions, again, emphasize both the woman's personal agency and her isolation: the phrase *genime heo sylf hyre agenes cildes* [let her herself take her own child's] uses a cluster of third-person pronouns to highlight both that the woman must cure herself and that she must operate alone.⁶⁴ She takes earth from her child's grave, wraps it in dark wool, and sells it to itinerant merchants, saying:

⁶¹ For the verb, see *DOE* s.v. "Gecypan". Cf. Pettit (II, 324-5), Storms (199), and Grendon (208), who argue for 'made manifest'. On *Criste*, see Mitchell, *Syntax*, §3997; Pettit, II, 324-5; Cockayne, III, 67; S. L. Keefer, "A Monastic Echo in an Old English Charm", *LSE* 21 (1990), 71-80 [75]. Cf. Storms, 199; Dobbie, 214; Grendon, 208; Abernethy, 37; Cook, 44; Griffiths, 192; Thompson, 95.

⁶² Pettit, II, 325; Meaney, "Women", 24. Keefer ("Echo", 76-8) suggests this declaration echoes Luke 1:41, when John the Baptist leaps in the womb at recognition of Christ, but the recognition here is on Christ's part, and there is no textual echo of Luke 1:41 or the *Magnificat*.

⁶³ Weston ("Medicine", 289) suggests the woman uses the past tense to portray Christ's recognition of her child as an established fact.

⁶⁴ Pettit, II, 325; Keefer, "Echo", 73.

x x x / x x x x / x
 Ic hit bebigge, gē hit bebigan, a|a

x / x / x x x x / x /
 þās sweartan wulle 7 þysse sorge corn. **hypermetric A|B**

The bundle of earth and dark wool is a potent symbol and has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Certainly the earth represents both death and life and serves, as in Charm 7, as a recipient of some kind of transference. Some scholars argue that the object is the woman's grief over the loss of her previous child, or her 'bad luck', which she removes from herself by selling it away.⁶⁵ Those scholars who favour this interpretation cite Grattan and Singer's assertion that 'selling sorrow is a common folk practice', but there is no attestation of such a belief in English or medieval European folklore that I have been able to discover.⁶⁶ Moreover, the piece of grave-earth wrapped in wool containing *sorge corn* [seeds or grains of sorrow] is a profoundly specific object, with each element bearing particular sociocultural connotations; a broad interpretation like 'sorrow' or 'poor luck' is perhaps insensitive to the details the text offers about the symbol itself. Several scholars suggest that the earth and cloth represent the woman's dead child: the earth of the child's grave represents its body, and the dark wool is a symbol of funereal grief, or perhaps an inversion of the infant's white baptismal clothes, echoing the *sweartbyrde* of Charm 6a.⁶⁷ Yet arguably the object also represents the mother herself. Earth is designated as an explicitly female force in Charm 1, and wool is strongly associated with women given that spinning and fabric production were women's primary occupations in early medieval England.⁶⁸ This feminized bundle of potentially-fertile material containing 'seeds' seems to represent the mother's ailing womb. Her body has produced death rather than life: the uterus that yielded a stillborn infant is here rendered magically

⁶⁵ Meaney, "Women", 24; Nelson, "Charm", 5; Abernethy, 129; Pettit, II, 326.

⁶⁶ See Grattan and Singer, 191.

⁶⁷ Thompson, 96; Storms, 201; Sandmann, 106.

⁶⁸ Fell, 40-45.

parallel to the grave of that same infant. The deadly womb is represented by grave-earth and filled with ‘seeds of sorrow’ rather than of life and growth. The uterus is an ambiguous locus of both mortality and fertility during a dangerous pregnancy, and the charm seeks to resolve this duality by symbolically casting out the ‘dysfunctional’ womb that has produced a dead child. In this reading, the woman must exorcise her own flesh in order to prevent future ‘malfunction’.

The use of repetition and two syntactically identical half-lines in the spoken incantation (*lc hit bebigge, ge hit bebigan*) emphasize the increasing distance between the woman and the symbol of her ailment: first she sells it, then the merchants sell it, and with each sale the parcel travels further away from her. As in the other metrical charms, the ritual and incantation of Charm 6b banish disease and bodily suffering outside communal space. In her interactions with itinerant people who cross the boundary between community and wilderness — and in her solitary trip to the graveyard — the woman locates herself on the edge of the social sphere. Further, she may have to sell the earth secretly, as it is unlikely that merchants would knowingly pay money for a bundle of dirt.⁶⁹ The exchange highlights the woman’s precariousness. She must engage in minor subterfuge and conceal her own attempts at healing in order to successfully purge herself of contamination.

The magical prominence of milk in Charm 6c suggests that, rather than treating a dysfunctional womb, the remedy is intended for a woman who cannot nurse or fears she will not be able to. The patient takes a mouthful of milk from a cow of one colour, carries it in her mouth to a stream, spits the milk into the stream, and then swallows a handful of the running water. The cow of one colour is a symbol of purity, arguably a purity the pregnant woman lacks (cows of one colour are called *unmæle* elsewhere in the medical texts, and the same

⁶⁹ Cameron, *Medicine*, 183.

word is also used of virgins).⁷⁰ When the woman swallows a mouthful of running water, the abundance of the stream becomes the abundance of her body.⁷¹ The milk she spits out seems to represent her own ‘inadequate’ milk supply, which much be purged and reinvigorated. Unlike affects unlike — the woman introduces an agent of purity into her body to absorb and expel her contamination — and, subsequently, like affects like, as the plentiful stream restores her ability to nurse.

Once she has swallowed the stream water, the woman says the following incantation:

x x x x x x x x / x \acute{x} / x
 Gehwēr ferde ic mē þone mæran maga þihtan ?|C

 x x x / x \acute{x} / x
 Mid þysse mæran mete þihtan a|C

 x x x x x x / x x / /
 þo[ne] ic mē wille habban 7 hām gān. a|? (ll. 1-3)

Line 1a is an unattested light verse with an unusual eight initial unstressed syllables. Though the line is irregular, such a structure highlights the final, essential word *mæran* [famous, glorious]. Lines 1-2, in addition, feature a pattern similar to cross-alliteration on *þ* and *m*. Line 3b is also unattested, though a grammatically-correct emendation to *hame gan* would render it a regular B type.⁷² The verse as it currently stands, however, concludes the line and the incantation as a whole with two paired stresses, a kind of metrical punctuation that draws attention both to the woman’s return to domestic, human space, and to the assonance and near-rhyme of *ham gan*.

The meaning of these lines has been the subject of significant debate, with various scholars offering vastly differing translations. The word *maga* is evidently the direct object of

⁷⁰ Deegan, 22; Barley, 70; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Unmæl-”.

⁷¹ Meaney, “Women”, 25; Weston, “Medicine”, 291; Nelson, “Charm”, 6; Pettit, II, 327; Sandmann, 107. On running water and spitting in Old English remedies, see Chapter 3.

⁷² M. Griffith, pers. comm., 26/03/18. Compare, however, the late verse pattern *xx//* noted in Chapter 3.

the verb *ferde*, so the word is unlikely to be the nouns *māga* [kinsman, son], *maga* [stomach], or *maga* [powerful one], which all take the form *magan* in the accusative; instead, it is probably the noun *magu* [son], which takes the accusative form *maga*.⁷³ *Pihtan* is either a weak accusative masculine adjective attached to *maga*, meaning ‘strong’, or an infinitive verb meaning ‘to strengthen’.⁷⁴ If *pihtan* is a verb, *ferde* is likely the singular preterite of *feran* [to go, travel]; if *pihtan* is an adjective, *ferde* must be transitive and therefore is probably a form of *ferian* [to carry] that has lost its middle syllable (*ferede* being the correct preterite singular form) due to scribal error.⁷⁵ Translating *me* as a pleonastic reflexive dative in all three lines yields syntactically straightforward clauses.⁷⁶ Line 1 therefore reads either ‘Everywhere I myself have carried the glorious, strong son’ or ‘I myself have gone everywhere to strengthen the glorious son’. Because the noun *mete* [food] is masculine, the demonstrative article *bysse* must be read as instrumental. Line 2 thus reads either ‘by means of this glorious, strong food’ or ‘to strengthen him by means of this glorious food’.⁷⁷ The interpretation, ‘Everywhere I myself have carried the glorious strong son, by means of this glorious, strong food’, is perhaps preferable because the woman has only gone to a stream in this remedy, and has not in fact ‘traveled everywhere’ to protect her child.⁷⁸ In addition, the syntactic pattern adjective-noun-adjective (*mæran maga pihtan*) is attested in Old English poetry.⁷⁹ Both interpretations, however, emphasize the strengthening of the son by means of the milk-ritual, privilege the

⁷³ *BT s.v.* “Magu”; Pettit, II, 329. Cf. Cameron, *Medicine*, 181; Cockayne, III, 69; Grattan and Singer, 191; Griffiths, 193; Abernethy, 121; Storms, 199; Cook, 44; Deegan, 22; Grendon, 209.

⁷⁴ Pettit, II, 330. Grattan and Singer (191), Abernethy (37), Griffiths (193), Deegan (22) and *BT (s.v.* “Pihtan”) treat it as a compound element, despite its adjectival or verbal ending.

⁷⁵ Pettit, II, 329; see *DOE s.v.* “Feran”, “Ferian”.

⁷⁶ Pettit, II, 330. Cf. Cameron, *Medicine*, 181.

⁷⁷ Pettit, II, 329.

⁷⁸ Pettit, II, 330; Olsan and Jones, 429; Voth, 15; Nelson, “Charm”, 6. Cf. Storms, 199; Cameron, *Medicine*, 181; Cook, 44; Crawford, *Childhood*, 60; Grendon, 208; Sandmann, 107.

⁷⁹ Mitchell, *Syntax*, §169.

possibility of a male child, and highlight the fact that the woman gives herself the strength to feed another by feeding herself. Line 3 almost certainly reads ‘I myself wish to have (him, or the food) and go home’, a declaration that the woman will maintain the abundance the ritual has bestowed on her as she returns to domestic space.⁸⁰

After reciting the incantation, the woman must leave the stream without looking back, a superstition with a long tradition (e.g. Lot’s wife, Orpheus) and a command that appears in *Herbarium* and *Leechbook III* remedies.⁸¹ Refusing to look back prevents a recontamination of the woman by the misfortune she has left behind at the stream. She then takes food at the house of another person, signalling her reintegration into the community and return to domestic space.⁸² Indeed, both Charms 6a and 6c locate the pregnant or postpartum woman in a symbolic landscape in which she must move from the edges to the centre: from the graveyard to her own bed to the church in 6a, from the stream to the home of a sympathetic community member in 6c. The fact that these remedies are so concerned with moving the woman from marginal to communal space suggests that such movement is essential for her healing. She exists on the edges of the human community, between life and death, between wifhood and motherhood, and she must be repeatedly reintegrated and reclaimed.

Charms 6a-6c reveal an underlying mistrust of the apparently uncontrollable and recalcitrant pregnant body, a sentiment consistent with the medical remedies’ particular demonization of feminine supernatural beings. The charms treat pregnancy as a moment in a woman’s life in which she is removed from the normal course of life and draws close to death and deadly forces, a shift inherently tied to the elision of her life with another’s. This medical

⁸⁰ If MS *ponne* in this line is not emended, it would literally read ‘Then I myself wish to have and go home’, with the object implied. Nelson’s interpretation ‘I wish to own myself and go home’ (“Charm”, 6) is perhaps anachronistic in its assumption that the phrase ‘have myself’ would connote bodily autonomy to an early medieval audience.

⁸¹ Grattan and Singer, 34; Pettit, II, 331.

⁸² Weston, “Medicine”, 291; Nelson, “Charm”, 6.

anxiety over the female and the feminine is little discussed in examinations of women and misogyny in Old English literature. Yet it offers powerful and uncomfortable evidence for the patriarchal nature of early medieval English social structures. A medical fear of women's bodies, too, dovetails with understandings of disease as sexualized incursion, as posited in Chapter 3: the 'penetrable' female body is inherently medically dysfunctional. Indeed, as a close analysis of Charm 8 will show, the threat posed by feminine bodies and forces must be reckoned with even when those forces are harnessed for socially acceptable purposes, including agriculture and resource production.

Metrical Charm 8

In the multiple rituals and incantations of Charm 1, the practitioner seeks to render his agricultural land fertile. The feminized earth has failed to perform her correct maternal function and feed those who depend on her, and so God must intervene. The charmer declares, *Hal wes þu, folde, fira modor, / Beo þu growende on godes fæþme, / fodre gefylled firum to nytte* [Be well, earth, mother of men; may you be growing in God's embrace, filled with food for the profit of mankind]. The feminine earth must be returned to the sexual embrace of the masculine divinity in order to fulfill her correct function, regain her fertility, and serve the *nytt* [profit, advantage] of the human community. Female forces in the agricultural charms — like the pregnant female body in Charm 6 — are often treated as being in need of (re)domestication. Agriculture transforms wild spaces and creatures into tamed, communal resources, but its efforts can always be 'undone': crops fail, fields become fallow, abandoned animals go feral. Even domesticated natural forces can 'return' to the wilderness from which humanity has claimed them, and therefore many of these forces are treated in the charms as liminal, uncertain, and in need of commandment and coercion. In Charm 8, *Wið*

Ymbe [for a swarm of bees], livestock are treated as feminine beings whose natural inclination is to abandon functionality, community, and service, and who must be magically bound to all three.

Charm 8 appears in the left-hand margin of p. 182 of CCCC 41, underneath the votive mass for the living and dead. The marginalia were likely copied in four stints, and Charm 8 was added later than the other charms present in the manuscript, suggesting that it — like other Old English remedies — circulated on its own prior to its copying in CCCC 41.⁸³ Charm 8 is in no way unsuited to this manuscript's collection of Christian protective texts, and its numerous analogues in Latin, German, and Middle English, ranging from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries, adjure bees not to fly to the woods in the name of the Virgin and other fixtures of the Christian universe.⁸⁴ The placement of Charm 8 next to the votive mass suggests a shared protective and religious purpose — and indeed, this text deals with the defense and maintenance of the human community against existential threats, and with its ability to claim and exploit natural resources.

Charm 8 in Context: Bees in Early Medieval England

Beeswax, honey, and bees themselves were considered highly valuable, symbolically and economically, throughout the early medieval English period: charters and lawcodes detail the payment of rents in honey, also treated in literature as an archetypal source of sweetness; beeswax was essential for the making of high-quality altar candles; mead was the most

⁸³ T. A. Bredehoft, "Filling the Margins of CCCC 41: Textual Space and a Developing Archive", *RES* 57 (2006), 721-32.

⁸⁴ Cf. Storms (132), Cook (49), Sandmann (31), and H. Jongeboer ("Der Lorscher Bienensegen und der ags. Charm Wiþ Ymbe", *ABäG* 21 [1984], 63-70), among others, who suggest the charm is pagan. For analogues, see Storms, 139; Grendon, 214; J. Zupitza, "Ein verkannter englischer und zwei bisher ungedruckte lateinische Bienensegen", *Anglia* 1 (1878), 189-95; A. Fife, "Christian Swarm Charms from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Centuries", *JAF* 77 (1964), 154-9.

prestigious alcoholic drink.⁸⁵ Beekeeping was widespread in early medieval England, largely attached to royal houses, aristocratic estates, and monasteries.⁸⁶ Much of this beekeeping involved the harvesting of honey from wild bees and the maintenance of semi-wild hives in or near woodland.⁸⁷ Domesticated bees may also have been cultivated: the estate-management text *Gerefa* notes a *hyfa* [hive] in a list of agricultural tools, and a ritual for bee protection involving the so-called ‘Circle of Columcille’ found in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius E.xviii mentions an *ymbhaga* [swarm-enclosure].⁸⁸ However, no archaeological evidence for such cultivation survives.⁸⁹ Charm 8 could serve a beekeeper either working with manmade hives or tending to a maintained population of semi-wild bees, seeking to induce a swarm — a phenomenon necessary for the survival of a bee population — to settle near the original colony, so that the beekeeper can continue to claim ownership of the new hive.⁹⁰

The fact that bees and hives were largely a woodland resource, and that a significant proportion of bees exploited by beekeepers were not domesticated, is important to our understanding of Charm 8. As Debby Banham and Rosamund Faith put it, bees and honey

⁸⁵ For charter and guild citations, see E. Crane and P. Walker, “Early English Beekeeping: The Evidence from Local Records Up to the End of the Norman Period”, *TLH* 29 (1999), 130-51. Penitentials note that even if bees kill a person, their honey can still be consumed (Canons 26.01.01, 44.31.01). On beeswax and mead, see D. Banham and R. Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming* (Oxford, 2014), 121-2; M. Osborn, “Anglo-Saxon Tame Bees: Some Evidence for Beekeeping from Riddles and Charms”, *NM* 107 (2006), 271-83.

⁸⁶ Beekeepers are listed in the Domesday Book (see Crane and Walker, 134-40) and described in the estate management manual *Rectitudines singularum personarum* (see M. C. Higham, “The Problems of the Bee-Keepers”, *JEPNS* 34 [2001], 23-8).

⁸⁷ Crane and Walker, 131; Banham and Faith, 209; Higham, “Problems”, 24.

⁸⁸ On Cotton Vitellius E.xviii, see Pulsiano, “Prefatory”, 91-2; *DOE* s.v. “Imbhaga”. See also *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Ymb stoc”, “Imbe lea”. For *Gerefa*, see F. Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1898-1916), 452-5.

⁸⁹ Banham and Faith, 135. *Contra* Crane and Walker, 131; M. Osborn, “Skep (*Beinenkorb*, **beoleap*) as a Culture-Specific Solution to Exeter Book Riddle 17”, *ANQ* 18 (2005), 7-18.

⁹⁰ J. B. Spamer, “The Old English Bee Charm: An Explication”, *JIES* 6 (1978), 279-94; Storms, 133. L. A. Garner and K. M. Miller (“A Swarm in July: Beekeeping Perspectives on the Old English *Wið Ymbe* Charm”, *OT* 26 [2011], 355-76) suggest the charm could also discourage a swarm at a disadvantageous time in the beekeeping season. Cf. Grendon (169), Abernethy (145), and F. S. Holton (“Literary Tradition and the Old English Bee Charm”, *JIES* 21 [1993], 37-53), who argue the charm prevents swarming entirely, despite the necessity of swarms for beekeeping, and Banham and Faith (135) who suggest the charm prevents bees from settling near one’s dwelling, although it commands them not to fly away.

products were ‘identified with “the wild” rather than with human habitation and farming’.⁹¹ Bees belong, conceptually, to the wilderness, the same uncultivated spaces outside the community from which disease and malevolent supernatural agents emerge. Bees and beehives are thus an ambivalent resource at best, associated with the danger of uncontrolled nature. Even domesticated bees must, necessarily, have been viewed by early medieval English beekeepers in relation to their wild counterparts. Charm 8’s anxious command *næfre ge wilde to wuda fleogan* [may you never fly wild to the woods], a demand also found in its many medieval analogues, demonstrates that such a possibility was of great concern to beekeepers, and suggests that the domestication of bees was considered a precarious state that could be easily ‘reversed’. Charm 8 coerces the bee population into abandoning their ‘natural’ instincts — leaving cultivated areas, resisting functionality, and becoming antisocially ‘wild’ — and instead serving human communal needs.

Old English literary evidence also suggests that bees were viewed as ambivalent animals, both valuable and dangerous. Some Old English and Anglo-Latin texts — including several homilies, Byrhtferth’s *Enchiridion*, and Aldhelm’s prose *De uirginitate* — draw on patristic sources in using bees as symbols of chastity, virginity, and spiritual community.⁹² Yet Aldhelm, in by far the most extensive of these bee metaphors, describes the ostensibly chaste, nunlike bees with overtly sexual and fleshly imagery, stating that they *auida uiscerum receptacula certatim implere contendunt* [struggle eagerly to fill the greedy receptacles of their stomachs] and load up their *crurum et coxarum* [thighs and hips] with *fertilem praedam*

⁹¹ Banham and Faith, 136.

⁹² On *De uirginitate*, see A. Casiday, “St. Aldhelm’s Bees (De uirginitate prosa cc. iv-vi): Some Observations on a Literary Tradition”, *ASE* 33 (2004), 1-22. For homilies mentioning bees, see DiNapoli, 19; Holton, 39. Byrhtferth mentions bees in his *Enchiridion*, Part III ch. 1.

[fertile plunder].⁹³ Even though the bees' sexuality is metaphorical, these erotic images of fertility, greed, and lust inescapably raise the spectre of these sins in relation to the insects themselves. In the *Metres of Boethius*, too, the bee is portrayed as a sinner, her wrathful sting serving as a metaphor for adultery and fornication.⁹⁴ Aldhelm's *Ænigma* 20 and Exeter Riddle 15 both depict bees as dangerous and martial. In Aldhelm's riddle, they carry *crudelis spicula belli* [the sharp weapons of cruel war]; in the Exeter Book, the insects are called *sperebrogan* [spear-terror], *hyldepilas* [battle-darts], and *eglum attorsperum* [horrible poison-spears].⁹⁵ *Homiletic Fragment I* describes bees, in a vivid and extended metaphor, as a symbol of malicious hypocrites: *ætterne tægel / hafað on hindan, hunig on muðe* [they have a poison tail behind, honey in the mouth].⁹⁶ While the riddles and homilies do not discuss the bees' gender, the fornicating bee of the *Metres* is described with female pronouns (though this may be due to the grammatical gender of *beo*). Aldhelm — unlike his patristic and classical sources — clearly considers worker bees to be female, and though he states that they serve a male 'king' or 'magistrate' bee, the Old English gloss refers to the *beomodor* [bee-mother].⁹⁷ Charm 8, addressing the bees as *sigewif*, designates them as female animals. Given consistent referrals to male and masculine bees in patristic and classical sources known to the early medieval English, and the fact that the riddles describe bees as bearing male-assigned weapons, it is possible that worker bees were viewed as masculine females. At the very least,

⁹³ For text, R. Ehwald, ed., *Aldhelmi Opera*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1961), 231-3; M. Lapidge and M. W. Herren, eds and trans., *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge, 1979), 61-2. On the sexuality of *De uirginitate*, see Pasternack, "Virginity", 102.

⁹⁴ *Metres of Boethius* Metre 18, ll. 6-11.

⁹⁵ Aldhelm, *Ænigma* 20 l. 4 (text in Orchard, *Tradition*); Riddle 15 ll. 4, 6, 9. For a brief commentary on the dual nature of bees in Old English literature, see J. T. Randle, "The 'Homiletics' of the Vercelli Book Poems: The Case of Homiletic Fragment I", in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, ed. S. Zacher and A. Orchard (Toronto, 2009), 185-224.

⁹⁶ *Homiletic Fragment I* ll. 19-23 (text in Randle, 193); T. D. Hill, "The Hypocritical Bee in the Old English Homiletic Fragment I, Lines 18-30", *NQ* 15 (1968), 123; P. Pulsiano, "Bees and Backbiters in the Old English Homiletic Fragment I", *ELN* 25 (1987), 1-6.

⁹⁷ On Aldhelm's use of Virgil, Ambrose, and patristic sources, see Casiday, 4, 6-9, 17-18. Cf. Burdorff, who suggests the early medieval English did not know bees were female (96).

these insects are depicted as armed, martial women — thus necessarily engaging in some form of gender-transgression. The other spear-wielding *wif* found in the metrical charms are the malevolent *mihtigan wif* of Charm 4.

The practical context of early medieval English beekeeping, then, suggests that bees are aligned with the wilderness and only uncertainly tamed, while the Old English literary context suggests that beehives were considered ambivalent — even, in some cases, poisonous, aggressive, or adulterous — weapon-bearing female groups. This charm, like Charm 6, is interested in the instability of the feminine, its perceived closeness to death and wildness. Though Charm 8 itself deals with a specific, domestic concern, the text seeks to affirm and maintain boundaries between nature and culture, chaos and order, inside and outside, male and female. It asserts the rightness of mankind’s power over nature, and coerces potentially dangerous female animals into serving human need, advantage, and profit. These essential dynamics both inform and are highlighted by a close stylometric analysis of the text.

Stylistic Analysis

Charm 8 is a unified text with an echoing two-part structure: both incantations are accompanied by the gesture of throwing earth, both consist of four spoken verse lines, and key terms are repeated between them (*oferweorp ... forweorp ofer; æminde ... gemindige*).⁹⁸ Weston suggests that charms with a two-part structure first gather, then deploy, magical effectiveness.⁹⁹ Arguably, Charm 8 follows such a pattern. In the first incantation, the charmer draws power from the earth, and in the second, he uses that power to coerce the bees

⁹⁸ Sandmann, 31-2; Storms, 132; Nelson, “Wordsige”, 58; E. P. Hamp, “Notes on the Old English Bee Charm”, *JIES* 9 (1980), 338-40.

⁹⁹ Weston, “Language”, 177.

into landing where he directs them. The first incantation is also, however, an essential claim of ownership over the animals themselves:

/ x x x / / x x /
 Fō ic under fōt, funde ic hit. E|E

x / x / x / x / x x / x
 Hwæt, eorðe mæg wið ealra wihta gehwilce, B|?

x x / x x x / \ x
 and wið andan and wið æminde a|d

x x x ∞ x / x / x
 and wið þa micelan mannes tungan. a|A (ll. 1-4)

The gesture of throwing earth with the right hand and catching it under the right foot is emphasized and reinforced by the declarative first line, ritual and incantation acting in tandem to establish the charmer's power over both the earth as an elemental force and the literal earth where he stands.¹⁰⁰ This performative first line features two E-type verses, sound patterning on *o*, *u*, *i*, and *t*, and stress on two alliterating, undisplaced finite verbs, highlighting the essential first person actions of seizing and finding. Throwing a handful of earth is a multivalent gesture. Just as the dirt falls to the ground, so too will the bees return to the charmer's land; just as the charmer throws earth over himself or near himself, so too will he subsequently throw dust over the bees, binding them to him and his wishes.¹⁰¹ Catching the dirt under one's foot is also, of course, a sign of power over the earth, and earth in turn has power over *ealra wihta gehwilce* [each and every creature].¹⁰² Holding something underfoot is a symbol of control in other Old English magical texts — a charm against theft in Cotton Vitellius E.xviii involves the user placing a diagram in his shoe — but also in the early medieval Christian worldview.¹⁰³ Genesis 1:28-9 unequivocally promises mankind

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, "Wordsige", 58; Garner, "Performance", 29.

¹⁰¹ Garner and Miller, 366; Osborn, "Tame", 280.

¹⁰² Spamer, 285; Nelson, "Wordsige", 58; Bragg, 9; Cook, 51.

¹⁰³ For charm text, see Pulsiano, "Prefatory", 89. Psalm 8 is cited in connection with Charm 8 by Holton (44).

power over the natural world: God instructs Adam and Eve to subdue the earth, and grants them dominion over every living thing. Psalm 8:8-9 reiterates this gift: *omnia subjecisti sub pedibus ejus, oves et boves universas, insuper et pecora campi, volucres caeli, et pisces maris qui perambulant semitas maris* [you put everything under their feet, sheep and all oxen, and all the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea that travel through the sea paths]. The charmer casting earth literally under his feet and commanding his livestock to obey him is a restoration of the Christian natural order, prohibiting a feminine natural force from rebelling against human wishes and thus behaving in a manner contrary to God's will.

Earth has power against, or for, every *wiht* — a word that generally means ‘creature’ or ‘created thing’, but which, as noted in Chapter 1, is often used in poetry for monstrous entities. Catching earth underfoot grants power over all created beings to the charmer, and thus power over the bees he will subsequently command, but the use of the term *wiht* specifically also suggests that the charmer claims the power to defend his livestock against the dangerous creatures that, like the disease agents of the medical charms, emerge from the wild. Line 2b is an unattested hypermetric verse, but such an unusual structure allows for the use of both *ealra* and *gehwilce* in the same half-line, heightening the charm's exhaustive power while also allowing for echoing on *w* (*hwæt ... wið ... wihta ... gehwilce*) in addition to the line's structural alliteration. This half-line is also the beginning of an anaphoric series like those found in Charms 7 and 12, which also contain verses that are metrically irregular but alliteratively ornamented and suited to the rhetorical pattern in which they participate.

Line 3 features a pattern similar to cross-alliteration, which draws attention to the unusual word *æminde*. The term appears only once elsewhere in the extant corpus, glossing the Latin *zelus* [zeal, jealousy], and therefore seems to mean intense envy, jealousy, or

malice.¹⁰⁴ The word is well-paired with *anda*, which primarily refers to a strong negative emotion, including envy, spite, and hostility.¹⁰⁵ This *anda* and *æmynd* may refer to the bees themselves, and their ‘malice’ or ‘spite’ in rebelling against the beekeeper’s wishes, or it may refer to the envy and hostility of a would-be thief.¹⁰⁶ The likelihood that bee-theft was a problem of some significance in early medieval England is supported by a specific mention of bee-thieving in Alfred’s Law Code, as well as a charm fragment in Cotton Vitellius E.xviii, which states that placing a madder sprout on one’s hive will prevent another person from enticing (*aspanan*) or stealing (*forstelan*) the bees away from it.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, in the subsequent line, Charm 8 seeks protection from *þa micelan mannes tungan* [the mighty tongue of a person]. This phrase may refer to the performance of a malevolent incantation — potentially a genuine concern in eleventh-century England, as discussed in Chapter 6 — designed to ‘entice’ bees from their hive, as described in the Vitellius E.xviii charm.¹⁰⁸ The anxiety over the ‘mighty tongue of a person’ may also refer to the claim of another person on the hive, an assertion that the swarm has entered another person’s land and thus become their property. Though Garner and Miller’s suggestion that Charm 8 was intended to be a public ritual audible to one’s neighbors is speculative,¹⁰⁹ the incantation is a performative statement of ownership that binds the bees to the beekeeper’s cultivated area, prevents the exercise of their instincts to seek a hive elsewhere, and forbids them to other people.

¹⁰⁴ *DOE* s.v. “Æmynd”. Cf. Storms, 133; Nelson, “Wordsige”, 58; Grendon, 169; Jongeboer, 68; Zupitza, “Bienensegen”, 193; Abernethy, 42; M. Elsackers, “The Beekeeper’s Magic: Taking a Closer Look at the Old Germanic Bee Charms”, *MQ* 27 (1987), 447-61. Dobbie offers a variety of meanings (214).

¹⁰⁵ *DOE* s.v. “Anda”.

¹⁰⁶ Holton, 45. Nelson (“Wordsige”, 58) and Elsackers (“Magic”, 453) argue these are exclusively human faults, and M. Rust (“The Art of Beekeeping Meets the Art of Grammar: A Gloss of Columcille’s Circle”, *PQ* 78 [1999], 359-86) argues these faults belong only to the bees.


¹⁰⁷ Banham and Faith, 136; Garner and Miller, 372. For charm text, see Pulsiano, “Prefatory”, 89; for Alfred’s Law Code 9.2, see Liebermann, 54.

¹⁰⁸ Grendon, 169; Spamer, 283. See Charm 1 l. 28.

¹⁰⁹ Garner and Miller, 371.

The charmer is then instructed to throw a handful of dust on the swarming bees, which would in fact inhibit flight and induce the insects to settle back to the ground.¹¹⁰ The action also represents contagious or contact magic, as the bees sink to the earth when touched by a small amount of that same earth.¹¹¹ Throwing earth over the swarm establishes a metaphorical boundary beyond which the bees cannot fly. The magical mechanism is perhaps similar to that of the ‘Circle of Columcille’ ritual, which also seeks to control how and where bees move: the circle is carved on a stone which is sunk into the earth in the middle of an apiary or garden enclosure, along with a written charm to keep bees *salvi* [safe] in that delimited area, inscribing the law of God *incorda* [in their hearts] so that they will serve human needs.¹¹² These charms are interested in demarcating and sanctifying agricultural space, reserving for the charmer the ability to determine what must remain in the domestic sphere and what must be prevented from entering it.

The charmer then begins the second incantation with a line that has received a significant amount of critical attention:

/ x x  \ / x x / x
 Sitte gē, sigewīf, sīgað tō eorþan! A|A

The command is traditional, appearing in a similar form in other medieval bee charms, including the Old High German *Lorscher Bienensegen*, which declares, *sizi, sizi, bina ... sizi uilo stillo, vuirki godes uuillon* [settle, settle, bees ... sit very still, work God’s will].¹¹³ Charm 8 is unique, however, in addressing the bees as *sigewif* [victory-women]. *Sige* occurs as an initial compound element in words referring both to martial triumph and to the spiritual

¹¹⁰ Garner and Miller, 366; Jongeboer, 68.

¹¹¹ Bragg, 10.

¹¹² Rust, 374-7. Note the masculine grammatical ending on *salvi*.

¹¹³ On Charm 8 and the *Bienensegen*, see Storms, 139; Grendon, 214; Jongeboer, 66; Elsackers, “Magic”, 448-51.

victories of Christ and Christians.¹¹⁴ To call the bees *sigewif* is thus to suggest either that they are armed women, or that they are, like the bees of patristic texts and *De uirginitate*, a spiritually-victorious, nunlike group, serving the church through the production of wax. Indeed, an analogous Latin bee charm refers to the insects as *ancillae dei* [handmaidens of God].¹¹⁵ Numerous scholars have suggested that *sigewif* is an appellation belonging to ‘valkyries’, but given the uncertain meaning of the Old English *wælcyrige* and a lack of narratives about or descriptions of such supernatural women in the extant Old English corpus, such a conclusion is necessarily speculative.¹¹⁶ The warlike depictions of bees in Old English literature suggest, however, that *sige* here does have a martial connotation. Such a descriptor grants them a status that is at least somewhat transgressive, given that the compound also actively genders them as ‘women’: they are, as discussed above, weapon-bearing, masculinized females not unlike the *mihtigan wif* of Charm 4. To call the bees ‘victory-women’ is also perhaps to invoke the aristocratic hall-society of Old English literature, whose rituals of camaraderie and exchange depend on mead produced from honey.¹¹⁷ In this reading, the charmer returns the bees to their correct place in human society, claiming them for the domestic, communal sphere. If the compound refers to the bees in their Christian aspect as virginal women and producers of church resources, the same social restriction is invoked. The charmer reminds the bees of their status as servants of God, which necessarily also places them under the feet of mankind, as Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 make clear. The bees are

¹¹⁴ *BT* s.v. “Sige”. See further Jolly, “Margins”, 153; Crawford, “Evidences”, 103; Holton, 48-9.

¹¹⁵ Storms, 139.

¹¹⁶ Scholars who suggest the word refers to valkyries include Griffiths, 171; Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 118; Grendon, 214; Davidson, *Gods*, 63; North, *Gods*, 106; Spamer, 286; Garner and Miller, 367; Damico, 45; Elsackers, “Magic”, 454. On the word *wælcyrige*, see Chapter 2.

¹¹⁷ Garner and Miller, 367. See further M. J. Enright, *Lady With a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy, and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Blackrock, 1996), 1-37.

reintegrated into, and bound to, the service of human structures of secular and religious power. A female community ‘on the loose’ needs to be re-anchored in correct domesticity.

Though the term *sigewif* may thus be ‘courteous’, as some scholars suggest, it is not a straightforward acknowledgement of the bees’ power, nor does it grant the animals significant agency outside human desires.¹¹⁸ The punning alliteration of *sige* [victory] and *sigað* [sink, settle] undermines any sense that the ‘victory’ belongs to the bees themselves. They are bound to the cultivated earth and to the service of the beekeeper, necessarily prevented from flying where they choose. The charm is corrective as much as protective. No malicious supernatural agents are addressed in this second incantation.¹¹⁹ Rather, as in Charms 1 and 6, the practitioner seeks instead to manipulate the misbehaving or dysfunctional feminine resource itself. The charm’s concluding lines bind the bees to a kind of social contract:

x x x / x x \acute{x} / x
Nǣfre gē wilde tō wuda flēogan. a|C

x x x x / \x / x / x
Bēo gē swā gemindige mīnes gōdes, d|A

x x / x x / \acute{x} x / x
swā bið manna gehwilc metes and ēpeles.¹²⁰ B|A (ll. 6-8)

As noted above, the command that the bees do not fly *wilde to wuda*, emphasized by a C-type b-verse, confirms that Charm 8 is essentially concerned with the same boundary that obsesses many of the other metrical charms and that serves as a defining theme in other Old English poetry: nature and community, human property and the forest, the settlement and the mountain. If the beekeeper’s bees return to the woods, they are lost to him, not only because

¹¹⁸ Storms, 138; Grendon, 214; Jongeboer, 69. Fife’s suggestion that the term is ‘endearing’ (157) does not account for the scale of the term *sige*, which is neither personal nor prosaic. Burdorff argues that the charm grants the bees ‘agency’ (96).

¹¹⁹ *Contra* Grendon, 115; Crawford, “Evidences”, 106.

¹²⁰ The syllable *-be-* is syncopated.

another person could theoretically claim them,¹²¹ but also because they would be returning to an untamed and untamable state. Charm 8's magical mechanism is therefore the inverse of that of the medical charms. It forces the object of its power to stay inside domestic space, rather than exiling that which does not belong. The bees are rendered serviceable once more, claimed and reclaimed from the wilderness, and mankind is reestablished at the top of the earthly hierarchy. Indeed, Charm 8 is copied next to a passage from the *Historia ecclesiastica* that describes Bishop Cedd's sanctification of an area of moorland for the construction of a monastery.¹²² Charm 8 harnesses a natural force for humans' civilized purposes, just as Cedd claims the moors for the Christian community.

The final command that the bees be mindful of the beekeeper's wellbeing, just as people are mindful of their own food and homes — highlighted by an alternating echoing pattern (*gemindige mines godes*) — draws the animals into the mutual obligations of the human community.¹²³ Their hypothetical flight to the woods is thus framed not only as a rebellion against divinely-sanctioned human rule, but also as simply and straightforwardly antisocial, a reneging on a service owed — similar, perhaps, to the flight of cowardly soldiers into the forest in *The Battle of Maldon* (ll. 185-97). The equation of the bees' bond of obligation to the beekeeper with each man's concern for the maintenance of his food and property implicates livestock in the systems of cultivation to which they are bound, suggesting not only that 'correct' and 'natural' behaviour on the part of animals consists of subservience to human needs, but also that animals in fact owe a duty of care to their rightful masters. The charm's final word, *epel* [homeland], is multifaceted. The term indicates one's

¹²¹ Jongeboer, 69; Garner and Miller, 370-2.

¹²² Olsan, "Marginality", 146.

¹²³ Neville, *Representations*, 77. Spamer (288) argues that the bees are admonished to obey kinship obligations found in the sixth-century Frankish Salic Law, but similar laws do not appear in early medieval English texts.

homeland or hereditary land, and is often contrasted with banishment or exile, but also refers to the true home of the righteous in heaven.¹²⁴ Charm 8 is concerned with the maintenance of *epel* on multiple levels. In returning the bees to an indisputably domesticated state, it serves the literal and spiritual continuation of the human community, maintaining their dominion over the natural world and its resources, as mandated by God.

Conclusion

Though they vary greatly in style, content, and the practitioners for which they are intended, all twelve metrical charms seek to (re)establish a particular order of power in the natural and supernatural landscape. The human (physician, patient, beekeeper) emerges victorious over the nonhuman (disease agents, animals, natural resources), or corrects that which is dysfunctional in the human body or community (the uterus that cannot sustain life).

Humanity, as this chapter has demonstrated, is normatively associated with maleness and the masculine, and those recalcitrant natural resources that must be forced to behave in life-giving, socially-acceptable ways are often female or coded as feminine. These texts seek to combat both human (generally) and male (specifically) anxieties about the precariousness of social order, health, and survival, and displace such fears onto emasculating, invasive agents and ambivalent female forces that can be expunged, defeated, or reintegrated into the existing social structure. The metrical charms may be unusual in terms of style and metre, but they are often profoundly, indeed coercively, normative in their worldview and content. Similarly exclusionary definitions of the human community also inform the metrical cattle-theft charms, whose thematic insistence on exile and punishment is explored in Chapter 5.

¹²⁴ *DOE s.v.* “Eþel”. See Holton, 50.

Chapter Five

Cattle, Cursing, and Christ in the Metrical Theft Charms

The twelve metrical charms may not all be textually related to one another, but they express shared concerns, themes, and anxieties, potentially indicative of the preoccupations of early medieval English culture. The three metrical theft charms (Charms 5, 10, and 9) are, like the medical charms, designed to uphold social and cultural boundaries, preserve the inviolate selfhood of the user, and reinforce the conceptual separation between ‘margin’ and ‘centre’. The theft charms are also, however, the only metrical charms that are demonstrably related to one another: these texts were likely transmitted together before being copied in their extant manuscript form, and Charms 5 and 10 are variants of a single incantation and ritual. A largely prose cattle-theft charm with a short set of hypermetric verses also belongs to this textual complex, and will be explored in this chapter as the possible thirteenth metrical charm. A close reading of these interlinked rituals highlights the anxieties they share with the other metrical charms — yet where the medical charms banish a supernatural agent to the conceptual and literal margin, the theft charms seek to exile a human enemy, expressed in their allusions to liturgical authority and their proximity to legal practice. Magennis has noted a persistent concern in Old English literature with the maintenance and defense of the community against not only external enemies, but also treachery from within.¹ The medical charms confront monsters of the kind found in *Beowulf*'s mere; the theft charms, on the other hand, confront the Unferth-figure, who has betrayed the human community by violating its laws. The curse-like violence in these texts suggests the particular danger of such ‘treason’ perpetrated from within the human sphere, and the apparently urgent necessity of removing

¹ Magennis, *Images*, 6, 15.

the offender from communal space.

The Theft Charms in their Manuscript, Legal, and Liturgical Contexts

It is a scholarly commonplace to point out that *feoh*, *orf*, and *ceap* — the three terms used to describe stolen property in Charms 5, 10, and 9 — mean both ‘movable wealth’ and ‘livestock’, particularly cattle.² Cattle were not only important food animals and essential to draft agriculture (and therefore to survival), but also prestigious status symbols, suggestive of power over land and labour.³ These three theft charms are thus primarily intended for the recovery of bovine livestock, and necessarily cater largely to wealthy lay or ecclesiastical property owners. Cattle-rustling was endemic to early medieval England.⁴ The lawcodes deal extensively and often with the prevention and punishment of livestock theft, as well as with the recovery of stolen animals, requiring that the owner publicly declare the loss before the livestock are tracked by persons selected for the purpose.⁵ The recording of numerous non-metrical theft charms, in both Old English and Anglo-Latin, also attests to the intensity of this concern.⁶ Indeed, social status — and thus the value of any individual in a *wergild* system — correlated very closely with wealth in early medieval England.⁷ In such a social structure, loss of property is both a loss of power and a loss of personal value; to suffer theft is to suffer

² *DOE s.v.* “Feoh”, “Ceap”; *BT s.v.* “Orf”.

³ Banham and Faith, 85-6, 107-13. See Riddles 10, 36, 70; *ASC* entries for 895-7, 986, 1042, and 1046 (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. D. N. Dumville and S. Keynes [Cambridge, 1983]). Remedies for cattle are included in the medical texts (e.g. Harley 585 ff. 170v-171r, 176v-177r, 178r-178v, 186r-186v), some of which, like Charms 5 and 10, use crosses to demarcate protected space.

⁴ S. Keynes, “The Fonthill Letter”, in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. M. Korhammer et al. (Cambridge, 1992), 53-97.

⁵ See for example I (the ‘Hundred Ordinance’), II, IV Edgar; II Edward; II, V, VI Athelstan; III Edmund; Laws of Ine 46; II Cnut 76. Texts in Liebermann.

⁶ Harley 585 f. 178r-178v; Cotton Vitellius E.xviii f. 15v; London, British Library, Cotton MS Titus D.xxvi f. 79v; *Herbarium* ch. 114; Durham, Cathedral Library, MS A.IV.19.

⁷ T. Charles-Edwards, “Social Structure”, in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c. 500-1100*, ed. P. Stafford (Chichester, 2009), 107-25; P. J. Fowler, *Farming in the First Millennium AD: British Agriculture Between Julius Caesar and William the Conqueror* (Cambridge, 2002), 269, 294; Banham and Faith, 3.

an assault on one's identity. The equation of thieves with fen-dwelling monsters in *Maxims II* and with wolves in numerous homilies, as well as the harsh punishments for theft found in the lawcodes themselves, suggest that the thief removes himself from the human community through the violence of his act.⁸ Cattle theft was thus a high-stakes crime in early medieval England, both practically and symbolically. To steal cattle is to steal a victim's livelihood, their power and prestige, and to strike a blow against the community on behalf of a broad category of antisocial, marginal, and dangerous forces. These three metrical charms — and the complex of cattle-theft charms to which they belong — are serious rather than trivial, concerned with significant questions of survival and the maintenance of social structures.

Charm 5 appears on ff. 180v-181r of Harley 585. The presence of a ritual for cattle-theft in a medical handbook again indicates the importance of cattle to human well-being, and suggests that early medieval English physicians, clergy, and other practitioners of these rituals understood recovering stolen items to be conceptually similar to curing disease — that is, the thematic links between the medical and agricultural charms, and their mutual enforcement of sociocultural boundaries, seem to have been apparent to their users. Charms 9 and 10 appear alongside a prose cattle-theft charm in the bottom margin of CCCC 41 p. 206, suggesting the protection of property may have been relevant both to the ecclesiastical community itself and to their efforts in pastoral care. Given the lack of manuscript separation between the charms, the scribe presumably continuously copied all three texts from the same source.⁹ We can therefore cautiously assume that the theft charms circulated together in at least one other manuscript, as alternative practices for the same purpose. Although several scholars have sought 'pagan' roots in these three charms, their overtly Christian content and

⁸ *Maxims II* ll. 42-3; DiNapoli, 94; W. Bonser, "Anglo-Saxon Laws and Charms Relating to Theft", *Folklore* 57 (1946), 7-11; J. Neville, "Monsters and Criminals: Defining Humanity in Old English Poetry", in *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, ed. K. E. Olsen and L. A. J. R. Houwen (Leuven, 2001), 103-22.

⁹ Bredehoft, "Margins", 727-8.

manuscript context preclude any such arguments.¹⁰

Hollis identifies three types of cattle-theft charm extant in the Old English corpus.¹¹ Charm 9 is Type A, which she describes as being ‘textually unrelated’ to the other charm-types, though this text was evidently transmitted alongside the other charms, and all three types refer to the Invention of the Cross. Charms 5 and 10 constitute Type B, the ‘Bethlehem’ charm, and Type C is constituted by the prose charm in CCCC 41 and a redacted version of the same ritual, which appears in four other manuscripts.¹² The CCCC 41 version requires the user to sing an incantation over the fetters and bridle of a lost horse, the four sides and middle of a robbed house, or the footprints of stolen livestock, and to drip candle wax onto the footprints. The Latin incantation includes a litany, an interpolation or quotation of the final three verses of the *Hymnus S. Secundini in Laudem S. Patricii* (used to protect both persons and property), the formulae *Crux Christi reducat* and *Crux Christi ... inuenta est*, petitions to Old Testament patriarchs, and a statement of the Jews’ inability to conceal the crucifixion of Christ.¹³ The four redacted versions retain only the instructions, the *Crux Christi reducat* and *Crux Christi ... inuenta est* formulae, a petition to Abraham and Job to close off paths and waterways to the thief, and the mention of the Jews.¹⁴

The final portion of the incantation in these redacted versions is in Old English, and

¹⁰ On the theft charms’ Christianity, see Pettit, II, 273; Abernethy, 115. For scholars who read the charms as pagan, see Storms, 87; Sandmann, 118, 134; Schneider, “Strukturen”, 41-2, 46-8.

¹¹ S. Hollis, “Old English Cattle-Theft Charms: Manuscript Contexts and Social Uses”, *Anglia* 115 (1997), 139-64.

¹² CCCC 41 p. 206; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 383 f. 59r; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 190 p. 130; Cotton Tiberius A.iii f. 106r; Rochester, Cathedral Library, MS A.3.5 (*Textus Roffensis*) f. 95r.

¹³ Texts and discussion in Hollis, “Charms”, 146-9; Jolly, “Margins”, 154-6; Grant, 4-9; Cooper, 193-214; Fisher, 72; Storms 210-12; P. Dendle, “Textual Transmission of the Old English ‘Loss of Cattle’ Charm”, *JEGP* 105 (2006), 514-39; J. M. McBryde Jr., “Charms to Recover Stolen Cattle”, *MLN* 21 (1906), 180-83; A. Rabin, “Ritual Magic or Legal Performance? Reconsidering an Old English Charm Against Theft”, in *English Law Before Magna Carta: Felix Liebermann and ‘Die Gesetze der angelsachsen’*, ed. S. Jurasinski et al. (Leiden, 2010), 177-95.

¹⁴ On the thematic suitability of the invocations of Abraham and Job, see Cooper, 199-200.

Rabin suggests that these lines are scannable hypermetrics in Bredehoff's system.¹⁵ The lines scan broadly but imperfectly in Sievers–Bliss, using the CCC 190 version as a template:¹⁶

/ x x / x / x x x x / x x / x
 Jūdēas Crist ahēngan, ðæt heom com to wīte swā strangan.

x x x x / x x / x x x x / x x / x
 Gedydan heom dæda þa wyrrestan,¹⁷ hy þæt drōfe onguldon.

x x x x x / x / x x x x x x ^úx / x
 Hælan hit heom to hearne micclum, for þam hi hyt forhelan ne mihtan.

[The Jews hanged Christ, so that to them came a great punishment. They did to him the worst of deeds; they paid terribly for that. They hid it to their own great harm, because they could not keep it hidden.]

Line 1 lacks alliteration, and its a-verse is unattested in Sievers–Bliss.¹⁸ The a-verse of line 2 is unattested as written above, but the version found in CCC 383 and *Textus Roffensis* has *wyrstan* instead of *wyrrestan*, which renders the verse a regular hypermetric.¹⁹ Lines 2-3 exhibit structural alliteration, and line 3 also features cross-alliteration. Like the concluding section of Charm 12, then, these lines are at least verse-adjacent. Given the stylistic flexibility of their genre, and the fact that two of three lines can be made to scan regularly, they should arguably be treated as verse.

The versification of different portions of the incantation in different theft charms points to the multiplicity of these variants. The sharing of formulae and biblical references across the verse and prose charms make it clear that these texts are related to one another and that these particular biblical themes were considered appropriate to theft rituals, but exact relationships among the charms are hard to determine — is the verse portion above derived

¹⁵ A. Rabin, “Hypermetric Verse in an Old English Charm Against Theft”, *NQ* 56 (2009), 482-5.

¹⁶ Text taken from Hollis, “Charms”, 149.

¹⁷ It is also possible to scan the alliterating verb in this verse and in the subsequent a-verse as stressed. I have not done so because it is not necessary for the creation of a two-stress verse.

¹⁸ All the verses would be attested in Yakovlev's system. Rabin argues this verse is regular, but he scans *Judeas* as having two syllables when it has three (“Hypermetric”, 484). Rabin also argues that if *com* is (irregularly) stressed in the b-verse it would alliterate with *Crist*, but the first stress in the a-verse falls on *Judeas*.

¹⁹ Texts in Hollis, “Charms”, 149.

from the prose in Charms 5 and 10, or vice versa? Nor can we conclude that these various charms are different versions of a ‘single’ charm text, as some scholars have argued.²⁰

Though they share some thematic references and language, significant portions of their respective incantations and ritual actions are notably different from one another. I propose that these texts are related to one another in the way that *The Dream of the Rood*, the Ruthwell Cross inscription, the Brussels Cross inscription, and the anonymous Palm Sunday Homily are related; the way that *Daniel*, *Azarias*, and the Honington Clip are related; or the way the *Soul and Body* poems are related to one another and to several of the Vercelli Homilies.²¹ They constitute a nexus or complex of similar, but not identical, texts, each containing kernels of shared, self-evidently traditional material.

In addition, the use of verse in the ‘prose’ version of the charm, and of significant amounts of prose in Charms 5 and 10, suggests that the putative composers of these charms intentionally created prosimetric texts. The judicious use of verse in these rituals privileges particular portions of a given charm over others, and the charms’ users, scribes, or composers may have intentionally applied verse sparingly in these rituals to highlight essential functions. In Charms 5 and 10, the emphasis is on the recovery of stolen goods: the Bethlehem formula asserting that the location of the owner’s property will become well-known is given prominent versification, and the short prose statement about the Jews’ inability to conceal the death of Christ focuses largely on the fact that the deed came to light. The ‘prose’ version of the charm does not focus on the recovery of property, but on the punishment of the thief,

²⁰ On the multiplicity of the theft charms, see Dendle, “Transmission”, 516; Pettit, II, 276. For the argument that the charms are variants of a single text, see Storms, 210; Grattan and Singer, 183; Rabin, “Performance”, 188.

²¹ On the *Dream of the Rood* tradition, see E. Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition* (London, 2005); A. Conti, “An Anonymous Homily for Palm Sunday, *The Dream of the Rood*, and the Progress of Ælfric’s Reform”, *NQ* 48 (2001), 377-80. On the Honington Clip and *Daniel/Azarias*, see J. Hines, “The *Benedicite* Canticle in Old English Verse: An Early Runic Witness from Southern Lincolnshire”, *Anglia* 133 (2015), 257-77. On the Vercelli Homilies, see S. Zacher, *Preaching the Converted: The Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto, 2009). O’Brien O’Keeffe (23-46) finds similar textual *mouvance* in the various versions of Cædmon’s Hymn.

using a correspondingly briefer *Crux Christi* formula, invoking Old Testament figures to close off the thief's escape routes, and versifying a segment focusing on the fact that the Jews suffered for their concealment of the crucifixion. The two charm-types seek different magical ends, and apply verse accordingly.

The 'prose' charm appears in three legal manuscripts: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MSS 190 and 383, and the *Textus Roffensis*. In CCCC 383 and *Roffensis*, it appears amongst what Wormald calls the 'Edward–Edmund group' of legal texts, a set of codes concerned with property rights and transfers.²² Several scholars have concluded that the inclusion of the charm in these manuscripts is apposite, demonstrating that the cattle-theft charms collectively were legal performances of some kind, perhaps a means of publicly declaring the loss of one's livestock or initiating the authorized search for those livestock.²³ The charms do seem to show an awareness of, or even make allusions to, certain legal practices regarding theft. Charm 9 declares that the practitioner will 'know' his enemy's strength and powers within three nights — the amount of time within which one must declare one's cattle to be stolen in several lawcodes.²⁴ It is also the amount of time (according to II Athelstan, a lawcode also found in *Roffensis* and CCCC 383) for which a thief must be held prior to completing the ordeal, after which all parties will 'know' whether or not he has the strength to bear the wound inflicted by iron or boiling water.²⁵ The 'prose' charms' performance of magic over the footprints of lost livestock, too, echoes the importance of cattle-tracking in legal procedures for apprehending thieves.

²² P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Volume I: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), 232.

²³ Cooper, 194; Rabin, "Performance", 188; Hollis, "Charms", 158. The legal text beginning *Hit becweð* following the 'prose' charm in *Roffensis* and CCCC 383 is almost certainly a separate text, as the charm appears without it in other manuscripts (cf. Grendon, 183; Fisher, 43).

²⁴ C. Hough, "Cattle-Tracking in the Fonthill Letter", *EHR* 115 (2000), 864-92 [875-6]. See VI Athelstan 8; I Edgar.

²⁵ II Athelstan 23.

None of the charms, however, call for witnesses, appeal to or cite legal authority, or make explicit mention of legal rituals for livestock recovery. Charms 5, 10, and 9 lack a legal manuscript context entirely. If the presence of witnesses or authorities were required to give these texts their performative social power, they would be essential to the charms' effectiveness and therefore would certainly be mentioned in the instructions. Indeed, the fact that the illuminator of CCCC 383 crossed out the charm with red ink demonstrates that at least one reader considered the text to be anomalous in a law compilation.²⁶ I suggest that the charms, in their expression of social and divine sanction, were private rituals intended to be performed alongside or in addition to public legal action. Such a theory would explain both the text's circulation with the Edward–Edmund group and its removal by a more orthodox reader. The charms themselves, in their extant forms, are necessarily only individual performances, confidence-enhancing declarations that the user's loss will be remedied — but they are perfectly compatible with the public declarations and cattle-tracking required by legal procedure. The user of a given theft charm may well have pursued supernatural and social recourse in tandem, and the inclusion of the 'prose' charm in lawcodes may show a contemporary awareness of the charms' participation in a wider paralegal framework. Moreover, the charms' interest in judgment and in exiling the thief from human society, discussed below, makes them appropriate ritual additions to this kind of authoritative communal action.

The charms do not, however, merely draw on legal authority; they also contain liturgical echoes. The charms rely on repeated biblical references — to Herod, the Old Testament patriarchs, the Nativity, and the Passion — mentioned prominently in early

²⁶ Dendle, "Transmission", 534.

medieval English offices and homilies for major religious occasions.²⁷ The Advent liturgy, for example, names Bethlehem as the *civitas Dei summi* and declares that Christ *magnificabitur in medio universae terrae* [will be glorified throughout the entire world], an echo of which can be heard in the first two verse lines of Charms 5 and 10.²⁸ The reference to Herod in Charm 9 is best explained by the Epiphany liturgy, in which Herod is unable to conceal the location of the Christ child from the three magi — just as the thief of Charm 9 will be unable to conceal his ill-gotten property.²⁹ The cattle-theft charms are paraliturgical texts informed by public offices, and likely performed by those who also performed the liturgy, though the charms' purpose is practical, secular, and specific. These texts are neither legal pronouncements nor scripts for official worship, but they are imbued with the power of religious, legal, and social norms, deriving some of their magical effectiveness from their invocation of various forms of communal authority. The charms are therefore ideal vehicles for the restitution of rightful property, the reassertion of an individual's social and economic identity, and the punishment of a marginal wrongdoer, and a close stylistic analysis confirms these assessments.

Stylistic Analysis: Charms 5 and 10

Charms 5 and 10 are best described as variants of a single ritual text. The differences between them are minor: the substitution of synonyms in line 1-2, a change in word-order in line 3, a greater use of Latin and shorter instructions in Charm 10. Given how small these changes are, and how little evidence we have for early medieval English scribes taking down texts by dictation, it is unlikely that these charm texts are derived from two different oral

²⁷ H. Barkley, "Liturgical Influences on the Anglo-Saxon Charms Against Cattle Theft", *NQ* 44 (1997), 450-52.

²⁸ Barkley, 451.

²⁹ Barkley, 452. For the suggestion that the theft charms are themselves liturgical, see Introduction.

performances of the ritual, as some scholars have suggested.³⁰ There is, however, more variation between them than among the ‘prose’ charm texts, which are nearly identical and demonstrate clear evidence of textual transmission.³¹ Charms 5 and 10, then, most likely either represent the independent textual transmission of two different versions of the same practice, or are derived from the same exemplar but include substantive variants actively introduced by the scribe(s).³² If the latter, the scribe of CCCC 41 could have shortened the initial prose instructions because he was copying quickly: the handwriting is cramped and difficult to read, there are several errors of tense in the Latin, the line *Crux Christi ab aquilone reducat* is either missing or intentionally omitted, and the instructions in the *Crux Christi* portion are abbreviated (*in west 7 cweð*) in a way that perhaps suggests familiarity with text, and certainly suggests speed.³³ The Harley scribe, on the other hand, could have edited the text with poetic effect in mind. The switch from *geboren* to *acænned* in the first line removes the irregular cross-caesura alliteration on *geboren* and instead creates two half-lines with internal alliteration, a pattern evidently permissible in the other metrical charms. Substituting *geond* for *ofer* would add another *ge-* syllable in a line with two others (*gemærsod, middangeard*), and Charm 5’s word order in line 3 allows for cross-caesura alliteration. The Harley scribe could also have altered the text to include more Old English, translating *per crucem Cristi* as *þurh þa haligan Cristes rode*. The fact that the scribe added *ð* to the endings of two Latin verbs suggests that he was ‘thinking’ in Old English.³⁴ Interesting as these considerations may be, however, it is equally likely that the scribes were simply

³⁰ Roper (*Charms*, 167) notes the unlikelihood of oral transmission, *contra* Dendle, “Transmission”, 539; Fisher, 64-5, 78; Olsan, “Inscription”, 408.

³¹ Dendle, “Transmission”, 529-34; Smallwood, “Transmission”, 14.

³² The phrase ‘substantive variants’ was first put forward by O’Brien O’Keeffe; see also Dendle, “Transmission”, 520-21.

³³ Dobbie, 215; Olsan, “Inscription”, 407-8; Fisher, 105.

³⁴ Dendle, “Transmission”, 522. Dendle claims Charm 10 is more ‘poetic’, without elaboration, though Charm 5 is more metrically regular.

copying two different versions of the charm from two different exempla — which suggests a broad circulation of charm texts in multiple forms, now lost to the manuscript record.

What is most striking about Charms 5 and 10 as variants, however, is how much of the text remains the same in each version. The initial prose instructions say essentially the same thing in different words. Because the instructions will likely never be recited aloud, their word choice is immaterial as long as their content is identical. The spoken incantations, however — whose phrasing and word choice do, presumably, matter — are remarkably similar to one another. The traditional naming formula in line 1a, discussed below, is unsurprisingly identical in both charms, and line 1b is nearly the same. The variation of *geboren* and *acænned* does not change the line's meaning, and both words add ornamental alliteration, but not regular structural alliteration.³⁵ The line's syntax and stress pattern, too, are unchanged. Line 2 is almost exactly the same in both texts — the substitution *geond* for *ofer* is hardly crucial, either to meaning or effect. The collocations *gemærsod ... middangeard* and *monnum mære*, and the resulting echo between *gemærsod* and *mære*, are preserved in both charms. In the climactic line 3, which literally enacts the revelation of the theft, word choice seems to be essential: both versions contain the exact same words. In Charm 10, those words are ordered such that there is no cross-caesura alliteration. That absence suggests that it was more important to the scribe or composer to include the words *swa þyos dæd*, *for monnum mære*, and *(ge)wyrþan*, as in Charm 5, than it was to hold to standard alliterative patterns. Charms 5 and 10 provide compelling evidence that the use of particular phrases, sentence structures, and magical formulae takes precedence over metrical regularity in the charms. Charms 5 and 10 demonstrate a uniformity of practice and a fixity of language.

³⁵ On charm formulae with substitutable positions of this kind, see J. Roper, "Charms, Change, and Memory: Some Principles Underlying Variation", *Folklore (Electronic)* 9 (1998), 51-70; Bozóky, 110.

The prose instructions in both charms require that the user say the charm as soon as he is informed that his livestock have been stolen and before he says anything else in response, highlighted by the polyptoton of *ærest ær* in Charm 5. Doing so sets apart, and preserves the power of, the incantation, but also highlights its urgency. The user must act immediately, both to prevent the thief from getting any further away, and to speed up the process of identifying and banishing an antisocial agent. The charm then launches into a well-known verse formula with a long afterlife in charm texts:

/ x x x x x \acute{x} x / x x / x /
 Bæðleem hātte sēo buruh þe Crīst on ācænned wæs. ?|? (5, l. 1)

/ x x x x / x / x x \acute{x} /
 Bethlem hātta sēo burh ðe Crist on geboren wes. ?|? (10, l. 1)

Variant formulae stating that Christ was born in Bethlehem appear in medieval Latin and German charms, and proliferated widely in Middle English.³⁶ The Bethlehem motif is used for ‘binding’, in multiple senses: most commonly such charms staunch blood flow, but a notable subset stop a thief from escaping.³⁷ The formula on its own may be particularly appropriate to the cattle-theft charms, as Christ was born in a stable. Arthur suggests that by invoking Bethlehem, the charms seek to map a biblical location onto the English landscape, but these charms — unlike the ‘prose’ charm — have little interest in the landscape.³⁸ The text wants the thief’s deed, not his whereabouts, to become famous. The power of a biblical place is brought to bear on an early medieval English problem, but it is universal knowledge of the location that is important, rather than the location itself. The charm draws on the incontrovertibility of messianic biography.

The fact that line 1 in both charms is so evidently traditional may excuse its

³⁶ Roper, *Charms*, 55. For discussion of examples in all three languages, see T. M. Smallwood, “God Was Born in Bethlehem: The Tradition of a Middle English Charm”, *MÆ* 58 (1989), 206-23.

³⁷ Roper, *Charms*, 55; Smallwood, “Bethlehem”, 206, 212.

³⁸ Arthur, “Ecclesia”, 11.

irregularity: none of these half-lines are attested Sievers–Bliss types, and their b-verses are notably heavy. 5.1 lacks cross-caesura alliteration, and 10.1 alliterates only on the second stressed syllable of the b-verse, which generally does not bear alliteration. 5.1a and 5.1b alliterate internally, as in Charm 2 line 10, Charm 4 line 14, and Charm 6a lines 1-3, while the use of *geboren* in Charm 10 does create cross-caesura echoing, however irregular; the lines are not devoid of poetic features. Placing the first stress of the b-verse on the non-alliterating *Crist* removes the possibility for regular alliteration in the line — but what better word to receive syntactic primacy in an Old English half-line? The displacement of *wæs* to the end of the clause also disrupts the metrical pattern of the verse, but the placement options for this second verb are limited. It cannot appear in the a-verse, because the a-verse is not only a traditional charm formula, but also an Old English naming formula. As noted in Chapter 3, the unattested E-type half-line *Bæðleem hatte seo buruh* is one of a number of E-type verses with extended drops, found in the metrical charms and elsewhere, that name a subject with the formula *X hatte se Y*. Magical function and poetic language are prioritized over the construction of a regular long line.

Line 2 employs another poetic formula in the b-verse:³⁹

x x x / x x x x / x \
 Sēo is gemærsod geond ealne middangeard. a|d (5 l. 2)

x x x / x x x x x / x \
 Sēo is gemærsod ofer ealne middangeard. a|d (10 l. 2)

The collocation of *gemærsod* and *middangeard*, as noted above, seems to be important to the text poetically and functionally, highlighting the two most important words in the verse and the condition of glorification the charmer seeks to replicate, with echoing on *ge-* in addition to structural *m* alliteration. Line 3, however, abandons metrical regularity again:

³⁹ Vaughan-Sterling, 197.

x x / x / x / x x / x
 swā þȳos dǣd for monnum mære gewurþe. **hypermetric A|A** (5 l. 3)

x x / / x x / x / x
 swā ðeos dǣd wyrþe for mannum mære. **C|hypermetric A** (10 l. 3)

In Charm 5, alliteration is carried only by the second stressed syllable in the a-verse, while Charm 10 lacks cross-caesura alliteration entirely, featuring double alliteration in the b-verse. These lines are certainly unusual, but they evidently fulfill their practical function. They contain the correct, identical words for rendering the charm's magical project a reality, for magnifying the deed of the thief. Meaning and phrasing are clearly more important than exact metre. The charms are straightforward, prosaic, emphatically clear on both what the incantation will do and how the principle of sympathy will achieve that result.

After the verse incantation, the charm instructs the user to turn to each of the cardinal directions and nonspecifically 'pray' (*gebidan*) — presumably a well-known, popular prayer like the Pater Noster or Creed. The user then requests in Latin that the cross of Christ bring the lost property back from each cardinal direction. This section of the formula is punctuated with the declaration *Crux Christi abscondita est et inuenta est* [the Cross of Christ is lost and is found], St Helena's discovery of the True Cross rendered grammatically and magically present. The fact that the cross was lost and then found makes it uniquely suited to a theft charm: *Crux Christi* formulae, many involving the cardinal directions and/or a reference to the Invention, can be found in numerous medieval Latin, German, Dutch, and Scandinavian theft charms.⁴⁰ All of the Old English cattle-theft charms refer to the Invention, and all but Charm 9 contain *Crux Christi* formulae.

The macaronic introduction of Latin in the *Crux Christi* formulae, in both the Old

⁴⁰ See Pettit, II, 277-80; Storms, 213. For German examples, see Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 536 f. 84v, and 373 f. 9v; for Norse examples, see McKinnell *et al.*, 153-4. See also the Irish *Lorica of Mugron* (text in Grant, 14).

English charms and their analogues, presumably summons the liturgical power of that language in order to invoke Christ directly. Indeed, in referring to the cross, Charms 5 and 10 draw not only on a widespread charm tradition, but also on a mode of ecclesiastically-sanctioned public and private devotion popular in early medieval England. Direct worship of the cross was essential to the liturgical offices for numerous feast days, and was fervently advocated as a mode of both public and private prayer by church authorities.⁴¹ Cross devotion also appears frequently in Anglo-Latin and vernacular texts, including poetry (*The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene* being the most notable examples), hymns, homilies, personal prayers, and medical remedies, as well as in visual art.⁴² The charmer thus brings the full weight of divine, liturgical, and even legal authority — given the repeated, prominent use of written crosses to sanction early medieval English legal documents — to bear on the thief. The charms' specific invocation of the protective and restorative power of the cross in all four directions has its roots in the theological concept of the 'cosmological cross': the cross as symbol of salvation is considered the metaphorical centre of the universe, and defines the spatial dimensions of the world with its points, encompassing the four cardinal directions and stretching up into heaven as well as down into hell.⁴³ The cosmological cross sacralizes all of space, undoing disorder wherever its power extends; the charm seeks to purify the entirety of the world. The charms' instructions to turn and pray to the cross repeatedly are also reminiscent of the Cross Vigil, a practice popular in Ireland and apparently known in early

⁴¹ J. Hill, "Preaching the Cross: Texts and Contexts from the Benedictine Reform", in *Cross and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. K. L. Jolly *et al.* (Morgantown, 2008), 36-48; B. W. Hawk, "*Id est, crux Christi*: Tracing the Old English Motif of the Celestial Rood", *ASE* 40 (2011), 43-73; S. McEntire, "The Devotional Context of the Cross Before AD 1000", in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (New Haven, 2002), 392-403.

⁴² On various artistic examples of cross devotion, see W. O. Stevens, *The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons* (New York, 1904); C. E. Karkov *et al.*, eds, *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2006); S. L. Keefer *et al.*, eds, *Cross and Cruciform in the Anglo-Saxon World: Studies to Honor the Memory of Timothy Reuter* (Morgantown, 2010).

⁴³ T. D. Hill, "The Theme of the Cosmological Cross in Two Old English Cattle Theft Charms", *NQ* 25 (1978), 488-90; McEntire, 396. Cf. Bragg, 12.

medieval England.⁴⁴ This ascetic devotional prayer can be performed to the four directions and is undertaken with arms outstretched, so that the user invokes the cross, and the Passion, with their own body. The charmer pushes the boundary of purified Christian space — space in which a thief, as criminal and sinner, cannot safely dwell — to the ends of the earth. There is nowhere left for the thief to hide. Charms 5 and 10 focus less explicitly on punishment than the ‘prose’ charm texts, but even rituals interested primarily in the recovery of property seek to remove the thief from the Christian community and deprive him of recourse. The assumed necessity of his exile runs through these charms like an undercurrent.

Moreover, the cross was understood as a specifically apotropaic symbol in early medieval England: in remedies, prayers, and saints’ lives, the sign of the cross is an active, physical weapon against evil forces.⁴⁵ The cross is useful for this aggressive purpose because it is multivalent, representing both resurrection for the righteous and judgment for the wicked at Doomsday.⁴⁶ Indeed, two remedies in *Lacnunga* use the phrase *crux mihi vita est, tibi mors, inimici* [to me the cross is life; to you, enemy, death].⁴⁷ The invocation of the cross in these charms separates the righteous from the sinful, invoking the judgment that will inevitably fall upon the criminal in this world and the next. Without ever overtly asking for punishment of the thief, the charms effectively banish him from the in-group of accepted and acceptable persons. The final prose incantation, recalling the Jews’ inability to conceal the

⁴⁴ McEntire, 395. For an Old English example, see Liuzza, “Prayers”, 300; P. Pulsiano, “British Library, Cotton Tiberius A.iii, fol. 59rv: An Unrecorded Charm in the Form of an Address to the Cross”, *ANQ* 4 (1991), 3-5. See also Charm 1.

⁴⁵ Liuzza, “Prayers”, 292; McEntire, 395; D. F. Johnson, “The *Crux Usualis* as Apotropaic Weapon in Anglo-Saxon England”, in *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. C. E. Karkov *et al.* (Woodbridge, 2006), 80-95.

⁴⁶ Hawk, 60; Hollis, “Charms”, 146, 150.

⁴⁷ Harley 585 ff. 182r, 186v.

Crucifixion, implicitly compares the thief with the so-called ‘killers of Christ’.⁴⁸ Like the Jews who ‘betrayed’ Christ to the Romans, the thief is marked as a traitor to humanity, placed beyond redemption. This final prose also repeats exactly the magical and discursive action of the verse: once again, a narrative from salvation history is invoked, the impossibility of concealment and inevitability of magnification is declared, and the theft is described as impossible to hide.

Charms 5 and 10, then, offer important information about the prescriptiveness of charm language, the persistence of metrically-irregular magical formulae, and the urgency of invoking religious authority to exile malefactors, deny them hiding-places, and reassert the primacy and universality of the community of the righteous. A still more intense interest in removing the thief from human society on every level, however, is apparent in Charm 9.

Stylistic Analysis: Charm 9

Unlike Charms 5 and 10, which seek to recover goods that have already been stolen, Charm 9 wavers syntactically between a theft that has already happened and a theft that might occur in future. The injunction to ‘Garmund’ to find, guard, and lead home the user’s livestock, as well as the command that the thief never possess lands because he stole, or is stealing, property, suggest that a theft has already occurred. The opening *ne forstolen ne forholen nanuht þæs ðe ic age* [may nothing of what I own be stolen or concealed], and the concluding lines *se ðe ðis feoh oðfergean þence / oððe ðis orf oðetian ðence* [he who intends to carry off these cattle, or intends to drive away this property] seem to refer to goods that remain in their owner’s possession, and a theft that is as yet only intent. The charm is perhaps

⁴⁸ On ‘Jews’ as a locus for the projection of Christian anxieties, see A. P. Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ann Arbor, 2004); S. Zacher, *Imagining the Jew in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture* (Toronto, 2016).

multifunctional, or seeks both the return of the owner's stolen property and the protection of the rest of his holdings. Also unlike Charms 5 and 10, Charm 9 does not ask for intervention from Christ, saints, or biblical figures, saying only that the user has 'thought of' them.⁴⁹

Garmund is the only potentially supernatural personage from whom help is expected, and the charmer — as in the medical charms — commands him rather than makes a request of him.

Where power resides with Christ, the Cross, and salvation history in Charms 5 and 10, in Charm 9 the primary power rests with the charmer.

Some of what is conventionally lineated as the charm's opening prose can in fact be scanned as verse:⁵⁰

Ne forstolen ne forholen nanuht þæs ðe ic age, þe ma ðe mihte Herod urne drihten.
Ic geþohte sancte Eadelenan and ic geþohte Crist on rode ahangen;

x x x x x / x / \ x x x x / \ x
swā ic þence þis feoh to findanne, næs to ððfeorrganne, ?|d

x x / \ x x x x / \ x
and to wītanne, næs to ððwyrceanne d|d

x x ^úx \ x x x x / \ x
and to lufianne, næs to ððlæðanne. d|d (ll. 1-3)

The opening lines do not lend themselves to scansion because they lack (regular) alliteration and natural caesurae, but even so, the rhyme, assonance, and shared prefixes of *forstolen* and *forholen* and the use of a *ne* structure with an echo in the subsequent *nanuht* make for an aurally emphatic opening declaration. The first scannable, alliterating line begins with an unattested hypermetric with long anacrusis — arguably a more 'prose-like' syntactic construction — before an anaphoric unit of light verses. The opening thus seems to transition from prose to verse in this half-line, moving gradually from an ornamented but unscannable

⁴⁹ Hollis, "Charms", 142.

⁵⁰ Cf. Dobbie, who lineates as prose. Storms (215), Schneider ("Strukturen", 41) and Sandmann (123) lineate as verse, but Storms does so without caesurae, while Schneider and Sandmann alter the text to create a *fornyrðislag* strophe.

opening into regular poetic lines. References to both the Invention and the Passion link Charm 9 to the other texts in the theft charm-complex, recalling the cosmological cross as instrument of salvation, but here they are mentioned only briefly. Charm 9 is more interested in the charmer's individual power — his ability to 'think', to command, and to speak efficacious words, as emphasized by the repeated *ic* — than in the divine allies available to him. The text transforms into incantatory verse precisely as the charmer declares his own future actions. Pairs of alliterating verbs contrast what the charmer wants to happen with what he forbids from happening. When the user is victimized — his survival threatened and the symbol of his social power taken from him — he responds by declaring his own personal strength unequivocally, reasserting magical control.⁵¹

The invocation of Garmund is metrically unusual:

/ \ ǫ× ǫ×
Gārmund, godes ðegen ?|? (l. 4)

Both verses are, of course, irregularly short. Theoretically, the line could be a single a-verse, with a b-verse that has been lost, but there is no gap in sense or failure of grammar to support an emendation. The line is notably similar to Charm 4's hammering, emphatic line 11: *Sæt smið, sloh seax*. In Charm 9, too, the line may simply be unusual, and therefore striking and appropriately incantatory for the commanding of a potentially supernatural force.

Garmund is an attested, but rare, personal name in Old English.⁵² The charm may be referring, as several scholars have suggested, to St Germanus, but the use of the vernacular name 'Garmund' for this saint is unattested.⁵³ Some scholars have argued that Garmund was a

⁵¹ Olsan, "Inscription", 406.

⁵² *Garmund* appears once in the Durham *Liber Vitae*, once in a charter, and inscribed on a ninth-century gold ring. See *PASE s.v.* "Garmund"; D. Rollason *et al.*, eds, *The Durham Liber Vitae: London, British Library, Cotton MS Domitian A.vii*, 3 vols (London, 2007).

⁵³ Cf. Grattan and Singer, 67; Vaughan-Sterling, 189; Hollis, "Charms", 143. The Welsh name for the saint is Garmon. The early medieval Cornish bishopric dedicated to him is referred to as *Germanus* or *Gernun* (Blair, 305), while a prayer in Harley 585 addresses him as *Germane* (f. 191v).

local priest whose name was inserted into the formula,⁵⁴ but given that the name belongs to an alliterating half-line — and that charms generally mark the insertion of individual names with *.N.* or similar — it is unlikely to be either substituted or substitutable. *Gar-mund* literally means ‘spear-hand’ or ‘spear-protection’. Describing this individual as *godes ðegen* renders him both a servant of God and an aristocratic retainer. Indeed, the father of Offa of Angeln is named in *Beowulf* as ‘Garmund’, suggesting the name had heroic connotations.⁵⁵ This first line thus calls up a vision of a Christian fighter, an idealized, sanctified warrior bowing to the practitioner’s demand.⁵⁶ As his name suggests, ‘Garmund’ may act as a kind of metaphorical shield or breastplate, much like the angels and saints invoked by a *lorica*: this protective figure defends the user against further violation of his property and his social self. Such a warrior’s specific identity is arguably far less important than this symbolic one.

Lines 5-7 consist of an anaphoric and alliterative unit:

/ x / x $\overset{\smile}{x}$ x /
 find þæt feoh and fere þæt feoh **B|B**

 x $\overset{\smile}{x}$ x / x / x /
 and hafa þæt feoh and heald þæt feoh, **B|B**

 x x x / x /
 and fere ham þæt feoh. **B**

Line 7 is an unpaired half-line representing the conclusion of the five-part anaphoric unit, which uses echoing and repetition to move the cows from where they are to where they should be.⁵⁷ These lines are ornamentally bound together: line 5 has double *f* alliteration, line 6 has cross-alliteration on *f* and *h*, and then both *h* and *f* sounds appear in line 7.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁴ Abernethy, 162; F. P. Magoun Jr., “Zu den altenglischen Zaubersprüchen”, *Archiv* 171 (1937), 17-35 [26].

⁵⁵ *Beowulf* 1. 1962. Offa’s father is named as *Wermund* and variants thereof in numerous other texts (see Neidorf, *Transmission*, 79). There is no evidence to suggest that Garmund is a pagan reflex (*contra* Schneider, “Strukturen”, 42; Sandmann, 118-19; Grendon, 223; Hollis, “Charms”, 143).

⁵⁶ Foley, 82.

⁵⁷ Roper, “Poetics”, 10; Tornaghi, 457. See also Charm 7 l. 5.

⁵⁸ Foley, 83.

collocation of *habban* and *healdan*, too, appears in other Old English poetry.⁵⁹ All of these half-lines are regular B types. If we choose to stress the potentially alliterating undisplaced finite verb, line 7 would become an unattested but striking hypermetric, a heavy conclusion to this already-emphatic section.

The text then turns its attention to the thief in a second anaphoric unit based, like the charm's opening lines, on antithesis:

x x x x x x / x x x x x / x
 þæt hē nǣfre næbbe landes þæt hē hit oðlǣde, a|a

x / x x x x x x
 ne foldan, þæt hit oðferie, ?|a

x / x x x x x / x
 ne hūsa, þæt hē hit oðhealde. ?|a (ll. 8-10)

Lines 9a and 10a are, like 4a and 4b, too light to be regular, but the repetitive structure and maintenance of alliteration and grammar suggests, again, that nothing is missing. The anaphoric formula is condensing, tightening as it progresses to maintain emphasis and patterning. The things barred to the thief — land, fields, and buildings (or, metaphorically, shelter) — alliterate with the incorrect actions he has performed.⁶⁰ These lines do not simply prevent the thief from hiding livestock, but also prevent him from owning lands and buildings as a direct result of his transgressions. Because he has stolen property that is not his, he is no longer permitted to hold that which he already owns, or to gain more in the future. Just as he has deprived the charmer of security, status, and social identity, the thief is now prohibited from holding any security or status of his own. He is demoted to the ranks of the landless.

⁵⁹ *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Habb-/Haf- ... Heald-”. See also U. Schaefer, “On the Linguistic and Social Development of a Binomial: The Example of *To Have and To Hold*”, in *Binomials in the History of English: Fixed and Flexible*, ed. J. Kopaczyk and H. Sauer (Cambridge, 2017), 322-43.

⁶⁰ Some scholars (Hollis, “Charms”, 144; Fisher, 55-6; Grendon, 183; Olsan, “Inscription”, 412; Cockayne, I, 385) interpret these lines as meaning ‘May he have no lands to lead the livestock to... etc.’, but ‘to which’ is an unattested sense of *þæt*, and the prefix *oð* generally means ‘away from’ rather than ‘towards’. See *BT s.v.* “Oðlǣdan”, “Oðferian”, “Oðhealdan”, “Þæt”. The lines are best interpreted as Dobbie (215) and Griffiths (199) do: ‘May he never have lands, because he leads the livestock away... etc.’

Indeed, the prohibition of *landes ... foldan ... husa* echoes late Old English and Anglo-Latin religious excommunication formulae, which condemn the sinner to be cursed at all times, while doing all actions, and in all locations. One formula curses the victim *on huse 7 on æcere ... on wætere 7 on lande 7 on eallen steden* [in a building and in the field ... on water and on land and in all places].⁶¹ The charm banishes the thief from multiple locations, from all ways of making a free agricultural living, and leaves him not only with nowhere to hide, but also excluded from both the Christian community and the normative socioeconomic hierarchy. Similar language also appears in the property-transfer text that follows the ‘prose’ charm in *Roffensis* and CCC 383. This legal code declares that the speaker will not be deprived of any part of his inherited property: *ne plot ne ploh, ne turf ne toft, ne furh ne fotmæl, ne land ne læse, ne fersc ne mersc, ne ruh ne rum, wudes ne feldes, landes ne strandes, wealtes ne wæteres* [neither plot nor plough-land, neither turf nor enclosed field, neither furrow nor footprint, neither land nor pasture, neither fresh water nor marsh, neither rough land nor open land, woods or open fields, lands or shores, wolds or waters].⁶² The use of an alliterating *ne* structure and shared terms of domestic geography (*land, feld*) in both charm and legal code, two verbal rituals used to prevent another person from taking ownership of the user’s property, suggests that these texts perhaps draw on shared exhaustive, prohibitive language that is authoritative enough to be legal and incantatory enough to be a performative speech act. The charm does not appear to quote any extant religious or legal text. Rather, it draws on apparently well-known cultural ideas about the universal exclusion of the undeserving, and offers a particularly repetitive and incantatory formulation of that

⁶¹ E. M. Treharne, “A Unique Old English Formula for Excommunication from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303”, *ASE* 24 (1995), 185-211 [210-11]; J. D. Niles, “The Problem of the Ending of *The Wife’s Lament*”, *Speculum* 78 (2003), 1107-50 [1124-5]. The closing of paths, mountains, and waterways to the thief in the ‘prose’ charms functions similarly (Hollis, “Charms”, 159).

⁶² Text in Hollis, “Charms”, 157.

discourse adapted for a specific purpose and individual performance.

Line 11 is the culmination and summation of the preceding section:

x x x x / x x / x x x / x
 Gif hyt hwā gedō, ne gedīge hit him nǣfre! e|A

The b-verse does not follow Kuhn's Laws: *hit* and *him* fall outside the clause-initial dip, and should therefore bear stress, but cannot if the line is to scan. As we have seen, however, very few of the metrical charms consistently abide by Kuhn's Laws, suggesting that a strict adherence to metrical grammar was not necessary in these flexible, practical poems. Again, the thief's wrongdoing (*gedo*) is linked by alliteration and echoing to that which is now prohibited to him (*gedige*).

Lines 12-13 return to the individual agency of the charmer:

x x / / x / x x x / x
 Binnan þrym nihtum cunne ic his mihta, C|A


x ^ux x x / x x x / \ x
 his mægen and his mihta and his mundcræftas. A|d

The thief is evidently a powerful enemy agent, given the use of the collocation *mægen* ... *miht*. Some scholars have suggested that thief is in fact a magic-user, employing negative power of the kind condemned in the penitentials, but none of the words used in this verse are necessarily supernatural.⁶³ The thief is certainly dangerous and antisocial whether he uses magic or not, and the charm's admission of his strength only makes the previous and subsequent curses against him more impressive: his 'known' *mægen* and *miht* are implicitly less than the charmer's. The lack of cross-caesura alliteration in line 12 and a lack of adherence to Kuhn's Law in line 12b are perhaps compensated for by the near-rhyme of *nihtum* and *mihta*, the repeated *i* and *n* sounds of the long line (*Binnan þrym nihtum cunne ic his mihta*), the use of a C-type a-verse, and the fact that this line, as noted above, may refer to

⁶³ Grendon, 116; Tornaghi, 446.

a legal procedure. The phrase *cunne ic his mihta* is also clearly the beginning of a repetitive unit that includes the subsequent long line, and lines 12-13 are end-linked on *m* alliteration. Storms and those scholars who use his edition eliminate the phrase *and his mihta* in line 13, considering it accidental repetition, but the half-line is unmetrical without it and there is no reason to assume the repetition of *mihta* is an error.⁶⁴ The repetition creates a chiasmic pattern across the two long lines (*mihta ... mægen ... mihta ... mundcræft*), and elaborates on the central, repeated word on either side of it in a kind of ring pattern. While *miht* and *mægen* are often collocated, *cræft* also appears often with both *miht* and *mægen*, but rarely both at once.⁶⁵ Charm 9 thus collapses multiple sets of collocations into one, with an overlapping word at the centre, the repeated *mihta*. The text intensifies poetic formulae by linking them to one another, subsuming all of the thief's power under that of the charmer.

After this exertion of strength, the charmer puts a second curse on the thief:

x x / \ x x / x  / \ x
Eall hē weornige, swā sýre wudu weornie, d|?

x / x x x / x
swā brēðel seō swā pýstel A (ll. 14-15)

Line 14b has an unattested, heavy metrical pattern, lacks alliteration on the first stressed syllable, and features conventionally disallowed double alliteration. The line does, however, have an internal alliterative pattern (*swa syre wudu weornie*), and carries the *w* alliteration of the long line, however irregularly. Indeed, the placement of the repeated verb *weornian* at the end of each half-line is emphatic and highlights the exact correspondence between the withering of the thief and the withering of dry wood. Line 15 does not follow Kuhn's Laws and is, of course, an unpaired half-line. The addition of the verb *bið* could create a full long

⁶⁴ Cf. Storms, 210; Hollis, "Charms", 144; Jolly, "Margins", 154.

⁶⁵ *DOE s.v.* "Cræft", 1a; *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "Miht ... Mæg-", "Mæg- ... Cræft", "Miht ... Cræft".

line: *swa breðel seo swa bið bystel*.⁶⁶ The emendation would restore alliteration, adhere to Kuhn's Laws, and make the understood verb explicit. This solution is attractive, but may not be necessary: the unamended grammar of the verse is still clear, and allowing it to stand on its own may provide striking emphasis. The near-rhyme of *breðel* and *bystel*, as well as the close repetition of *swa*, renders the correspondence between the thief and the thistle all the more powerful.

There is a fairly well-attested, Latinate cursing tradition in early medieval England. Though homilies and penitentials forbid cursing by laypeople, cursing was a normal and legitimate feature of the Christian world in the form of excommunication, which was often public, dramatic, and involved the participation of the wider congregation.⁶⁷ Liturgical excommunication formulae are often called curses (OE *curs*) and encompass outlawry and other forms of legal banishment.⁶⁸ Numerous charters, wills, and royal proclamations contain curses for those who would flaunt their contents, most of which are related to excommunication formulae, and books and other objects sometimes include similarly Christian curses for thieves.⁶⁹

These lines, however, with their references to dry wood and thistles, do not bear significant resemblance to liturgical curses, which simply promise removal from the church congregation and damnation on Judgment Day. Charm 9's curse is much closer to, for example, the one found in Charm 12, which also uses imagery of the natural world and the

⁶⁶ M. Griffith, pers. comm., 16/04/19.

⁶⁷ Niles, "Problem", 1125-9.

⁶⁸ Treharne, 191; Niles, "Problem", 1123-6.

⁶⁹ B. Danet and B. Bogoch, "Whoever Alters This, May God Turn His Face from Him on the Day of Judgment": Curses in Anglo-Saxon Legal Documents", *JAF* 105 (1992), 132-65; P. Hofmann, "Infernal Imagery in Anglo-Saxon Charters" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of St Andrews, 2008); K. M. Castle, "The Development and Decline of Malediction in the Charters of Anglo-Saxon England" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2016). See also R. H. Bremmer, "An Old English Rhyming Curse", *NQ* 40 (1993), 434-5; *Leechbook II* f. 109r-109v; E. Okasha, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (Cambridge, 1971), no. 114.

verb *weornian*. These lines are also remarkably similar, as Harris has noted, to the Old Norse *Skírnismál*, in which Skírnir threatens to curse the giantess Gerðr for her unwillingness to yield sexually to the god Freyr: *ver þú sem þistill, / sá er var þrunginn / í önn ofanverða* [be like the thistle, that which is crushed at the end of the harvest].⁷⁰ The thistle appears in *Skírnismál* in the context of a curse that banishes Gerðr from the community, subjects her to sexual humiliation, and deprives her of status, and indeed, *Skírnismál* itself belongs to an identifiable tradition of cursing in Old Norse in which the speaker attacks the victim's social utility, prowess, and sexual ability or aristocratic masculine performance.⁷¹ It is possible that Charm 9 imagines a similar punishment for its antagonist. The charm curses the thief to be like natural objects that are waning, dying, or withering — the antithesis of potency and growth. The charm has already sought to deprive the thief of personal power and social utility, but while the 'dry wood' and 'brittle thistle' connote powerlessness or uselessness, they also necessarily indicate a lack of fertility and generation. By depriving the thief (referred to with male pronouns throughout the charm) of property and status, the charmer may also deprive him of some element of his masculinity. Masculinity is correlated with social status in Old English and Anglo-Latin texts: poetic warrior-masculinity is generally reserved for men of noble birth, and in seeking to describe the strength of Cnut's army, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* notes that his forces contained no low-born men and no slaves — that is, the lowest tier of the social hierarchy, persons who not only are themselves

⁷⁰ J. Harris, "Cursing with the Thistle: *Skírnismál* 31, 6-8, and OE Metrical Charm 9, 16-17", *NM* 76 (1975), 26-33; *Skírnismál* st. 31. Harris translates *þrunginn* as 'swollen', but that is not the usual meaning of the word.

⁷¹ See for example Runestick B257; *Buslubæn*; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* st. 31-3; *Atlakviða* st. 31. For discussion, see S. A. Mitchell, "Skírnismál and Nordic Charm Magic", in *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. P. Hermann *et al.* (Turnhout, 2007), 75-94, and "Anaphrodisiac Charms in the Nordic Middle Ages: Impotence, Infertility, and Magic", *Norveg* 38 (1998), 19-42; B. Ø. Thorvaldsen, "The Poetic Curse and Its Relatives", in *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations and Their Implications*, ed. S. Ranković *et al.* (Turnhout, 2010), 253-67; L. L. Gallo, "Persistent Motifs of Cursing from Old Norse Literature in *Buslubæn*", *LF* 18 (2004), 119-46.

property, but who cannot legally own anything.⁷² Wulfstan describes the enslavement of a *þegn* (with concomitant loss of property) and the forcing of a man to watch others gang-rape his wife as equivalent losses of power.⁷³ The humiliation and loss of social utility that the charmer wishes upon the thief may thus also implicitly diminish his ability to perform an ideal form of socially-acknowledged manhood. Images of dying, infertile plants are appropriate curse-elements on multiple levels, implying different, interconnected forms of economic and gendered social violence.

The charm's last two lines are a final gesture of warning and condemnation:

x x x / x / x x / x
 se ðe ðis feoh oðfergean þence e|A

 x x x / x / xx / x
 oððe ðis orf oððētian ðence. e|A (ll. 16-17)

Line 17 lacks cross-caesura alliteration, but *oððe*, *orf*, and *oð-* echo one another. Indeed, the repeated metrical structures (Bliss types e1c and 2A1a(iii) with unusual anacrusis) in both lines, repetition of *oð-* and *þence*, and the chiming syntax of 16b and 17b create a tight poetic unit and a fitting conclusion to the incantation.

Conclusion

The metrical charms are concerned, as previously noted, with establishing boundaries between chaos and wilderness on the one hand and order and 'civilization' on the other. The majority of the charms command, persuade, and punish agents allied with or tainted by the

⁷² *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. A. Campbell and S. Keynes (Cambridge, 1998), 20-21. On slaves' inability to own property, see D. A. E. Pelteret, "Slavery in Anglo-Saxon England", in *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, ed. J. D. Woods and D. A. E. Pelteret (Waterloo, 1985), 117-34. On the perception of slaves as emasculated in early medieval England, see R. M. Karras, "Desire, Descendants, and Dominance: Slavery, the Exchange of Women, and Masculine Power" and E. S. Girsch, "Metaphorical Usage, Sexual Exploitation, and Divergence in the Old English Terminology for Male and Female Slaves", both in *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and D. Moffat (Glasgow, 1994), 16-29, 30-54. D. Wyatt (*Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200* [Leiden, 2009]) also makes this argument, but assumes that the 'warrior masculinity' of the poetic *comitatus* was a historical fact.

⁷³ Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* ll. 82-5, ed. D. Whitelock, 3rd ed. (London, 1963).

‘opposition’, the dangerous (super)natural. Charms 5, 10, and 9, however, implicitly acknowledge the porosity of these boundaries and the constant incursion of the wild upon the ‘civilized’ through their anxious, punitive policing of human spaces. They seek to weed out human ‘traitors’ in the battle against destruction and death — those who engage in actions the community has determined to be inimical to its integrity and safety, and thus illegal and sinful. These three charms take on a moral dimension more specific than the other charms’ general ability to separate the human from the nonhuman. The cattle-theft charms are texts of internal community regulation, using the weight of religious, secular, and poetic authority to purge from society those who have lost the right to remain within its protection. These texts show correspondingly greater legal and liturgical influence: they metaphorically create exiles and excommunicants. The human thief is aligned with disease, sin, and monsters in the fens — another example, perhaps, of the coercive normativity of the metrical charms, and a reading which invites us to examine, rather than dismiss, their violent imagery.

Chapter Six

Performing Christian Victory in Charms 1 and 11

We turn, finally, to Charm 1, often referred to as the *Æcerbot*, a remedy for infertile agricultural land, and Charm 11, an incantation to protect the user on a journey, both physical and spiritual. These texts have much in common with one another, exemplified by the centrality of the names of the evangelists in both rituals. Both charms draw on Scripture, liturgy, and popular prayer, in addition to traditional poetic and magical formulae, to invoke the power of *Christus victor*, Christ in his aspect as vanquisher of evil, and to derive magical potency from belief in God as creator and the Son as redeemer.

Charms 1 and 11 exemplify the essential themes of both the medical and agricultural charms that precede them in this study: the maintenance of divisions between civilization and an entropic, contaminating wilderness; the definition of the human community through exclusion. Perhaps most importantly, both texts revolve around the same defining binary as the medical charms, that of *hal* and *unhal*. Yet, as this chapter will argue, Charms 1 and 11 make more ambitious theological claims than any of the other charms examined here. They suggest that Christian victory and God's covenant with mankind not only empower humanity to triumph over individual malicious agents, but grant the virtuous the right to live in an almost prelapsarian relationship with the created world. These texts are interested in mankind's role not merely in the (super)natural landscape, but in the Christian cosmos, and salvation history at large.

Charm 1: *Æcerbot*

Charm 1 appears on ff. 176r-178r of Cotton Caligula A.vii. The majority of the manuscript is

taken up by the Old Saxon *Heliand*, a heroic verse biography of Jesus, copied in England in the second half of the tenth century. Charm 1 was copied in the first half of the eleventh, and added to the *Heliand* in either the eleventh century or the seventeenth century.¹ Numerous scholars have suggested that there are traces of pagan sun, sky-god, and earth-goddess worship in the ritual.² The text, however, is thoroughly Christian, includes significant liturgical quotation, and, as discussed below, takes Genesis as its central myth and source of power. Other scholars, noting the text's animistic treatment of the personified earth, have suggested that Charm 1 is a syncretic text, merging Christianity with elements of a pre-Christian 'Germanic' folk culture.³ Four hundred years after the conversion, however, any such 'survivals' are fundamentally integrated into a Christian worldview, to the extent that they cannot be identified as pre-Christian or non-Christian with any confidence. Even the animated earth is, here, the creation and subject of God.

The charm is necessarily rooted in early medieval English farming practices, and in a predominantly agricultural economy in which cultivation was essential to personal and social survival. Though some scholars have concluded that Charm 1 contains two rituals, the first for the refertilization of pasture land, and the second for arable land, the text presents its ritual

¹ Ker, no. 137. For a summary of the debate on the binding of the MS, see C. Arthur, "Ploughing Through Cotton Caligula A.vii: Reading the Sacred Words of the *Heliand* and the *Æcerbot*", *RES* 65 (2014), 1-17.

² Storms, 178; Sandmann, 146; Grattan and Singer, 62; Grendon, 220; Bragg, 11; Bonser, *Background*, 432; MacLeod and Mees, 124; Cook, 39; North, *Gods*, 247; K. Schneider, "The Old English *Æcerbot*: An Analysis", in *Sophia Lectures on Beowulf*, ed. S. Watanabe and N. Tsuchiya (Tokyo, 1986), 276-98; B. Rosenberg, "The Meaning of *Æcerbot*", *JAF* 79 (1966), 428-36. On the charm's Christianity, see Arthur, "Ploughing"; J. D. Niles, "The *Æcerbot* Ritual in Context", in *Old English Literature in Context: Ten Essays*, ed. J. D. Niles (Cambridge, 1980), 44-56.

³ Jolly, *Religion*, 9; D. Banham, "The Staff of Life: Cross and Blessings in Anglo-Saxon Cereal Production", in *Cross and Cruciform in the Anglo-Saxon World: Studies to Honor the Memory of Timothy Reuter*, ed. S. L. Keefer et al. (Morgantown, 2010), 279-318 [286]; M. V. Molinari, "Sull' *Æcerbot* anglosassone: Rituale per la benedizione dei campi", *Romanobarbarica* 10 (1988), 293-308 [295]; T. D. Hill, "The *Æcerbot* Charm and its Christian User", *ASE* 6 (1977), 213-21; M. D. J. Bintley, "*Brungen of Bearwe*: Ploughing Common Furrows in Exeter Book Riddle 21, *The Dream of the Rood*, and the *Æcerbot* Charm", in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. M. D. J. Bintley and M. G. Shapland (Oxford, 2013), 144-57; K. Helm, "Der angelsächsische Flursegen", *HBfV* 41 (1950), 34-44.

actions and incantations as a unified chronological sequence.⁴ Repetition of key phrases throughout the charm (*gife, wæstm, rice, nytte, gefyllan, fold, fira, fod, growende* etc.) strongly suggests that Charm 1 is a single text, encompassing both pastoral and arable fields in its curative potency. Many of these arable fields would have been shared, and by the eleventh century ‘open’ fields (large areas communally cultivated in long strips without demarcation between one individual’s strip and another) were popular in some parts of England.⁵ The charm would presumably have been performed whenever the community was collectively prepared to resume agricultural work on a problematic area of land.⁶ The rituals must take place, however, at a time when ploughing is possible, most likely in autumn during the winter wheat sowing or spring during the barley sowing, the two unrivaled major crops of early medieval England.⁷ The text itself mentions both crops in its bid for effectiveness through exhaustiveness. Fields would be rotated, so presumably the charm seeks to restore the field permanently, rendering it fertile for any and all crops planted there in future.

The charm is an antidote for farmland that has been rendered infertile specifically through malevolent supernatural interference — here described as *dry* and *lyblac*, both words used to describe demonic and anti-Christian magic and magical practitioners in Old English biblical narratives, saints’ lives, homilies, and penitentials.⁸ Both words suggest the array of dangerous forces inherently opposed to Christianity that populated early medieval English thought, with a particular emphasis on malicious human agents who align themselves with

⁴ For the argument that the text contains two rituals, see Storms, 180; Banham, “Staff”, 284; Bragg, 10.

⁵ Banham and Faith, 68-9; on open fields, see N. J. Higham, “Introduction”, in *The Landscape Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. J. Higham and M. J. Ryan (Woodbridge, 2010), 1-22. Open fields would still have had marked bounds (Banham and Faith, 67; Fowler, 142-55).

⁶ Niles (“Ritual”, 48), Sandmann (146), and Rosenberg (434) argue these rites were performed annually. However, as Banham notes (“Staff”, 288), there is no evidence for annual fertility rites performed before the rise of Plough Sunday and Monday rituals in the later medieval period.

⁷ Banham and Faith, 58; Niles, “Ritual”, 47.

⁸ *DOE* s.v. “Dry”; *BT* s.v. “Lybb”, “Lyblac”; *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Lyblac”.

devils. The straightforward attribution of agricultural failure to the interference of such persons suggests that prohibitions against the practice of witchcraft in Old English penitentials may not have simply been survivals of older canon law and may, instead, have reflected actual belief in tenth- and eleventh-century England. Charm 1 is concerned, like the theft charms, with those persons who align themselves with the forces of chaos, destruction, and sin, thereby jeopardizing the survival of the human community. It is also concerned, like the medical charms, with sickness caused by incursion. *Lyblac* — derived from *lybb* [drug, poison] — is described in the second verse portion of the charm as being *geond land sawen* [sown throughout the land]. The charm uses sexual imagery to describe the desired penetration of the feminized earth by crops, but the infertile fields of Charm 1 have been ‘entered’ instead by magic and poison. There is a conceptual sympathy between the bodies of sickened persons and the body of the poisoned land, and the fear of violation that defines Old English medical thought evidently also extends to an understanding of the proper state of the domesticated natural world.

The feminized earth of Charm 1 is, however, a fickle and unpredictable ally, liable to be recalcitrant and unproductive. Arable farming was precarious during this period: it is inherently risky and difficult work, at the mercy of climate, weather, soil quality, seed failure, consumption by animals, weeds, disease, rot, and other dangers, and in a largely subsistence economy such failures lead inevitably to human death.⁹ An agricultural field is, by its nature, land that has been carved out and demarcated from uncultivated space, but (as noted in Chapter 4) such domesticated natural resources can easily ‘return’ to the wilderness from which humanity has claimed them. The feminine earth of Charm 1, like the bees of Charm 8 or even the pregnant woman of Charms 6a-6c, must be magically coerced and returned to a

⁹ Fowler, 207-8.

useful role in a system of productivity defined by human, rather than animal or ecosystemic, needs. Charm 1 is an exertion of righteous control by the human community over the feminine earth God created for their use. And it is, indeed, a communal exercise, requiring significant preparation, more than a day of performance time, and numerous participants.¹⁰ The text provides a dramatized object lesson establishing the place of the Christian community in the earthly landscape.

Christian Resonances in Charm 1

The ritual action of Charm 1 draws on a significant amount of scriptural imagery. Genesis is the underlying myth of Charm 1, from which it draws its power.¹¹ The repeated phrase *Crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram* [Grow and multiply and fill the earth] is a biblical commandment, given by God first to Adam and Eve upon their creation (Genesis 1:28), and then to Noah and his sons after the flood (Genesis 9:1-7). These two iterations frame a covenantal narrative: Adam is given the earth for his use; the ground becomes cursed after the Fall; after the Flood, God promises Noah that he will never curse the earth again, and that seedtime and harvest shall not cease.¹² The repeated invocation of Genesis serves both to reassert the covenant into which God and man have entered, and to reintegrate the land into God's plan for the created world, in which the earth regularly yields crops for human use.¹³ The central importance of the number four in Charm 1's opening ritual explicitly and implicitly recalls the four Gospels, the four directions, the four elements, the four rivers of

¹⁰ Niles, "Ritual", 45; Storms, 179; M. Ward, "Hard Questions About Hard Woods: The Exclusions in the Old English *Æcerbot* Charm", *LH* 40 (2019), 5-14 [6].

¹¹ Hill, "User", 215; Niles, "Ritual", 51-4.

¹² Niles, "Ritual", 54. On the importance of the covenant in early medieval English literature, see D. Anlezark, *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 2006), 174-240. On the importance of both past and future salvation history to the present relationship between man and God, see R. R. Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto, 2009), 24.

¹³ Hill, "User", 215; Niles, "Ritual", 54.

Paradise, the four sacred liquids of biblical imagery (honey, milk, oil, and wine), the four seasons, and the four letters in the name of Adam, a ‘system of quaternities’ known in early medieval England.¹⁴ The association of the cross, and thus the four buried crosses of Charm 1, with the Tree of Life and the four rivers of Paradise was also known in early England.¹⁵ The four sods from four corners of the field may also recall the creation of Adam in II Enoch 30, in which Adam is created at the centre of the world out of four sods brought from the four corners of the earth, sprinkled with water from the rivers of Paradise.¹⁶ The ritual use of milk and honey recalls the land flowing with those substances promised by God to the Israelites, another iteration of the divine covenant of fruitfulness.

Scholars have noted these various scriptural references and the importance of the covenant and creation to Charm 1, but no study has yet examined the most ideologically ambitious aspect of this material. Charm 1 does not merely invoke God’s gift to man, but in fact seeks to undo the Fall in miniature.¹⁷ The ‘planting’ of the crosses, symbols of the Tree of Life and rivers of Paradise, recreates Eden in an English field. The use of the four sods in conjunction with the phrase *Crescite et multiplicamini*, and the repeated references in the verse to God in his aspect as creator of earth and heaven, suggests that the particular resonance of this phrase is not God’s promise to Noah, but his gifting of Eden to Adam at the beginning of creation. Supporting this suggestion, too, are the numerous parallels — many of which have not been previously noted by scholars — between the text of Charm 1 and *Genesis A*. The charm includes numerous phrases, formulae, and collocations that appear in

¹⁴ Hill, “User”, 215-16; Pollington, 478; Jolly, “Tapping”, 65. See for example Byrhtferth’s Diagram, in Oxford, St John’s College, MS 17 f. 7v and London, British Library, Harley MS 3667 f. 8r.

¹⁵ Niles, “Ritual”, 51; Hill, “User”, 216; Bonser, *Background*, 434.

¹⁶ Hill, “User”, 217.

¹⁷ On returns to a prelapsarian state in early medieval English literature, see Brooks, *Creation*. Bede notes in *In Genesis* that the submission of nature to saints is evidence of the prelapsarian first creation (94), while barrenness only occurs in nature because of the Fall (135).

multiple Old English poems, but overlaps by far most significantly with *Genesis A*. The following appear in both texts: *wæstm ... woruldnytte, fyllan ... fold, wexen ... wriden, se ðe ðas woruld gesceop*, and *gesceop ... heofon and eorþan*, as well as the popular phrases *heofonrices weard* and *fæst geleaf*.¹⁸ Charm 1 draws on imagery of earthly abundance made for mankind that also seemed appropriate to the composer of *Genesis A*, and that evidently recalls the fruitfulness of the prelapsarian world. Charm 1 metaphorically rebuilds Paradise, and taps into the unlimited potential of the harmonious relationship between man and earth before the Fall.

Moreover, in asking that God grant (*geunnan*) the earth flourishing fields, and commanding the earth to be *growende in Godes fæþme* [growing in God's embrace], the charmer places the responsibility for making the earth yield *fodres fira cinne* [food for mankind] with God, not with man. This is an undoing, to a certain extent, of Adam's curse to eat of the earth only through toil (Genesis 3:17). The land is made fertile again through the benevolence of God, not the labour of mankind. Christ's victory over the Devil redeemed the Fall, as the references to Christ and Mary, and the texts of the *Magnificat* and the four Masses recited as part of Charm 1, remind its audience. Therefore *trumne geþanc* [certain thought] and *fæste geleafan* [firm belief] in God as creator and Christ as saviour are sufficient to encourage a small portion of the earth to briefly return to a prelapsarian relationship with mankind. To this end, the charm text also makes significant use of the liturgy and of liturgical objects, including incense, holy water, salt, and oil. The *Tersanctus*, *Pater Noster*, *Benedicite*, and *Magnificat* seem to have been selected not only for their ideological power and their

¹⁸ *Genesis A* ll. 112-3, 543, 668, 960, 1532-4, 1903. *Fyllan fold* also appears in *Christ* ll. 952, 974; *The Phoenix* ll. 653-4; *Death of Edgar* l. 18. *Weaxen ... wridan* also appears in *Beowulf* l. 1741. God is shaper (*gesceop*) of heaven and earth in *Resignation* l. 2 and several homilies (*DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "Gesceop ... Heofon ... Eorþ"), with similar phrasing in *Cædmon's Hymn* ll. 5-6 and *Beowulf* l. 97. Three of the charm's six similarities to *Genesis A* are noted by Molinari, 305.

familiarity to both lay and clerical audiences from the Mass, but also because of their references to fertility, fruitfulness, bread, and plenty.¹⁹ This selection of prayers invokes God as maker of the covenant and creator of Eden, and Christ as redeemer — the essential ideological elements of Charm 1's bid for agricultural healing.

The charm also has several relevant liturgical analogues. A significant number of prayers for the blessing of bread, new fruits, milk and honey, seed, and infertile fields appear in Anglo-Latin liturgical books and missals. These prayers draw on the same doctrinal concepts that inform Charm 1. God is invoked in his aspect as creator of the world, as the giver of the gift of fruitfulness to man, and as the holder of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and their descendants.²⁰ The fact that Charm 1 involves prayers for fertility and a demarcation of the bounds of the field also suggests a passing similarity to early medieval English Rogationtide processions, in which the congregation of a given church would make a penitential procession through the countryside and pray for deliverance from sin and for flourishing crops.²¹ One anonymous Rogationtide homily uses language notably similar to Charm 1: *nu ealle eorðan wæstmas growende syndon and blowende geopenade and þæt ure bileofan syn growende and gebletsode to hælo ures lichoman and sawle* [now all the earth's crops are growing and are opened, blooming, and therefore our belief may be growing and blessed for the health of our body and soul].²² The phrase *eorðan wæstmas* and the pairing *growende ... blowende* suggest that Charm 1 draws on a set of vocabulary used for invoking

¹⁹ L. K. Shook, "Notes on the Old English Charms", *MLN* 55 (1940), 139-40.

²⁰ See for example the Leofric Missal, ed. N. Orchard (London, 2002), 278, 344, 416-20; the Missal of Robert Jumièges, ed. H. A. Wilson (London, 1896), 279-82; Pontifical of Egbert, ed. H. M. J. Banting (London, 1989), 123-4; Claudius Pontifical I, ed. D. H. Turner (Chichester, 1971), 63-5, 72. For discussion, see Banham, "Staff", 300-6. For similar prayers from the Durham Collectar, see K. L. Jolly, "Prayers from the Field: Practical Protection and Demonic Defense in Anglo-Saxon England", *Traditio* 61 (2006), 95-147.

²¹ Blair, 488; Banham, "Staff", 291-6; J. Kramer, *Between Earth and Heaven: Liminality and the Ascension of Christ in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Manchester, 2014), 177. On Rogation, see M. B. Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), 191-200; Gittos, *Liturgy*, 134-9.

²² J. Bazire and J. E. Cross, eds, *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies* (Toronto, 1982), no. 8.

growth and abundance in the landscape, both literally and metaphorically, while the use of the words *hælu* or *hal* in both texts reinforces the conceptual sympathy between inviolate body and sanctified land. Charm 1's use of blessings and holy water on the four sides of the field also recalls parts of the liturgy for the consecration of a churchyard, in which the celebrant performs the required ritual in each of the cardinal directions.²³ Both of these prescribed sets of actions and prayers seek to delimit, sacralize, and civilize natural space, reclaiming it for human use and reinforcing its bounds. A similar paraliturgical blessing for barns and crops in Vitellius E. xviii uses crosses and hallowed bread to demarcate the four corners of the barn, sacralizing agricultural space like a church.²⁴ Charm 1 either is designed to evoke liturgical rituals or draws on a set of cultural practices made available through tenth- and eleventh-century liturgy and liturgical experimentation. The text seeks God's authority through legitimate channels, the better to invoke the covenant, briefly reverse the Fall, and bring the power of Christian creation to bear on the recalcitrant earth.

The similarities between Charm 1 and these liturgical rites, however, should not be overstated. Though the charm has clear affinities with the prayers and masses found in Anglo-Latin missals, and with the consecration liturgy, it shares almost no language or imagery with them. Genuine similarities of language can be found in a single prayer in the Durham Collectar that refers to *eorþan wæstma*, and in the Rogationtide homily cited above, but there is no evidence that Charm 1 quotes from these texts or that they share a source. No prayers for fertility are found in extant Rogation liturgies.²⁵ The use of prayers like the *Tersanctus* and the *Benedicite* might best be described as 'off-label', as these prayers were not designed

²³ Gittos, *Liturgy*, 47-9; Jolly, "Tapping", 66-8.

²⁴ Cotton Vitellius E.xviii f. 15v. For a similar thirteenth-century ritual, see Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 385, p. 301. See also Storms, 182; Banham and Faith, 63-4; Jolly, "Tapping", 68; Arthur, 'Charms', 157.

²⁵ Banham "Staff", 291.

to be fertility texts and the charm makes use of them in a way in which they were not originally intended. Charm 1 is a unique, practical, devotional exercise rooted in Christian myth and making use of liturgical quotation to give authoritative sanction to its pragmatic purpose: the integration of a single field or set of fields in England at the turn of the millennium into a schema of creation and salvation history encompassing the entirety of time. A stylometric analysis of Charm 1 highlights this reenactment of prelapsarian creation, this concern with boundaries, and the anxiety provoked by those forces and agents who inhibit human use of the earth, whether through active malice or uncooperative malfunction.

Stylistic Analysis

Charm 1's opening prose instructions describe a ritual of high complexity, but its elements often have relatively clear symbolic meaning. The four sods taken from the four sides of the land not only recall the body of Adam, but simultaneously serve to reassert the boundaries of the field itself and create easily-handled synecdochical representations of the earth.²⁶ The gathering of the milk of all livestock on the land and representative pieces of all the trees and known plants growing thereon is an exhaustive magical gesture. *Glappan*, the meaning of which is unrecoverable, is presumably excluded because it is agriculturally undesirable and therefore its fertility should not be increased.²⁷ The exclusion of *heardan beaman* [hard trees] cannot be taken to refer to hardwood as opposed to softwood trees, as there is no evidence that such a distinction was made in the early medieval period.²⁸ Instead, the performer may be taking pieces only of 'softer' young trees, whose new growth could serve a sympathetic

²⁶ Bragg, 11; Kramer, 180-81; Hill, "User", 215; Nelson, "Wordsige", 60; Pollington, 478.

²⁷ Ward, 7.

²⁸ *Contra Storms*, 181-2; Bragg, 11; Schneider, "Analysis", 277; Rosenberg, 428; Grendon, 220.

function for the infertile ground.²⁹ The use of oil, honey, yeast, and milk recalls the four holy liquids of the Bible, with a common fermenting substance (yeast) substituted for an expensive one (wine).³⁰ The ritual anointing of the land brings the power of divine abundance to bear directly on the earth, transforming it into both the ‘land flowing with milk and honey’ of Exodus and a replica of Eden.

The application of holy water to the gathered plant and animal material is a baptism of the land and the natural life that depends on it, bringing the previously uncooperative and malfunctioning earth into a state of grace.³¹ The cleansing of ‘sin’ from the land is another undoing of the curse of Adam, another return to prelapsarian sanctity. The recitation of four Masses over the sods is a similar act of purification, and the turning of their green sides towards the altar is an encouragement of correct growth. The burial of the four crosses inscribed with the names of the evangelists replaces the poison and witchcraft sown in the land with Christianity, permeating the earth with the power of the gospels.³² The act literalizes the charmer’s intent to *gefyllan þas foldan mid fæste geleafan* [fill the earth with firm belief].

The charmer then turns to the east, direction of the rising sun and symbol of new growth, and declares:

/ \ x / x / x x x x / x
 Ēastweard ic stande, ārena ic mē bidde, A|?
 x x x x x / x ū x x x x / x / x
 bidde ic þone mæran domine, bidde ðone miclan drihten, **hypermetric A types**

²⁹ Jolly suggests light branches (*Religion*, 7). See Niles (“Ritual”, 50) for the suggestion that trees are excluded because they are agriculturally undesirable. Ward (11) suggests the text should read *heorrbeaman*, which she translates as ‘trees in a significant position’. However, the *DOE* does not accept this meaning of *heorr*.

³⁰ Hill, “User”, 215-18. On the connection between these liquids and the Evangelists, see T. D. Hill, “An Irish-Latin Analogue for the Blessing of the Sods in the Old English *Æcerbot Charm*”, *NQ* 15 (1968), 362-3.

³¹ Ward, 7-8.

³² Vaughan-Sterling, 191; Niles, “Ritual”, 51; Arthur, “Ploughing”, 12. The evangelists appear in numerous medical remedies. The *Crux Matheus* formula in particular appears in Harley 585 ff. 136v, 140v, 148r-148v, 174v; Cotton Caligula A.xv, f. 140r.

x x x x x / \ x ☺ \ x /
 bidde ic ðone hāligan heofonrīces weard ?|E (ll. 1-3)

The charmer declares his action as he performs it, with a line featuring syntactic parallelism between verses, chiming verb endings, and enjambed repetition of *bidde* between lines 1 and 2, beginning a brief anaphoric unit. Line 1b is technically unattested in Sievers–Bliss scansion because of foot-division placement in type 1A*1c, but is acceptable in all other ways and evidently an essential declaration. The word *are* is polysemous, referring to mercy, grace, earthly prosperity, and honour, all of which the performer is arguably seeking.³³ The short anaphoric unit of lines 2 and 3 is based, too, on variation of multiple epithets for God, employing a popular formula (*heofonrices weard*) and collocation (*mære ... micel*),³⁴ cross-alliteration in line 2, and an E type in line 3b to conclude the unit. Line 3a is unattested in Sievers–Bliss scansion because it contains one more unstressed syllable than is generally allowed in light D type verses, but that extra syllable is required for the repetition of the formula *bidde ic ðone*. The lines are seamlessly macaronic: the Latin *domine* is easily integrated into both the metre and the alliterative scheme. The charm invokes both the God of scripture and public worship (*domine*) and the God of vernacular devotion (*drihten*). This in-text glossing makes authoritative religious Latin intelligible to a popular audience, not unlike the word-for-word translation embedded in the charm’s initial *Crescite* quotation. A second three-line unit beginning with *bidde* occurs in lines 4-6, with the charm returning to the verb-final construction of line 1, as opposed to the verb-initial construction of lines 2-3. Line 4 serves as the closing of an envelope pattern in the opening lines as well as the first element of

³³ DOE s.v. “Are”.

³⁴ *Heofonrices weard* appears in *Genesis, Exodus, Daniel, Andreas, Dream of the Rood, Elene, Guthlac A, Juliana, Judgment Day II, Cædmon’s Hymn*, and others (DOE Corpus, Simple Search, “Heofonrices weard”). The collocation appears in *Daniel, Juliana, Beowulf*, and the Paris Psalter, among others (DOE Corpus, Boolean Search, “Mær ... Micel/Micl-”).

a quintuple set of invocations:

$\begin{array}{ccccccc} / & x & x & / & x & & x & / & \backslash & x \\ \text{eor}\ddot{\text{d}}\text{an ic bidde} & & & & & & \text{and upheofon}^{35} & & & \mathbf{A|d} \end{array}$

$\begin{array}{ccccccc} x & x & / & x & & / & x & \overset{\smile}{\times} & x \\ \text{and } \ddot{\text{d}}\ddot{\text{a}} \text{ s}\ddot{\text{o}}\text{þan} & & & & & & \text{sancta Marian} & & \mathbf{a|A} \end{array}$

$\begin{array}{ccccccc} x & \overset{\smile}{\times} & x & / & & x & / & \backslash & x \\ \text{and heofones meaht} & & & & & & \text{and he}\ddot{\text{a}}\text{hreced} & & \mathbf{B|d} \text{ (ll. 4-6)} \end{array}$

Here the charm introduces the ‘earth and heaven’ collocation that appears elsewhere in the text (*heofonrice ... eorþrice, þe ðas heofon gesceop and ðas eorþan*) with a formula found in Old English, Old Norse, Old Saxon, and Middle High German verse.³⁶ With another macaronic insertion, the charm invokes Mary, the miraculous receiver of heavenly fertility and thus perhaps an ideological model for the misbehaving feminine land. Line 6 imagines God as the mighty lord of a high hall. The idea of the ‘world-hall’ is a particularly Old English iteration of Christian cosmology, found, for example, in *Genesis A*: God commands that a *heofontimber* [heavenly timber structure] be built amidst the waters, and the earth comes into being *under fæstenne folca hrofes* [under the stronghold of the people’s roof].³⁷ If heaven is a hall, God is a lord, and those who dwell on the earth are his retainers and dependents, to whom he owes a duty to provide food and material prosperity.

If the opening lines summon heavenly power, the remainder of the first verse section employs that power to awaken the earth:

$\begin{array}{ccccccc} x & x & x & x & x & / & x & & x & \overset{\smile}{\times} & / & x \\ \text{þæt ic m}\ddot{\text{o}}\text{te þis gealdor} & & & & & & \text{mid gife drihtnes} & & & \mathbf{a|C} \end{array}$

³⁵ Resolution is suspended here and in line 6b.

³⁶ *Andreas* l. 798; *Christ III* l. 967; *Heliand* l. 2886; *Völuspá* st. 3; *Drymskviða* st. 2; *Wessobrun Prayer* l. 2 (text in Braune, 77). Noted by Schneider, “Analysis”, 285; Sandmann, 148. It also appears on the Ribe Runestick (MacLeod and Mees, 124-6). See L. Lönnroth, “*Iqrð fannz æva né upphiminn*: A Formula Analysis”, in *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. U. Dronke et al. (Odense, 1981), 310-27.

³⁷ *Genesis A* ll. 146, 153. As Neville notes (*Representations*, 63-4, 146-7), ‘roof’ imagery also appears in *Cædmon’s Hymn* and Bede’s *In Genesim*.

/ x x / x x / x x /
 tōðum ontȳnan þurh trumne geþanc, A|B

x / x x / x x x ^úx \ x
 āweccan þās wæstmas ūs tō woruldnytte, A|d

x / x x / x x / x x / x
 gefyllan þās foldan mid fæste gelēafan, A|A

^úx x x x / \ x x / x x /
 wlitigigan þās wancgturf, swā se wītega cwæð ?|B

x x x x / x x / \ x x x / \ x
 þæt se hæfde āre on eorþrice, se þe ælmyssan ?|d

/ x / \ x / x / x
 dælde dōmlīce drihtnes þances. D|A (ll. 7-13)

The alliteration of *gealdor* and *gife* is appropriate, suggesting that the recitation of this secret knowledge directly merits God’s gift of abundance. The word *gife* is repeated in line 37, emphasizing God’s generous mercy and his original gift given to mankind at creation. The collocation *þurh ... þanc* is also found in other Old English verse, and the charm’s use of this kind of poetic vocabulary distinguishes it from its simpler liturgical analogues.³⁸ The text describes the act of speaking the *gealdor* in a mechanistic, defamiliarizing way: *tōðum ontȳnan* [to open with teeth]. The charm’s spoken words are torn open by the charmer’s mouth, an assertion of strength and an imaginative exaggeration of the difficulty of performing such an incantation — a difficulty which, perhaps, contributes to its efficacy and potency. The text’s description of its own promised effects uses three collocations found in *Genesis A* (*wæstmas ... woruldnytte, fyllan fold, fæst geleaf*) and three parallel a-verses that constitute a set of synonymous poetic variations, with extra echoing on *l* in line 10 (*aweccan þas wæstmas, gefyllan þas foldan, wlitigigan þas wancgturf*). The fact that line 11a is an unattested A type is due to its accommodation of this unusual form of *wlitigian*, which may be an error. This line is also the third part of a tripartite unit, and accommodates both a *hapax*

³⁸ *Andreas* l. 670; *Azarias* l. 191; *Christ II*. 315; *Apostles’ Creed* l. 50; *Genesis B* ll. 532, 631, 1078. See Cavell, *Weaving*, 247.

compound and a poetic verb that echoes the subsequent *witega*. The irregular anacrusis in line 12a's D type, too, serves to accommodate essential grammatical elements.

These lines contribute to the charm's prelapsarian project: God's agency, the speaking of secret knowledge, and the expression of belief displace evil forces and create earthly abundance without human labour. The filling of the field with belief is particularly important. Edenic abundance can only be created through correct Christian dedication, because the community only deserves a recreation of Eden if its members have been redeemed through their belief in God as creator and Christ as saviour. Belief renders the community party to the covenant that keeps the earth fertile. When nature obeys God, it is civilized, useful, and in harmony with man, conceptually distant from the wilds to which disease agents must be banished. The invocation of David and Psalm 111, *Beatus vir*, in lines 12-13 sets up the subsequent gift of seeds to beggars as a gesture of generosity meriting a commensurate reward of prosperity and grace.³⁹ The multivalent word *are* appears again, but the *heofonrice* of line 3 is changed in line 13 to the *eorþrice*: God's rule of heaven permits our prosperity on earth, just as the *trumne geþanc* of the charmer becomes the gracious *þanc* of God. A cluster of D types at the end of the verse only enhances these important transitions.

The charm then offers a second set of ritual instructions. Turning in the direction of the sun — and taking the four sods before dawn and returning them before sunset — is an act of alignment with the cosmos, the motion of the earth, and the passing of time and natural cycles of the seasons.⁴⁰ The instruction to pray facing east and turn *sunganges* also appears in a *Leechbook* remedy, reinforcing the conceptual overlap between ailing bodies, ailing land, and the 'correct' relationship between mankind and God's creation.⁴¹ In addition to making

³⁹ Shook, 139; Niles, "Ritual", 52-3; Hill, "User", 219-20.

⁴⁰ Barley, 72; Pollington, 415.

⁴¹ *Leechbook I* f. 44r.

gestures of humility (bowing nine times, lying on the earth) and generosity dependent on social disparity (gifting seed to beggars), enforcing hierarchies both cosmic and earthly, the leading practitioner must hallow the plough with exorcistic substances to prepare it for its union with the land.⁴² The image of the seed-laden plough moving forward into the feminine ground is straightforwardly one of insemination.⁴³

Invoking the explicit femininity of this sexually-receptive earth, the second verse portion of the charm begins with one of the most famously opaque lines in Old English literature:

/ x / x / x / x / x
 Erce, Erce, Erce, eorþan mōdor, **hypermetric|A**

 x x x x x / \ x / x / x
 geunne þē se alwalda, ēce drihten ... **d|A** (ll. 14-15)

These invocatory lines form a plurilinear unit of vocalic alliteration, with extra alliteration on the undisplaced finite verb in line 15a. The address is to ‘the mother of earth’, potentially so called because she is envisioned as the earth’s animating force. Growth and abundance is ‘granted’ (*geunnan*) to the earth; she does not produce it herself. Previously dysfunctional and infertile, now baptized and cleansed of sin, she may be returned to her correct position as the subordinate of the eternal All-Ruler.

The most obvious literary question posed by these lines, however, is the meaning of the word *erce*, which has been the subject of perhaps more scholarly debate than any other crux in the metrical charms. The word is not recognizably Old English, and no definitive interpretation of it has yet been put forward. Some scholars have suggested that the word is a gibberish invocation.⁴⁴ If this is the case, however, its derivation remains in question. There is

⁴² Bintley, 153. This instrument could have been an ard, a heavy plough, or, by the eleventh century, a mouldboard plough (Banham and Faith, 45-9; Fowler, 204; Higham, “Introduction”, 18-19).

⁴³ Banham “Staff”, 290; Kramer, 183; Griffiths, 187; Pollington, 478; Hill, “User”, 214-15; Bragg, 18.

⁴⁴ Ellis Davidson, *Gods*, 114; Arnovick, 41; Grendon, 220; Beechy, *Poetics*, 87.

perhaps some formal similarity to Middle English *herken* [hark, hearken], but the putative Old English **hercian* is unattested. John D. Niles suggests the word is a corruption of the Latin *ecce*, yet it is not apparent why — and how, from a phonetic standpoint — an Old English incantation would transform *ecce* to *erce*, and the use of a significant amount of Latin elsewhere in the charm suggests this solution is not sensitive to the text’s macaronic nature.⁴⁵ Maria Vittoria Molinari argues the word is a deformation of the dative *æcre* [field].⁴⁶ A dative, however, renders the line grammatically meaningless. Numerous scholars conclude instead that *Erce* is the name of a pre-Christian earth goddess, but the various etymologies proposed for such a name are tenuous.⁴⁷ Moreover, there is only minimal evidence for the worship of goddesses in pre-Conversion England, and *Erce* or any similar names are unattested.⁴⁸ Even if such a deity existed, her unique survival four hundred years later in a liturgically-inspired setting seems unlikely.

Some scholars have suggested that *erce* is Irish. However, the solutions proposed by Audrey Duckert and others require a significant degree of postulated corruption and alteration, and often the meanings of the suggested Irish terms do not suit the Old English text.⁴⁹ *Erc* is a name-element in some Old Irish inscriptions, but would never take the form *Erce* as a vocative or nominative, and its various meanings are inappropriate for Charm 1.⁵⁰ It

⁴⁵ Niles, “Ritual”, 55.

⁴⁶ Molinari, 301.

⁴⁷ Storms, 185; Niles, “Ritual”, 55; Bragg, 18; Jolly, *Religion*, 8; Bintley, 152; Cook, 39; Dobbie, 208; Sandmann, 154; Schneider, “Analysis”, 291; Helm, 39; R. Boenig, “*Erce* and Dew”, *Names* 31 (1983), 130-31. McKinnell *et al.* (106) suggest *Erce* is the equally-unidentifiable *Ertæ* of the Franks Casket. They give no explanation for the phonological variation, however.

⁴⁸ A. Meaney, “Bede and Anglo-Saxon Paganism”, *Parergon* 3 (1985), 1-29. Depictions of women associated with fruit and grain, referred to as *matronae*, were apparently known in Roman Britain, but no such depictions survive from the post-Roman period (Simek, “Goddesses”, 116; H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess* [London, 1998], 79).

⁴⁹ A. R. Duckert, “*Erce* and Other Possibly Keltic Elements in the Old English Charm for Unfruitful Land”, *Names* 20 (1972), 83-90. MacLeod and Mees’ suggestion (124) that *erce* means ‘furrow’ in Ogham Irish is unsupported by *eDIL*.

⁵⁰ *eDIL* s.v. “Erc”.

is entirely possible, however, that *erce* is a medieval Irish word. Several Old English remedies contain significant amounts of Irish. For example, the popular incantation beginning *acrae aercrae aernem* is largely Irish — its opening words can be rendered as ‘the urging of a claim against gore/bleeding’ — and an incantation for a patient who has swallowed an insect in *Lacnunga* also contains Irish, beginning *Gonomil, orgomil, marbumil* [I wound (the) beast, I strike (the) beast, I kill (the) beast].⁵¹ Significant Irish influences have been found in Old English medical texts and paraliturgical collections: a Hiberno-Latin prayer to St John against poison in the *Leechbook*, *Lacnunga*, the *Book of Cerne*, and the *Book of Nunnaminster*; a prayer to St Brigit in *Lacnunga*; the ‘Circle of Columcille’ in Cotton Vitellius E.xviii; the citation of the Hiberno-Latin hymn of St Sechnall and a prayer to St Patrick in the prose theft charm in CCC 41; the popular and influential *Lorica of Laidcenn* in *Lacnunga*, *Cerne*, and *Nunnaminster*.⁵² These texts testify to a profound English interest in Irish texts of practical devotion and personal protection.

Indeed, Old and Middle Irish offers a simple solution to the *erce* problem. The second person singular subjunctive of the Irish verb *ercaid* [is abundant, increases, flourishes] is *erc(a)e*, ‘may you flourish’.⁵³ The final vowel is pronounced as *-e* or a schwa, with the *a* an orthographic convention only.⁵⁴ Given the propensity for Old English texts containing Irish to alter vowels (e.g. the rendering of *ar neim* as *ærnem* or *arnem*), the spelling *erce* for *ercae* is unsurprising. The phrase *erce, erce, erce*, then, is grammatically correct and orthographically

⁵¹ Meroney, “Irish”, 172-82; Pettit, I, xxxi; J. Borsje, “A Spell Called *Éle*”, in *Ulidia 3: Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, University of Ulster, Coleraine 22-25 June 2009: In Memoriam Patrick Leo Henry*, ed. G. Toner and S. Mac Mathúna (Berlin, 2013), 193-212. Meroney notes that there is no relation between *acrae aercrae* and *erce* (“Irish”, 176).

⁵² Jolly, “Prayers”, 102, and “Tapping”, 60-61; Pettit, I, xxxi; Meroney, “Irish”, 174. On *Laidcenn*, see M. W. Herren, ed., *The Hisperica Famina II: Related Poems* (Toronto, 1987), 2-44; T. D. Hill, “Invocation of the Trinity and the Tradition of the Lorica in Old English Poetry”, *Speculum* 56 (1981), 259-67; J. Reid, “The *Lorica of Laidcenn*: the Biblical Connections”, *JML* 12 (2002), 141-53.

⁵³ *eDIL* s.v. “*ercaid*”.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of pronunciation, see C. R. Batten and M. Williams, “*Erce* in the Old English *Æcerbot* Charm: An Irish Solution”, *NQ* 67 (2020), 1-4.

plausible Old or Middle Irish meaning ‘May you increase, may you increase, may you increase’, an entirely appropriate and meaningful address to the earth. This interpretation requires neither emendation nor speculation about pre-Christian worship for which corroborative evidence is lacking. It is a macaronic command to flourish in a charm filled with macaronic lines and commands to flourish, evidently rooted in the profound influence of Irish devotional texts on Old English medicine and prayer. The word *may*, of course, still have sounded like gibberish to an uneducated English audience, but a repetitive, alliterating hypermetric verse would retain an aural performative power even without translation.

The vocalic alliteration of *erce* carries over into the first word of line 16 and is picked up again in line 17:

$\acute{e}x$ x $\acute{e}x$ x x / \ x
 æcera wexendra and wīdendra, A|d

 / \ x x x / \ x x
 eācniendra and elniendra D|D⁵⁵

Wexen ... wriden is a collocation found also in *Genesis A* and in *Beowulf*, but the pairing of *eacnian ... elnian*, featuring assonance, rhyme, and the use of two D types, is unique to Charm 1, a rhetorical flourish that adds to the charm’s aural potency. These two lines form a rhyming unit at the head of a repetitive, echoing section. As the verbal patterning increases, so too does the abundance of the earth:

/ x / x / x / x
 sceaf̥ta hēhra, scīrra wæstma, A|A

 x x x / x $\acute{e}x$ \ x
 and þāra brādan berewæstma, a|?

 x x x / x / x \ x
 and þāra hwītan hwætewæstma, a|A

 x / x / x / x
 and ealra eorþan wæstma. ?|A (ll. 18-21)

⁵⁵ Anacrusis is irregular in 17b. Fulk’s Rule of the Coda does not generate an attested metrical pattern.

These four lines are syntactically identical, nearly metrically identical, and most likely formulaic.⁵⁶ The word *scirra* [bright, resplendent] echoes the later description of the fields as *beorhtblowende* [bright-blooming]. Lines 19b and 21a are unattested because they have only three positions, but both clearly belong to the poetic unit. The verse *berewæstma* [barley-crops] — which is irregular only because *bere* resolves — follows the exact format of *scirra wæstma* and *hwætewæstma*. A mention of ‘barley’ alongside ‘wheat’ is clearly essential because these were, by a significant margin, the two most important crops grown in early medieval England. As in Charm 9, these short lines are not errors, but metrical quirks resulting from the creation of an exhaustive formula. A single irregular verse is apparently less problematic than the disruption of a plurilinear poetic structure or a failure of the magical principle of exhaustiveness. The poet is thinking beyond the individual half-line.

The pairing of the verb *geunnan* with the phrase *ece drihten*, found in line 15, occurs again in line 22, but here abundance and increase is granted to *him*, presumably the landowner:

x / x / / x / x
 Geunne him ēce drihten **B|A**

x x /\ x x x ^úx x /
 and his hālige, þe on heofonum synt, **d|B**

x x / x x ^úx x / x / x x / x
 þæt hys yrþ si gefriþod wið ealra feōnda gehwæne, **B|?**

x x x x / x x / x / x x /
 and hēo si geborgen wið ealra bealwa gehwylc, **a|?**

x x / \ x x / / x
 þāra lyblāca geond land sāwen. **d|C** (ll. 22-6)

The feminine abundance of the earth is made available for human use by divine commandment. The invocation of saints recalls the litanies recited in the second set of ritual

⁵⁶ Foley, 84.

instructions, and this heavenly *convivium* reflects an idealized version of the earthly Christian community.⁵⁷ Several irregularities occur in lines 24-5, a hypermetric cluster which constitutes the actual banishment of the demons, evil forces, and *lyblac* that have penetrated the land. Line 24a violates Kuhn's Laws, but the line is semantically sound, and, as previously noted, many of the metrical charms are unconcerned with this metrico-grammatical rule. Lines 24b and 25b, which are exact syntactic parallels, are unattested hypermetrics and alliterate on the second stressed syllable. *Feonda* and *bealwa*, however, are the most important words in their respective verses, the evils against which the charm seeks protection, while *ealra* takes syntactic primacy as a sign of the exhaustive power of these incantatory statements. Line 25b, too, is enhanced by multiple instances of assonance (*ealra bealwa, bealwa gehwylc*). The statement that *lyblac* is 'sown' throughout the land is a C type, and recalls the 'loathsome one' that travels *geond lond* in Charm 2. These are the same broad cast of dangers and poisons found in the medical charms, which have entered the earth and must be pulled up like weeds.

The final three lines of this verse section again invoke God as creator of the world, again using the word *bidde*:

$$\begin{array}{l}
x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ / \ x \quad x \ x \ x \ \acute{x} \ x \ / \\
Nū \ ic \ bidde \ ðone \ waldend, \ se \ ðe \ ðas \ woruld \ gesceōp, \ \mathbf{a|B} \\
\\
x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ \acute{x} \ \backslash \quad x \ x \ x \ / \ x \ / \\
þæt \ ne \ sy \ nān \ tō \ þæs \ cwīdol \ wīf \ ne \ tō \ þæs \ cræftig \ man \ \mathbf{a|B} \\
\\
x \ x \ / \ x \ x \ \acute{x} \ / \quad x \ x \ \acute{x} \ x \\
þæt \ āwendan \ ne \ mæge \ word \ þus \ gecwedene. \ \mathbf{B|A}
\end{array}$$

The charm's concern with a 'speaking woman' recalls the malevolent power of a woman's *gemædla* [speech] in *Leechbook III* and the persistent association of women with illicit

⁵⁷ Magennis describes the community of saints as a *convivium* (*Images*, 32).

incantations in penitentials and homilies.⁵⁸ The ‘speaking woman’ and the ‘skilled man’ are *dry* and *lyblac* made flesh, human representatives of larger anxieties over contamination and power. The Christian fear of imagined anti-Christian magic is a natural extension of the worldview exemplified by the metrical charms, in which mankind is both surrounded by hostile forces emanating from the untamed natural world and subject to betrayal from within by sinners. The alliterative chiming of *cwidol wif* with *awendan ... word*, and the echoing of *cwidol* and *gecwedene*, links these evil agents and their dangerous speech with the holy speech they cannot undo.

As the plough enters the earth, the charm reiterates the land’s feminine nature:

/ x x / x / x / x
 Hāl wes þū, folde, fira mōdor! A|A

 x x / \ x x ☺x / x
 Beō þū grōwende on godes fæþme, d|C

 / x x / x / x x / x
 fōdre gefylled firum tō nytte. A|A (ll. 30-32)

The common collocation *fold ... fira*, along with the envelope pattern created by the repetition of the poetic term *firum* in line 32, draws attention to the correct relationship between earth and mankind: the former serves the needs of the latter.⁵⁹ The earth is again addressed as a ‘mother’ whose body is returned to its proper, nourishing function — much like the body of the pregnant woman of Charms 6a-c. The command *hal wes þu*, also found in Charm 4, emphasizes that the earth is currently not whole, inviolate, or (therefore) well. To be made *hal* again she must grow ‘in God’s embrace’, a phrase highlighted by a C-type verse. The cure for the malfunction of a female being is her return to a sexual interaction with —

⁵⁸ *Leechbook III* f. 122v. On the association between women and magical speech in penitentials and homilies, see Chapter 4, n. 11.

⁵⁹ *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Fold ... Fir-”.

and, implicitly, sexual subordination to — the patriarchal ruler of the divine order.⁶⁰

Appropriate penetration by the divinity and the plough undoes penetration by *lyblac*. *Fæþme* in line 31 sets up the *f* alliteration of line 32, and such alliterative emphasis, along with the third use of *gefyllan* in the charm and a repetition of the word *nytte* found in line 9, highlights the fruitful result of this union.

The burial of a loaf of bread made from mixed grains, milk, and holy water is clearly a symbolic planting of abundance, the sacrifice of a single loaf for the provision of many future loaves.⁶¹ The final verse incantation begins with the repetition of the words *ful*, *fod*, and *fira* — the charm’s central concerns — also found in line 32 above:

/ $\acute{\times}$ ⁶² / x / x / x
 Fūl æcer fōdres fira cinne, A|A

 / / \ x x x / x /
 beorhtblōwende, þū gebletsod weorþ D|B

 x / x x $\acute{\times}$ x x $\acute{\times}$ x /
 þæs hāligan noman þe ðās heofon gesceōp B|B

 x x / x x x / / x
 and ðās eorþan þe wē on līfiap; a|C

 x / x x / x x / x x x x x / x x $\acute{\times}$
 se god, se þās grundas geworhte, geunne ūs grōwende gife, ?|hypermetric

 x x / x x / $\acute{\times}$ x / x
 þæt ūs corna gehwylc cume tō nytte. B|A (ll. 33-8)

The compound *beorhtblowende*, highlighted by a D-type verse, is a *hapax*, a culminating poetic description of the resplendent abundance Charm 1 will generate. Again, the earth is ‘made’ blessed, bright, and blooming by the name of God, rather than through her own agency or the labour of man. The description of God as the shaper of *heofon* and *eorþan* is

⁶⁰ Pollington, 478; Hill, “User”, 214-15; Bragg, 18; Banham, “Staff”, 290. North (*Gods*, 255), Schneider (“Analysis”, 295), and Sandmann (148) see this as a *hieros gamos*.

⁶¹ Banham “Staff”, 283; Nelson, “Wordsige”, 62.

⁶² This should be a resolved secondary stress.

formulaic, as noted above. Alliteration on the displaced proclitic *on* in line 36 emphasizes that the earth is where mankind lives, where God intended them to survive and flourish rather than starve. The final invocation of God in his capacity as creator of all growing things is metrically irregular: line 37a is an unattested hypermetric that violates Kuhn's Law. The line is, however, highly ornamented. Extra alliteration on *g* abounds, the words *geunnan*, *growende*, and *gife* appear elsewhere in the charm, and the phrase *grundas geworhte* is apparently a quote from the Old English verse translation of the Creed, the ultimate statement of faith.⁶³ Line 37a violates Kuhn's Law because of the phrase *se god, se þas grundas*. This elaborative syntactic structure creates echoing, accommodates the Creed quotation, and gives the name of God syntactic primacy. As so often in the metrical charms, strict metrical regularity is evidently less important than the retention of a dramatic phrase structure, ornamentation, and quotation. The final line returns to metrical regularity, to the theme of effectiveness through exhaustiveness, and to the central idea of *nytte* [use], the idea of the earth as servant to humanity.

Charm 1 thus seeks to undo the hostile relationship between humankind and the natural world found in the other eleven metrical charms. The answer to the proliferation of anti-Christian forces is to recreate God's original plan for Eden and the earth. Where the postlapsarian world is filled with demons, spear-wielding riders, colonizing tumors, *mæran*, *ylfe*, and dwarfs, the prelapsarian world is sustaining, domesticated, brightly blooming. Charm 1 seeks to uproot the evils that haunt the other metrical charms and replant, instead, the Tree of Life. Charm 11 is acutely aware of these same dangers, and turns for protection to the figure whose presence in Charm 1 is largely implicit: *Christus victor*, the Christ who harrowed Hell and overthrew Satan's rights to mankind.

⁶³ *Apostles' Creed* 1. 7.

Charm 11: The Journey Charm

The final charm in this study is a protective prayer designed for use at the beginning of a journey, which should be understood, as discussed below, as both literal and spiritual. Charm 11 is in many ways summative, drawing on themes essential to all the metrical charms previously discussed.

The charm appears in the outer margins of pp. 350-53 of CCCC 41. The text may have been copied in haste, as there are several obvious errors and one clear instance of eye-skip.⁶⁴ Like the other marginal texts of CCCC 41, Charm 11 is a protective, practical, devotional text intended for ecclesiastical use, and presumably taught to or performed for lay patrons and congregants as needed. In his *De Auguriis*, Ælfric declares that travelers desiring a safe journey should *clypige to his dryhten and bletsige hine sylfne, and siðige orsorgh þurh godes gescyldnysse* [call to his Lord and bless himself, and travel without anxiety through God's protection].⁶⁵ The speaker of Charm 11 also calls (*clipian*) on patriarchs, saints, and angels, suggesting that the charm may have been one of many incantatory Christian prayers for safe journeys.⁶⁶

Indeed, Charm 11, like Charm 1, contains important liturgical and scriptural resonances. The middle section of the charm, a list of names of major biblical figures, is not dissimilar to a liturgical litany. The evangelists play a significant role in this charm, as in Charm 1. Mentions of angels and of Seraphim specifically are likely drawn originally from

⁶⁴ Dobbie, 216; Storms, 218; Skemp, 296. Given the eye-skip in l. 27, Jolly's suggestion that the text was received orally is unlikely ("Margins", 170). K. Rupp ("The Anxiety of Writing: A Reading of the Old English Journey Charm", *OT* 23 [2008], 255-66) speculates that the power of the 'oral' charm is inherently diminished by transcription.

⁶⁵ *De Auguriis*, ll. 96-9.

⁶⁶ Jolly, "Margins", 172. Those who argue the charm is originally pagan include Sandmann, 20; Rupp, 263; Storms, 221; Grendon, 221; Hill, "Rod", 158; M. Amies, "The Journey Charm: A Lorica for Life's Journey", *Neophilologus* 67 (1983), 448-62.

liturgical prayers, including the *Sanctus* and the *Te Deum*.⁶⁷ The same liturgical books that contain blessings for bread and new fruits also contain masses designated *pro iter agentibus* [for travelers] that bear some relevant similarities to Charm 11: references to the covenant made with Abraham; imagery of roads, paths, and steps; requests for accompanying angels who will carry the traveler in their hands; requests for guarding and guidance; and a proclamation that God will overshadow the traveler with his shoulders and shield.⁶⁸ Charm 11, again, is best described as paraliturgical rather than liturgical, as it contains no scriptural quotations and is clearly a ritual for personal devotion, unlike a travelers' mass. Indeed, Charm 11 is tightly focused on the single individual performing it, though its devotional references imply the presence of the community: the individual user deserves protection from God because of his membership in the metaphorical kin-group of righteous Christians.

The question of whether the 'Journey Charm' refers to literal or spiritual travel has long been a focus of scholarly analyses.⁶⁹ Clear travel imagery — and repeated declarations indicating the immediate commencement of movement, such as *Forð ic gefare* — suggest the charmer seeks protection on an actual journey, and travel was certainly dangerous in early medieval England.⁷⁰ The charm is concerned with physical threats, including *stice*, *slege*, and the *mære*. Metaphorical descriptions of human life as a journey fraught with suffering, however, appear in *Christ II*, *The Seafarer*, and several of Ælfric's homilies.⁷¹ In these texts,

⁶⁷ N. A. Porter, "Wrestling with Loan-Words: Poetic Use of Engel, Seraphim, and Cherubim in *Andreas* and *Elene*", *NM* 89 (1988), 155-70.

⁶⁸ Leofric, 41-3, 335-6; Jumièges, 260; Egbert, 105; Claudius, 27.

⁶⁹ Those scholars who read the charm's protection as purely physical include Nelson, "Wordsige", 64; Neville, *Representations*, 99-100; Crawford, "Evidences", 101. For spiritual readings, see Amies, 448; Olsan, "Marginality", 149; Griffiths, 201; H. Stuart, "*Ich me on pisse gyrde beluce*: The Structure and Meaning of the Old English Journey Charm", *MÆ* 50 (1981), 259-73. For arguments that the charm's protection is both physical and spiritual, see Hill, "Rod", 149; Jolly, "Margins", 170; Rupp, 255; Arthur, 'Charms', 130.

⁷⁰ Banham and Voth, 154. See also *Historia ecclesiastica* Book 2, ch. 16.

⁷¹ *Christ II* ll. 850-66; *The Seafarer*, *passim*. See Jolly, "Margins", 170; Kramer, 9-10. For these themes in Ælfric's work, see Amies, 448-50.

life is described as a sea excursion on which the traveler must face the turbulent waters of sin, navigate good and bad winds, and seek the safe shores of heaven — perhaps echoed in the *windas on waroþum* and *circinde wæter* of Charm 11. The opening of the charm in CCCC 41 is copied next to the portion of the *Historia ecclesiastica* that describes St Cuthbert embarking on his service as a bishop, shielding his flock with prayer, and fulfilling with deeds what he preached with words.⁷² These clear parallels with Charm 11 suggest that the compiler of the CCCC 41 marginalia recognized some level of spiritual meaning in the charm text, and its persistent references to *feondas* [demons, enemies] may refer to supernatural agents of bodily harm, as in the medical texts, or to spiritual threats to the souls of righteous. Charm 11 most likely served multiple purposes, occasions, and users. An ecclesiastic setting out on a mission, for example, would require protection on both his physical journey and his spiritual quest.

Charm 11 also bears strong similarities to the *lorica*, an Insular Latin genre of apotropaic prayer in which the speaker invokes the Trinity, seeks the protection of numerous Christian figures, and finally gives an exhaustive enumeration of the parts of the body to be guarded against physical and spiritual harm.⁷³ The *lorica*, named after the metaphorical breastplate of Ephesians 6:10-6, became influential in early medieval England through Irish channels. As noted above, the *Lorica of Laidcenn* in particular had a significant stylistic influence on Old English remedies and prayers, and Charm 11 shares relevant imagery with this personal devotional text.⁷⁴ The Old English gloss of *Laidcenn* found in Harley 585

⁷² Olsan, “Marginality”, 147; Arthur, ‘Charms’, 95-6.

⁷³ On *loricae*, see L. Gougaud, “Etude sur les loricae celtiques et sur les prieres qui s’en rapprochent”, *BALAC* 1 (1911), 265-81, 2 (1912), 33-41, 101-27; W. Godel, “Irish Prayer in the Early Middle Ages”, *MS* 4 (1979), 60-99, 5 (1980), 72-114; Herren, *Poems*, 24-7; Reid, 141; Hill, “Invocation”, 262. Similarities between Charm 11 and *loricae* are noted by Hill, “Rod”, 156; Reid, 143; Amies, 452; Stuart, “Structure”, 261-2.

⁷⁴ Reid, 143-7; Liuzza, “Prayers”, 296. For other texts inspired by *Laidcenn*, see Leofric, 438; Harley 585 ff. 148r-148v, 174v; *Leechbook III* ff. 123v-124r, 124v-125r; CCCC 41 p. 292.

describes the speaker as being *gesettum / sæs micel swa swa in fræcennisse* [in peril even as in a great sea], recalling again the *circinde wæter* of Charm 11.⁷⁵ Like Charm 11, *Laidcenn* calls on cherubim and seraphim, patriarchs, apostles, virgins, widows, and prophets to defend the speaker against enemies. Both texts invoke the Trinity, and both describe heavenly protection as constituting a metaphorical shield, helmet, and breastplate.⁷⁶ The charm lacks, however, one of the defining features of the *lorica* genre: the list of body parts to be protected. The charm is clearly inspired by this popular mode of devotion, but to call it an Old English *lorica* would be reductive.

Charm 11 also bears significant similarities to a category of medieval, vernacular German charms known as *Reisesege*n, the oldest extant copies of which date to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁷⁷ These Christian travel-charms also request that angelic hosts, apostles, evangelists, and numerous biblical figures — including Mary, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David, as in Charm 11 — act as protective shields and armour for the speaker against numerous dangers, such as fire, water, and weapons.⁷⁸ The *Tobiassege*n, in particular, requests a blessed path (*wec*) and God's peace (*gotes vride*) for the user, echoing Charm 11's *wega Seraphim* [Seraphim of the paths] and *ælmihgtigan frið* [peace of the Almighty]. Charm 11 thus seems to represent an Old English iteration, ornamented with some of the imagery and vocabulary of Old English religious poetry, of a contemporary mode of protective prayer. In Charm 11 and the *Reisesege*n, we can see evidence of a vernacular tradition spanning both insular and continental communities, perhaps originally inspired by

⁷⁵ Harley 585 ff. 152r.

⁷⁶ For prayer as a weapon against the devil elsewhere in CCCC 41, see *Solomon and Saturn I*, which depicts the letters of the Pater Noster as warriors defending their speaker.


⁷⁷ This similarity is noted by Stuart, "Structure", 262; Grendon, 220; Sandmann, 24.

⁷⁸ Stuart, "Structure", 262; Grendon, 220-21. See, for example, the *Müncher Ausfahrtsege*n, *Weingartner Reisesege*n, and *Tobiassege*n, all in K. Müllenhoff and W. Scherer, eds, *Denkmäler deutscher Poesie und Prosa aus dem VIII-XII Jahrhundert*, 3rd ed., 2 vols (Berlin, 1892).

loricae. The resulting charm is a hybrid text, a unique entry in a broad category of devotional practice, that also exemplifies the particular concerns put forward in the other Old English metrical charms.

Stylistic Analysis

Like many of the metrical charms, Charm 11 opens with a confident declaration whose meaning has occasioned significant debate:

x x x x x / x x / x x x  \ x x / x
Ic mē on þisse gyrd e belūce and on godes helde bebeōde **hypermetric A|?**

Line 1b is unattested in Sievers–Bliss scansion, but still upholds the cross-alliteration of the long line and allows for echoing verbal prefixes. Its meaning is unequivocal: as in the Psalms, the charmer commends himself to the protection of God. The term *gyrd* can refer to a branch or twig, but far more often a staff or rod. It is never used to mean ‘cross’ in the extant corpus, despite the claims of some scholars, and there is no evidence that the text refers to the use of a twig as an amulet.⁷⁹ Given the charm’s scriptural references, this staff is almost certainly a symbol of Christian pilgrimage and of the authority of God. The word *gyrd* is used in the Old English corpus for the rods of Moses and Aaron, to describe a tool of just punishment, and as a sign of God’s power, particularly in the Psalms; it is also the word used to translate ‘rod’ in the Old English Lord’s Prayer.⁸⁰ In the portion of *Solomon and Saturn I* found in CCC 41 alongside Charm 11, the letter *P* wields a *gyrd* as a weapon against the devil.⁸¹ Thomas D. Hill suggests that the staff here refers to a gospel passage and its Augustinian exegesis

⁷⁹ *DOE s.v.* “Gyrd”; Storms, 221. For the reading ‘cross’, see Cockayne, I, 389; Grattan and Singer, 70; Grendon, 177. For the reading ‘amulet’, see Stuart, “Structure”, 264; Künzel, 99; Sandmann, 24; Meaney, *Amulets*, 19. Jolly suggests ‘cross, runestick, or walking stick’ (“Margins”, 172).

⁸⁰ *DOE s.v.* “Gyrd”; Amies, 454–5.

⁸¹ Paz, 235; Amies, 454; *Solomon and Saturn I* l. 90.

popular in the early Middle Ages and quoted in Bede.⁸² In Mark 6:8, Christ tells his disciples to carry nothing but a staff with them as they set forth to proselytize, while in Matthew 10:9 and Luke 9:3, Christ tells them to carry nothing, not even a staff. Augustine argues that the disciples are urged not to carry a staff as a sign of their own authority, but rather to carry, as a metaphorical staff, the protective power of God. A reading from Matthew 10 features in the travelers' masses found in the Anglo-Latin missals, suggesting that this passage and its exegesis may have been known to the composer of Charm 11.⁸³ Even if the charm does not refer to the gospel text, the *gyrd* is straightforwardly a symbol of God's power and protection over the traveler in the Psalms and elsewhere. It is impossible to know whether the user of Charm 11 was holding an actual walking stick, transformed into a symbol of God's protection, or whether it was, as per Augustine, metaphorical.

The verb *belucan* means 'to enclose, shut up, close what is open', and refers in *Christ I* to the inviolate womb of the virgin.⁸⁴ It is uncertain how this verb relates to the phrase *on ... gyrd*. There is no evidence in the text that the charmer is using the staff to draw a circle of protection around himself, as some scholars have claimed.⁸⁵ The word appears in the Old English Creed in a syntactically similar phrase: *Ic haligne gast hihte beluce* [I enclose the holy spirit in hope], perhaps with the sense 'embrace'.⁸⁶ *On* can mean 'within' and metaphorically 'in the power of'.⁸⁷ Taking *belucan* to have its usual meaning 'to enclose, close up', I would suggest that the line is best translated 'I enclose myself within the power of

⁸² Hill, "Rod", 151-3.

⁸³ Arthur, 'Charms', 129-30.

⁸⁴ DOE s.v. "Belucan"; *Christ I* l. 328.

⁸⁵ Noted in Hill, "Rod", 149. For the argument that the charmer is drawing a protective circle, see Storms, 221; Nelson, "Wordsige", 57; Stuart, "Structure", 262-5; Jolly, "Margins", 172; Kunzel, 99; Sandmann, 23; Arthur, 'Charms', 129. Hill also suggests that *belucan* here means 'to bind'. However, 'to bind' is not an attested meaning of the verb (DOE s.v. "Belucan").

⁸⁶ *Apostles' Creed* l. 41 in Dobbie's edition. For translation, see C. A. Jones, ed. and trans., *Old English Shorter Poems Volume 1: Religious and Didactic* (Cambridge, 2012), 85.

⁸⁷ BT s.v. "On".

this staff'. The user is rendered inviolate by surrounding himself with the power of God. The speaker can no longer be entered by the forces of evil, but rather is closed up like the womb of the Virgin, made undeniably *hal* — a word which appears twice in the charm.

After this powerful opening, the charm turns to a list of dangers against which the speaker must be protected, presented as an anaphoric sequence on *wið*.⁸⁸ A tripartite unit of metrical and syntactic repetition is followed by a bipartite unit linked by repetition of the word *lað*:

x x x / x $\acute{\times}$ x x x / x $\acute{\times}$
 wið þane sāra stice, wið þane sāra slege, **B|B**

x x x / x $\acute{\times}$
 wið þane grymma gryre, **B**

x x x $\acute{\times}$ x / x x x / x /
 wið ðane micela egsa þe bið eghwām lāð, **hypermetric A|B**

x x / x / x x x / / x
 and wið eal þæt lāð þe in tō land fāre. **B|C (ll. 2-5)**

Lines 2-3 are metrically identical, all type 3B1c(i), and a single half-line both concludes this portion of the anaphoric sequence, as in Charms 7 and 9, and returns to the *g* alliteration of line 1. *Grym ... gryre* is an echoing collocation found in numerous other Old English poems and homilies, used in descriptions of hell, demons, and wolves, and applied to Grendel in *Beowulf*.⁸⁹ Lines 4-5 use exhaustive language to seek protection against the *lað* [loathsomeness] that travels into the land from outside, with a punctuating C-type verse and language that recalls Charm 2 (*wið þam laþan þe geond lond fereþ*) — while the *stice* of line 2 recalls the penetrating spears of Charm 4. The similarities between these texts, alongside Charm 11's use of a common collocation for monstrous beings, suggest a well-known, shared set of language used to describe the incursive, pervasive supernatural threats of the early

⁸⁸ Compare Charm 2 ll. 45-54.

⁸⁹ The collocation appears in *Genesis A*, *Daniel*, *Guthlac A*, *Beowulf*, and some homilies (*DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "Grim ... Gryr"). On word-initial *gr-* as a 'monster phonaestheme', see Griffith, "Alliteration", 97-9.

English landscape.

The text's subsequent poetic unit begins with a set of binomials amplifying its performative force:⁹⁰

\acute{x} \ x x x \acute{x} \acute{x} \ x x \acute{x}
 Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic mē wege, ?|E

 / \acute{x} ⁹¹ x / \acute{x} ⁹² x x / x
 wordsige and worcsige. Se me dēge; A|a

 x x \acute{x} x x / x x x \acute{x} x x / x
 ne mē mere ne gemyrre, ne mē maga ne geswence, A|A

 x x x x x x / x / x x / x
 ne mē nāfre mīnum fēore⁹³ forht ne gewurþe. a|A (ll. 6-9)

Line 6a is an E type unattested in Sievers–Bliss, but is an exact syntactic parallel to line 6b, an attested E type. Cross-alliteration is apparent in the long line, along with chiming verb endings and polyptoton between *gealdor* and *begale*. *Sygegealdor* and *sigegyrd* pair, too, with the two elements of the binomial *wordsige and worcsige*, which builds on the poetic collocation *word ... worc*.⁹⁴ The two long-lines are connected by enjambed alliteration (*wege ... word*), a technique favoured by the composer of Charm 11. The irregularity of a single half-line is less important than the maintenance of the plurilinear structures in which that half-line participates. The charm is concerned with spirituality and physicality, with words and deeds, with the verbal expression of secret knowledge (the *gealdor*) and with the outward sign (the *gyrd*) of that privileged understanding. The repetition of *sige* [victory] four times in three half-lines points to its undeniable importance and to the fact that it is, by the eleventh century, a strongly Christian word. Indeed, *sige* compounds are used to designate Christian

⁹⁰ R. D. Fulk, "Pragmatic and Stylistic Functions of Binomials in Old English", in *Binomials in the History of English: Fixed and Flexible*, ed. J. Kopaczyk and H. Sauer (Cambridge, 2017), 27-40 [33].

⁹¹ This should be a resolved secondary stress.

⁹² Another resolved secondary stress.

⁹³ Note compensatory lengthening on *feor*.

⁹⁴ *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, "Word ... Worc".

victors and signs of victory throughout the corpus.⁹⁵ The text thereby exults in the triumph of Christ and the subsequent empowerment of mankind over the devil. The user of Charm 11 can wield power over the loathsome forces that travel into the land because he believes in his own salvation: acceptance of Christ entitles his followers to utterly overcome evil.

There is no cross-caesura alliteration in line 7, but 7b rhymes with 6b and is clearly the beginning of a new anaphoric sequence on *ne*, similar to those found in Charms 7 and 9 as well as the prohibitive sections of the *Lorica of St Patrick*. Each verb-final construction in lines 8-9 contains two repetitions of *ne*, an unusually dense instance of anaphora, but also includes rhyme between *ne* and *me*, echoing between *mere* and *gemyrre* in a long line with repeated assonance on *e*, repeated verb prefixes, and chiming verb endings. *Mere* can only refer to the *mære*, the female sexual assailant named in the medical texts. It is surely relevant that this particular being is the only supernatural enemy specifically named by the text: she is the epitome of the incursive threats that apparently populated the early medieval English imagination, and therefore represents all the dangers against which Charm 11 seeks protection. *Gemirran* means ‘to physically hinder, to obstruct’ as well as ‘to lead astray, prevent right conduct’, suggesting both the physicality of the *mære*’s attack and her erotic nature.⁹⁶ The word *maga*, with short initial vowel, may mean ‘maw, stomach’, or may be the well-attested substantive adjective ‘the powerful one’.⁹⁷ If the word means ‘stomach’, it may refer to a symptom in the patient of the crushing weight of the *mære*’s ride, or may refer to the maw of the creature herself, oppressing the patient with her body. If the word means ‘powerful one’ — a more straightforward reading — then the term refers directly to the *mære*,

⁹⁵ Crawford, “Evidences”, 103; Amies, 453.

⁹⁶ *BT s.v.* “Gemirran”.

⁹⁷ Although Dobbie (216) suggests this latter is ‘unlikely’, there is no grammatical, semantic or metrical reason to dismiss it. Cockayne (I, 389), Grendon (179), Grattan and Singer (71), and Storms (218) translate ‘belly’. Hill (“Rod”, 148) has ‘kinsman’.

and the multivalence of the verb *geswencan* becomes relevant: it means not only ‘to harass, afflict’, but also ‘to oppress, cause fatigue’. Charm 11 puts forward as the traveler’s primary antagonist the dark feminine principle, the incarnation of contemporary anxieties over bodily vulnerability.

The charm then pivots, like Charm 7, from *ne me* to *ac me*, from the prohibition of harm to the creation of a blessed state:

$x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ / \ \backslash \ x \ x \ \text{ⓧ} \ x \ / \ x \ /$
 ac gehæle mē ælmihtig and sunu and frōfre gāst, **hypermetric|B**

 $/ \ x \ / \ x \ / \ x \ / \ x$
 ealles wuldres wyrðig dryhten, **A|A**

 $x \ x \ x \ x \ / \ x \ / \ x \ \backslash \ x$
 swā swā ic gehyrde heofna scyppende. **a|D** (ll. 10-12)

Line 10 does not alliterate, but the a-verse is a hypermetric E type, and the long line bends its metre to accommodate the elaborate Trinitarian invocation. The word *fæder* usually alliterates with *frōfre* in Old English references to the Trinity, but in several examples the phrase *fæder ælmihtig* is used.⁹⁸ The alliterating word seems to have dropped out of Charm 11’s formulation, and the retention of *ælmihtig* may have to do with the fact that the charm is most interested in God as the all-powerful deity, capable of protecting the charmer from any and all evils. Nor is it a coincidence that the charm invokes the Trinity immediately before launching into its most *lorica*-like section. Trinitarian invocation is, as noted above, a feature of all *loricae*, and the Triune God is called on in moments of grievous threat in Old English poetry.⁹⁹ Even more important is the verb *gehælan*, which literally means ‘to make *hal*’, to heal, to render whole, to save.¹⁰⁰ The charmer’s request deals in the ideology of *hælu*, and states that such protection will be provided *swa swa* [just as] he has heard — that is, obeyed

⁹⁸ *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Fæder ... Frōfre”.

⁹⁹ Hill, “Invocation”, 263.

¹⁰⁰ *DOE* s.v. “Gehælan”.

— God. *Hælu* is earned through correct Christian belief.

The litany-like section that follows is largely devoid of poetic features. The composer seems to be struggling to create alliterative long lines from a list of biblical names, though in several instances he has succeeded:

/ x \ x x / \ x
 Ābra[hā]me and Īsāce **A|d**

x / x / / x x / x
 and swilce men, Mōyses and Īacob, **B|A**

x / x x / x
 and Dauīt and Īosep **A**

x / x x / x x ^úx \ x
 and Ēvan and Annan and Elizabet, **A|d**

^úx x x x ^úx / x / x
 Saharie and ec Marie, mōdur Cristes, **?|A**

x x x x / x / x x / x
 and eāc þæ gebrōþru, Petrus and Pāulus, **a|A**

x x / x / x / x
 and eāc þūsend þīnra engla **a|A**

^úx x x x x / x x / x / x
 clipige ic mē tō āre wið eallum feōndum. **A|hypermetric A** (ll. 13-20)

An unattested half-line (17a, an expanded A type) is compensated for by internal rhyme, but the single half-line in line 15 serves no discernible aesthetic purpose here, nor does the lack of structural alliteration in line 18. It is only after the list of names ends, in lines 19-20, that the charm returns to ornamented verse: a pattern similar to transverse alliteration in line 19, and enjambed alliteration between lines 19-20 (and between lines 20 and 21 as well). The litany itself seems to be more important than metrical regularity, but also — unusually for a metrical charm — more important than compensatory ornamentation. This list of names may well have come from a non-metrical *lorica* or prayer and fit into verse lines only imperfectly. The charm initially names the Old Testament patriarchs, the men with whom God's covenant

was first made. David, as the composer of the Psalms, is central to early medieval English religious practice, while Peter and Paul are the greatest of the apostles. The charm invokes biblical figures famous for their roles in three miraculous births (Joseph and Mary, Elizabeth and Zachariah, Anna), three instances in which parents and children both emerged whole and unscathed from a period of significant danger. Eve's inclusion is unusual, as she is a holy figure only insofar as she is the mother of mankind. Yet Eve too is essential to salvation history: her sin is redeemed in the person of Mary just as Adam is redeemed by Christ. Eve and Mary both are essential links between the speaker and the *convivium* of saints, and the juxtaposition of holiness with sin redeemed is relevant to the text's practical project.

The charm returns to high levels of poetic ornamentation in the subsequent section:

x x \acute{x} x x \acute{x} x x x / x \acute{x} x
 Hi mē ferion and friþion and mīne fōre nerion, **A|hypermetric A**

/ x x / x x x / x
 eal mē gehealdon, mē gewæaldon, **A|a**

/ x /\ x x x / x /
 worces stīrende; si mē wuldres hyht, **D|B**

/ x x / x / x x /
 hand ofer heāfod, hāligra rōf, **A|E**

\acute{x} \ x \acute{x} / \ x / x
 sigerōfra sceolu, sōðfæstra engla. **E|A**¹⁰¹ (ll. 21-5)

The rhyme scheme of lines 21-2 is striking, and builds verbal power as the charmer asks for the guardianship of the heavenly community of the righteous. Cross-caesura alliteration in line 22 is displaced by rhyme, assonance, the use of a poetic collocation that also appears in *Maxims*, and enjambed alliteration between lines 22 and 23. Another instance of enjambed alliteration connects lines 23-4, and line 24 is then linked to line 25 with the repetition of *rof* [n. 'band', adj. 'strong']. The section grows increasingly heavy as the charmer ascribes his

¹⁰¹ This A-type verse is technically unattested in Sievers–Bliss because the secondary stress in a type 2A3a(ii), which this verse most closely resembles, should fall on a short syllable, but *fæst* is a closed syllable and thus metrically long.

deeds (*worc*) to the urging of the collective Christian pantheon, requests not only safety in this life but glory (*wuldor*) in the next, and then asks these collected heavenly personages to be a ‘hand’ over his head. It has not previously been noted that this line bears a strong similarity to *Metrical Psalm 138*, lines 12-13: *þu me gehiwadest handa þinre, / me ofer heafod holde gesettest* [you shaped me with your hand, set it mercifully over my head].¹⁰² The shared imagery is striking, and the placing of a hand ‘over one’s head’ is not found in the Old English psalter glosses, nor elsewhere in Old English poetry.¹⁰³ Powerful Christian individuals make this gesture in some Old English religious texts, but these instances of placing a hand on the head are literal, while the *hand ofer heafod* of Charm 11 is necessarily more abstract, a request for protection from the saints as a vast pantheon.¹⁰⁴ The *Metrical Psalms* were among the most popular texts of the late tenth and eleventh centuries and were quoted in multiple vernacular texts of the period.¹⁰⁵ They also evidently served the composer of Charm 11 as a word bank and a library of powerful religious imagery.

Two lines with echoing on *b* and *m*, and with enjambed alliteration, begin the subsequent poetic unit, which shows strong lorical influence:

/ x / x / x / x
 Biddu ealle blīðu mōde **A|A**

 x x x / x x / / x / x
 þæt mē bēo Matheus helm, Marcus byrne, **B|A**

 / / x \ / x x /
 leōht, līfes rōf, Lūcos mīn swurd, **D|E**

 / x / \ / / \ x
 scearp and scīrecg, scyld Iōhannes, **A|D**

¹⁰² P. P. O’Neill, ed. and trans., *Old English Psalms* (Cambridge, 2016), 560-4.

¹⁰³ For the relevant psalter glosses, see *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, “Manum Tuam”. F. Tupper (“Notes on Old English Poems”, *JEGP* 11 [1912], 82-103) argues this gesture of protection appears in *The Wanderer* ll. 41-3 and *Maxims I* l. 67. However, a hand is not placed on a head in either of these texts.

¹⁰⁴ *DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Hond/Hand ... Heafod/Heofod”.

¹⁰⁵ Toswell, *Psalter*, 310-19.

/ x x \acute{x} x \acute{x} \acute{x} x
 wuldre gewlítegod, wega Serafhin. A|C (ll. 26-30)

Again the section becomes heavier as it builds, and the lines feature significant ornament: a pattern similar to transverse alliteration in line 27, enjambed alliteration in lines 28-9, a third repetition of *rof*, and the use of two poetic formulae (*bliðu mode*, *wuldre gewlítegian*).¹⁰⁶ The charm girds the user against the incursive wounding of other agents and arms him to do righteous battle. *Serafhin* seems here to be an uninflected collective noun, referring to the highest class of angels, described in exegesis as the most burning in their love of God.¹⁰⁷ Though the long line is perfectly regular in all respects, the grammatical relationship between line 30b and the preceding clauses is unclear. The evangelists may be accompanied by ‘the Seraphim of the paths’, angels who protect travelers, or the collective *serafhin* may refer to the evangelists themselves, who certainly possess an intense love for God.¹⁰⁸

The following seven lines form an envelope pattern between two iterations of the phrase *freond ic gemete*:

x x x \acute{x} / x x / x
 Forð ic gefare, frīnd ic gemēte, e|A

/ / x \ / x x / x
 eall engla blæd, eādiges lāre. D|A

x x x x \acute{x} x / \acute{x} / x
 Bidde ic nu sigeres god godes miltse, B|C

/ \ / x / x x / x
 sīðfæt gōdne, smylte and līhte A|A

/ x x \acute{x} x / x x /
 windas on waroþum. Windas gefran, A|E

¹⁰⁶ *Bliðu/e mode* appears in *Genesis A* and *B*, *Daniel*, *Dream of the Rood*, *Guthlac A*, *Beowulf*, *Judith*, the prose and metrical Psalms, and many homilies (*DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Blið ... mod”). *Wuldre gewlítegian* appears in *Andreas*, *Azarias*, and *Solomon and Saturn II* (*DOE Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Wuld ... Gewlit”). See also C. B. Tkacz, “Christian Formulas in Old English Literature: *Næs Hyre Wlite Gewemmed* and its Implications”, *Traditio* 48 (1993), 31-61.

¹⁰⁷ Amies, 456. On *seraphim* as a collective noun, see Porter, 157.

¹⁰⁸ Amies, 456. Cf. Stuart, “Structure”, 269; Dobbie, 218.

/ x x \acute{x} / x x / x
 circinde wæter — simble gehælede¹⁰⁹ E|A

x / x / x / x x / x /
 wið eallum feōndum. Freōnd ic gemēte wið ... **hypermetric A|?** (ll. 31-7)

Where in line 5 it was ‘loathsomeness’ that traveled (*fare*), now it is the confident charmer.

The charm continues to be metrically heavy, highlighting this section’s most important concepts, including the glory of angels, the mercy of God, and the dangers of the wild. *Eall engla* are pitted against *eallum feondum*, and repetition abounds: *god godes ... godne, windas ... windas*, the use of *bidde* as in line 26 and *wið eallum feondum* as in line 20, and, in line 37, a single-line envelope pattern on *wið*. The displacement of *wið* to the end of the b-verse to create this effect renders the half-line unmetrical, but the long line is then framed by two uses of the same preposition, with two different meanings. The charm operates *wið* [against] demons and enemies, excluding anti-Christian evil, but the charmer hopes to meet *wið* [with] friends, returning the individual to his virtuous community. The alliteration and rhyme of *feond* and *freond* serve a similar contrastive purpose. Unusually, both lines 33 and 35 generate cross-caesura alliteration by repetition of the same word. The *windas* on the shores of line 35, along with the ‘roaring water’ of line 36, may represent both the storms of sin and temptation and the hostile wilderness through which the charmer will travel. As in the other metrical charms, the natural world is aligned with chaos and destruction. Line 36 shifts from danger (*circinde wæter*) to protection (*simble gehælede*), a change in focus perhaps mirrored by the line’s lack of cross-caesura alliteration.

The charm closes with yet another envelope pattern, this time on the phrase *wunian mote*, and seems to partially abandon cross-caesura alliteration:

x x x x / \ x x / \acute{x} x / x
 þæt ic on þæs ælmihtigan frið wunian mōte, ?|A

¹⁰⁹ The epenthetic vowel is syncopated.

x \acute{x} x x / x x x / x /
 belocun wið þam lāþan, se mē lȳfes eht, A|B

x / x / x \acute{x} x
 on engla blæd gestapelod, B|?

x x x / x / / x / x
 and inna hāltre hand heofna rīces, B|A

x x x x x x x / x \acute{x} x / x
 þa hwile þe ic on þis līfe wunian mōte. Amen. ?|A (ll. 38-42)

The repetition of *wunian mote* emphasizes ideas of dwelling and permanence — the appropriate end of a journey. The lack of alliteration in lines 38, 40, and 42 suggests that poetic structure becomes less important as the charm launches into its final, summative petition. The phrase *ælmihhtigan frið* occurs only in this charm, and in an unattested half-line. Given that *frið* means both literal and spiritual peace, however, it is an ideal request for the purposes of this text and echoes the *f* alliteration of the previous line. The repetition of *belocun* (see l. 1) and *þam lāþan* (see ll. 4-5) brings the charm full-circle, reasserting the charmer's power against all kinds of incursive evil. The repetition of *engla blæd* and use of the participle *gestapelod* firmly establishes the charmer in ideal company and under ideal protection. An image of permanence, this latter term is given its own dedicated half-line (40b), despite the fact that doing so creates a three-position verse. The hand of God is, notably, described as *hal*: wholeness and purity are not only ideologically essential, but nearly equated with godliness.

The conclusion of the charm, irregular in metre and lacking alliteration, uses homiletic language to ask not for eternal life in heaven, but for heavenly protection in this earthly life, from both the immediate dangers of travel and the broader forces of illness, destruction, and sin that haunt the human experience. In so doing, Charm 11 brings the absolute power of Christian victory to bear on the same malicious creatures tackled by the

medical charms, excluding the unrighteous by default, as in the theft charms. Yet this text, like Charm 1, also seeks a return to purity and wholeness (the *halre hand* of God, the armour of the evangelists) through belief. Charm 11 seeks to create in its user a state of triumph over evil and oneness with God that can only be achieved through the conviction that we have already been redeemed.

Conclusion

Charms 1 and 11 elevate the trials of individuals and particular communities into struggles for the maintenance of Christian cosmic order, for the restoration of the correct relationships between man, God, and created world. The medical charms' battles against incursive agents and their attempts to maintain the wholeness of the body are aligned with this cosmic struggle, but it is Charms 1 and 11 that directly assert a vision of the correct order of the universe and posit the existence of a world in harmony with humankind. These texts are optimistic in their 'bright-blooming', 'wondrously adorned' imagery, eschewing the darkness and ambivalence that characterize the other charms, and are therefore, perhaps, a fitting note on which to conclude. Where the other charms assert that the user can overcome individual evils, Charms 1 and 11 assert that humanity deserves to live free of all danger. Through belief, these rituals claim, we will be made not only inviolate but holy and powerful. The metrical charms show that the righteous are not only destined for heaven, but capable of recreating Paradise on earth.

Conclusion

The metrical charms are a varied and complex group of texts, powerful in their elaborate verbal ornamentation and in their vivid imagery. Stylometric analysis rescues these twelve poems from the designation of ‘poor verse’, and the resulting recalibration of our understanding of the charms and their metre has major implications for our concepts of Old English poetic composition and cultural values.

This thesis has demonstrated, firstly, that the metrical charms’ irregularities are predictable and explicable within the narrative and practical structures of the texts themselves. Irregular half-lines occur when the putative composer is concerned with poetic structures — repetition, anaphora, parallelism, chiasmus, echoing — greater than the individual half-line or long-line. Unusual verses occur most frequently when the charm is employing traditional magical formulae, found in analogous Indo-European charm texts, that do not fit neatly within the bounds of the Old English metrical line. Such verses occur often in the climactic moment of magical efficacy, especially in the charms’ final lines. Unusual lines also occur, occasionally but to high dramatic effect, in moments of narrative disruption or transition. The use of particular words, phrases, and sentence structures evidently necessary to the charms’ function as magical texts or to the drama of their oral performance takes precedence over strict metrical regularity of the kind found in *Beowulf*. When the charms show a fixity of language, they also show a resulting elasticity of poetic form.

The charms were certainly composed within the broad tradition of Old English poetry, but constitute a distinct poetic ‘sub-dialect’ conditioned by their function: their verse is less rigid, more accommodating, than that of the *Beowulf*-poet or indeed most other vernacular verse of this period. Though the charms as preserved show every sign of textual transmission,

they are designed for oral performance by an educated practitioner, and they have an attendant flexibility. Old English metre was evidently, in some contexts, a more generous, impressionistic, and stylistically-dependent set of guidelines than scholars often assume — an ‘unfettered’ and ‘living art form’, in the words of Eric Stanley.¹ The charms deserve to be reintegrated into the corpus of Old English poetry on the basis of their use of imagery, poetic language and formulae, and verbal ornamentation. However, their difference from traditional Old English verse is also significant: it suggests that metre was an art rather than a science, a perceptible stylistic tool of the Old English poet. Reading the charms as poetry forces us to reevaluate the criteria by which we judge Old English verse, and overly simplistic dichotomies of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ poetry, ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ metre, ‘classical’ early verse and ‘decayed’ late verse, become self-evidently anachronistic.

A close reading of the charms also demonstrates the importance of style and ornament to a text’s thematic project. Chapter 1, using Charm 3 as a case study, demonstrated that the charms’ stylistic features highlight their poetic themes, point to important moments of magical efficacy, and elucidate the meaning of these enigmatic texts. This chapter introduced themes central to all the metrical charms — the violative nature of disease, the prominence of the principle of sympathy, the harnessing of ambivalent forces — which were then explored individually in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 focused on three charms interested in extracting and banishing incursive disease agents (4, 7, and 12) with martial violence and introduced the concept of health as inviolate wholeness, while Chapter 3 examined the principle of sympathy in Charm 2, and the ways in which this text seeks to create an multivalent origin myth for poisonous disease. Chapter 4 used stylistic and semantic analysis to draw attention

¹ E. G. Stanley, “*The Wonder of Creation: A New Edition and Translation, with Discussion of Problems*”, *Anglia* 131 (2013), 475-508.

to the mistrust of feminine bodies and beings in Charms 6 and 8, an inherent consequence of the incursive model of disease and of the charms' emphasis on the demarcation of 'inside' and 'outside'. Chapter 5 explored the ways in which the theft charms police the human community from within, and Chapter 6 built on these insights to examine the ideology of Christian victory in Charms 1 and 11. Close readings of all twelve charms consistently demonstrated the important correspondences between the Old English metrical charms and medieval charms in other languages, Old English verse of other genres, and Old English and Anglo-Latin prose.

This study has shown that the metrical charms deal with some of the most important cultural issues of the early medieval English period: the place of humanity in a hostile postlapsarian world; the threat that incursion, both literal and metaphorical, poses to the integrity of the self; the connection between an inviolate body and a saved soul; the fraught distinction between humanized, domesticated spaces and the chaotic supernatural wild; the definition of the human community by exclusion. These themes and anxieties are consistently highlighted by the charms' ornamental features. The rich results of such an analysis not only provide new insight into early medieval English literary concerns and cultural worldviews, but also suggest more broadly the power of stylometric analysis as a literary tool. Literary analyses in Old English rarely examine metre at all; to add metre to the toolbox of literary analysis is to make the latter more rigorous and quantifiable, and to move metrical theory from the realm of the abstract to the applicable, creating a more holistic and illuminating understanding of the composition of Old English poetry. The potential for future studies employing this methodology is vast. The three-position verse *Wulf, min Wulf* reminds us how many unusual lines exist even within the canon of Old English verse, as well as in unusual poetry like *The Rhyming Poem*, the *Metres of Boethius*, or gnomic verse.

If style is meaningful difference, the metrical charms possess a style of their own. Both their deviation from Old English norms and their use of poetic techniques and imagery found elsewhere in the verse corpus are thematically significant, functions of their central anxieties and their central purpose as magical texts. In many cases, the charms' disruptive, inventive metre not only cannot be emended, but also should not be emended. They are Old English poems that meditate vividly on power and powerlessness, but they are also artifacts of early medieval practice: valuable weapons in the daily struggle for survival and salvation.

Texts Edited With Translations

The Old English texts of Charms 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are based on those edited by Edward Pettit in *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*. The texts of Charms 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 are based on those edited by Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*. I have consulted multiple editions for all the charms. Where relevant, I cite the varying opinions of different editors in the footnotes. In some cases, I have disagreed with editorial decisions made by Pettit or Dobbie and presented the text accordingly. All such decisions are noted and explained. Following Dobbie, I have left minor errors in the Latin of Charms 5, 10, and 1 uncorrected.

All translations are my own. Texts are presented in the order in which they are discussed in the thesis.

CHARM 3 (Chapter 1)

+ Wið dweorh: man sceal niman VII lytle oflætan swylce man mid ofrað, 7 wri[t]an þas naman on ælcra oflætan: Maximian(us), Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion. Þænne eft þ(æt) galdor þ(æt) heræfter cweð man sceal singan, ærest on þ(æt) wynstre eare, þænne on þæt swiðre eare, þænne [b]ufan þæs mannes moldan; 7 ga þænne an mædenman to 7 ho hit on his sweoran, 7 do man swa þry dagas; hi(m) bið sona sel.

Hēr cōm ingangan inspidenwiht.¹

Hæfde hi(m) his haman on handa, cwæð þ(æt) þū his hæncgest wære.

Leg[d]e þē his tēage an swēoran. Ongunnan hi(m) of þæm lande liþan.

Sōna swā hȳ of þæm lande cōman þā ongunnan hi(m) ðā liþu cōlian.

5 Þā cō(m) ingangan dēores² sweostar.

Þā g(e)ændade hēo, 7 āðas swōr

ðæt nāfre þis ðæ(m) ādlegan derian ne mōste,

ne þæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte,

oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cūþe.

Amen. Fiað.

[Against a dwarf: a person must take seven little sacramental wafers such as one makes an offering with, and write these names on each wafer: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion. Then afterwards one must sing the incantation that is said hereafter, first into the left ear, then into the right ear, then above the crown of the person's head; and then let a virgin go to him and hang it on his neck, and let a person do so for three days; he will soon be better.

Here came walking in an *inspiden* (?strengthened within) creature.

It had its bridle in its hand, said that you were its steed.

(It) laid its reins on your neck. They began to take ?themselves³ from the land.

As soon as they came from the land, then the limbs began to cool ?themselves.

5 Then came walking in the beast's sister.

Then she interceded, and swore oaths

that this must never harm the sick person,

nor the one who is able to obtain this incantation,

nor (the one) who knows how to sing this incantation.

Amen. Let it be done.]

CHARM 4 (Chapter 2)

Wið færstice, feferfuige 7 seo reade netele ðe þurh ærn inwyxð 7 wegbrade; wyll in buteran.

Hlūde wæran hȳ, lā hlūde, ðā hȳ ofer þone hlæw ridan,

wæran ānmōde ðā hȳ ofer land ridan.

Scyld ðū ðē nū, þū ðysne nīð genesan mōte!

¹ On word division and the lack of emendation from MS *inspidenwiht* in this line, see Chapter 1.

² Dobbie (212) emends to *dweores*. Grattan and Singer (163) emend to *eares*.

³ Pettit considers *him* to be a pleonastic reflexive dative in this line and lines 2-3: 'then the limbs themselves began to cool' (Pettit, II, 189, citing Mitchell, *Syntax*, 113-14). However, in other instances of the phrase *ongunn[o]n him*, the pronoun is a non-reflexive dative. See *DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Ongunnon him", "Ongunnan him".

- Ūt, lýtēl spere, gif hērinne sīe!
 5 Stōd under linde, under lēohtu(m) scylde,
 þār ðā mihtigan wīf hýra mægen beræddon,
 7 hý gyllende gāras sændan.
 Ic him oðerne eft wille sændan,
 flēogende flān(e) forane tōgēanes.
 10 Ūt lýtē[l] spere, gif hit hērinne sý!
 Sæt smið, slōh seax,
 lýtēl īserna, wundswīðe.⁴
 Ūt lýtēl spere, gif hērinne sý!
 Syx smiðas sētan, wælspera worhtan.
 15 Ūt spere! Næs in spere!
 Gif hērinne sý īsenes dæl,
 hægtessan geweorc, hit sceal gemyltan.
 Gif ðū wære on fell scoten, oððe wære on flæsc scoten,
 oððe wære on blōd scoten,⁵
 20 oððe wære on lið scoten, nāfre ne sý ðīn lif ātæsed.
 Gif hit wære ēsa gescot oððe hit wære ylfa gescot
 oððe hit wære hægtessan gescot nū ic wille ðīn helpan.
 Þis ðē tō bōte ēsa gescotes, ðis ðē tō bōte ylfa gescotes,
 ðis ðē tō bōte hægtessan gescotes; ic ðīn wille helpan.
 25 Flēd þ(æ)r on fyrgehæfde.⁶
 Hāl westū! Helpe ðīn drihten.
 Nim þon(ne) þ(æt) seax; ado on wætan.

[Against a sudden, stabbing pain: feverfew and the red nettle which grows in through the house (*or*: the grain) and waybread (greater plantain); boil in butter.

- Loud were they, lo, loud, when they rode over the burial mound,
 they were resolute when they rode over the land.
 Shield yourself now, you can escape this attack!
 Out, little spear, if you are herein!
 5 (I) stood under a lime-wood (shield), under a bright shield,
 where the mighty women consulted⁷ their power,
 and they sent screaming spears.
 I will send another back to them,
 a flying dart from the front in return.
 10 Out, little spear, if it be herein!
 A smith sat, forged a knife,

⁴ Dobbie (212-13) and Storms (143) assume a lacuna. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, the MS text is grammatically and semantically understandable. I have therefore followed Pettit in declining to emend.

⁵ Pettit (I, 92), Storms (142), and Grattan and Singer (174) add the b-verse *oððe wære on ban scoten* to this line. For discussion, see Chapter 2.

⁶ Numerous emendations have been proposed for this line (for a complete list, see Pettit, I, 94), most positing the existence of a lacuna, and many emending *fled* to *fleoh*. Given the difficulty of *fled* and the impossibility of knowing whether text was lost here, I follow Pettit, who does not emend the MS text.

⁷ *DOE s.v.* “Berædan”, definition B.

- a little one of iron weapons, powerful in wounding (*or* severely wounded).
 Out, little spear, if you are herein!
 Six smiths sat, worked slaughter-spears.
- 15 Out, spear! Not in, spear!
 If there be herein a piece of iron,
 the work of witches⁸, it must melt.
 If you were shot in the skin, or were shot in the flesh,
 or were shot in the blood,
- 20 or were shot in the limb, never may your life be harmed.
 If it were gods' shot, or it were elves' shot,
 or it were witches' shot, now I will help you.
 This to you as a cure for gods' shot, this to you as a cure for elves' shot,
 this to you as a cure for witches' shot; I will help you.
- 25 It is fleeing (*or* may it flee) there on the mountaintop.
 Be whole! May the Lord help you.
 Then take the knife; put it in (the) liquid.]

CHARM 7 (Chapter 2)

Gif mon biþ on wæterælfadle, þonne beoþ him þa handnæglas wonne and þa eagan tearige and wile locian niþer. Do him þis to læcedome: eforþrote, cassuc, fone niþoweard, eowberge, elehtre, eolone, mersmealwan crop, fenminte, dile, lilie, attorlaþe, polleie, marubie, docce, ellen, felterre, wermod, streawbergean leaf, consolde; ofgeot mid ealaþ, do hæligwæter to, sing þis gealdor ofer þriwa:

- Ic benne awrat [*or* awrað] betest beadowræda,
 swā benne ne burnon, ne burston,
 ne fundian, ne feologan,
 ne hoppettan, ne wund waxsian,⁹
- 5 ne dolh dīopian,
 ac him self healde hāle wæge,¹⁰
 ne ace þē þon mā þe eorþan on ēare ace.

Sing þis manegum siþum:

Eorþe þē onbere eallum hire mihtum and mægenum.¹¹

þas galdor mon mæg singan on wunde.

[If a man has water-elf-disease, then his fingernails are livid and his eyes are teary and he wishes to look downwards. Do this for him as a remedy: carline thistle, cassock,¹² the lower

⁸ *Hægtessan* is likely a weak plural genitive. See Hall, *Elves*, 4; Pettit, II, 247; T. F. Hoad, "Old English Weak Genitive Plural -an: Towards Establishing the Evidence", in *From Anglo-Saxon To Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. Godden et al. (Oxford, 1994), 108-29.

⁹ MS *wæosian*. Dobbie emends to *waxsian*, a well-attested verb. Cockayne (II, 353) and Grendon (195) both emend to *waco sian*, which they translate as 'be wicked/filthy', but the form *sian* is unusual and *wac* means 'weak, pliant, inferior' (*BT* s.v. "Si", "Wac").

¹⁰ The lineation of ll. 5-6 is my own. Dobbie (125) prints as one long line, and has *halewæge*.

¹¹ Dobbie (125) lineates this line as prose.

¹² Possibly hassock-grass (P. Bierbaumer, *Der Botanische Wortschatz des Altenglischen*, 3 vols [Bern, 1975]).

part of iris, yew-berry, lupine, elecampane, marshmallow sprouts, water mint, dill, lily, poison-loather,¹³ pennyroyal, white horehound, dock, elder, centaury, wormwood, wild strawberry leaf, comfrey; soak them with ale, add holy water to (them), sing this incantation over (them) three times:

I bound around¹⁴ the wounds the best of battle-bandages,
 so the wounds do not burn, nor burst,
 nor grow evilly inward, nor discolour (i.e. putrefy),
 nor throb, nor the wounds grow,
 nor sores deepen,
 but may (I) myself preserve him by means of holy/healthy water,
 nor let it ache for you more than it pains the earth of the tillage.

Sing this many times:

May earth destroy¹⁵ you with all its might and power.

One can sing this incantation on a wound.]

CHARM 12 (Chapter 2)

Wenne, wenne, wenchichenne,
 hēr ne scealt þū timbrien, ne nenne tūn habben
 ac þū scealt north eonene to þan nīhgan berhge
 þēr þū hauest, ermig, ēne brōþer.
 5 Hē¹⁶ þē sceal legge lēaf et hēafde.
 Under fōt wolues,¹⁷ under ueþer earnes,
 under earnes cleā, ā þū geweornie.
 Clinge þū alswā cōl on heorþe
 scring þū alswā scerne¹⁸ awāge
 10 and weorne alswā weter on anbre.¹⁹
 Swa litel þū gewurþe alswā linsetcorn
 and miccli lesse alswā ānes handwurmes hupebān
 and alswā litel þū gewurþe þet þū nāwiht gewurþe.²⁰

¹³ This plant could be betony (*stachys officinalis*), cockspur grass (*echinochloa crus-galli*), *solanum nigrum*, or a calque on the Latin *venenifuga*, among others (Bierbaumer, II, 3).

¹⁴ I translate ‘bound’ here because I assume, as discussed in Chapter 2, that *awrat* is an error for *awrað*.

¹⁵ Some scholars render this verb as ‘to bear upon’ (Storms, 163; Cameron, *Medicine*, 154; Cockayne, II, 353) but that is not an attested meaning of *onberan* (BT s.v. “Onberan”).

¹⁶ Sandmann (66) and Schneider (“Zaubersprüche”, 287) argue that this pronoun should be *ic*, referring to the physician, because they assume the wen’s sibling cannot be part of the cure that destroys the swelling. Storms posits a lacuna in the charm for this same reason (157). The text has no sign of an error or lacuna, however, and Charm 3 demonstrates that the siblings of a disease agent can be commanded to operate against their kin.

¹⁷ MS *uolmes*. See Chapter 2 for discussion.

¹⁸ The MS reading *scesne* is meaningless; Dobbie (128) and Grendon’s (216) suggested emendation *scerne* makes sense in context, and indeed the *s* in the manuscript is oddly formed and bears some resemblance to the scribe’s *r*.

¹⁹ The caesura placement in lines 8-10 is my own; see Chapter 2.

²⁰ The lineation of lines 12-13 is my own; see Chapter 2.

[Wen,²¹ wen, wen-chicken,
 here you must not build, nor have a dwelling,
 but you must (go) from hence north to the nearby²² hill (*or* burial mound),
 there you have, miserable wretch, one brother.
 5 He must lay for you a leaf at the head.²³
 Under the wolf's foot, under the eagle's feather,
 under the eagle's claw, ever may you wither away.
 May you shrink up, just like coal on the hearth,
 may you dry up, just like dung on a wall,
 10 and fade away, just like water in a vessel.
 May you become just as little as a linseed-grain,
 and much smaller, just like a hand-worm's hipbone,
 and may you likewise become so little that you become nothing.]

CHARM 2 (Chapter 3)

Gemyne ðū, Mucgwyrt, hwæt þū āmeldodest,
 hwæt þū rēnadest æt Regenmelde.
 Ūna þū hāttest, yldost wyrta;
 ðū miht wið III 7 wið XXX,
 5 þū miht wiþ āttre 7 wið onflyge,
 þū miht wiþ þā[m]²⁴ lāþan ðe geond lond fæ[r[e]ð.²⁵
 + Ond þū, Wegbrāde, wyrta mōdor,
 ēastan op[e]ne, innan mihtigu;
 ofer ðy cræte curran, ofer ðy cwēne reodan,
 10 ofer ðy brýde bryodedon, ofer þy fearras fnærdon;
 eallum þū þon wiðstōde 7 wiðstunedest.
 Swā ðū wiðstonde āttre 7 onflyge
 7 þæ(m) lāðan þe geond lond fēreð.
 Stune hætte þeos wyrt, hēo on stāne gewēox;
 15 stond hēo wið āttre, stunað hēo wærce.
 Stīðe hēo hātte, wiðstunað hēo āttre,
 wreceð hēo wrāðan, weorpeð ut āttor.
 + Þis is sēo wyrt sēo wiþ wýrm gefeagt;
 þeos mæg wið āttre, hēo mæg wið onflyge,
 20 hēo mæg wið ðā[m] lāðan ðe geond lond fēreþ.

²¹ The charm addresses the wen in the nominative vocative with a Middle English final *-e*. This is not, as Cook suggests, the dative (30). See Dobbie, 128.

²² Schneider (“Zaubersprüche”, 289-90), followed by Sandmann (68) and Cook (33), argues that *nihgan* is an otherwise-unattested Old English word meaning ‘killer’ (**niga*).

²³ Most scholars (Storms, 155; Meaney, *Amulets*, 19; Grendon, 216; Sandmann, 62) translate this line as ‘he must lay a leaf at your head’, but *þe* is in the dative. Cameron (*Medicine*, 155) translates as I have done here.

²⁴ This expansion (and the same expansion in l. 20) is likely, as the article should be dative, and the feminine *þā* is accusative (Pettit, II, 126-7; Dobbie, 210). Cf. Cockayne, III, 33; Grattan and Singer, 151.

²⁵ Pettit does not emend this verb to its usual form *fereþ* or *færeð*, but it appears in this form elsewhere in the charm and is metrically more appropriate.

- Flēoh þū nū Āttorlāðe sēo lāsse ðā māran,
sēo mære þā læssan, oððæt him bēigra bōt sȳ.
Gemyne þū, Mægðe, hwæt þū āmeldodest,
hwæt ðū geændadest æt Alorforda,
25 þ(æt) nāfre for gefloge feorh ne gesealde
syþðan him mon Mægðan tō mete gegyrede.
Þis is sēo wȳrt ðe wergulu hātte;
ðās onsænde seolh ofer sæs hrygc[e],²⁶
ondan āttres oþres tō bōte.
- 30 Ðās VIII ongan wið nygon āttrum.
+ Wȳrm cōm snīcan, tōslāt hē nān,
ðā genam Wōden VIII wuldortānas,
slōh ðā þā nāddran þ(æt) hēo on VIII tōflēah.
þær geændade Æppel 7 āttor
- 35 þ(æt) hēo nāfre ne wolde on hūs būgan. +
Fille 7 Finule, felamihtigu twā:
þā wȳrte gescēop wītig Drihten,
hālig on heofonu(m), þā hē hongode;
sette 7 sænde on VII worulde
- 40 earmum 7 ēadigum eallu(m) tō bōte.
Stond hēo wið wærce, stunað hēo wið āttre,
sēo mæg wið III 7 wið XXX,
wið fēondes hond 7 [w]ið f[ær]b[r]egde,²⁷
wið malscrunge minra wihta. +
- 45 Nū magon þās VIII wȳrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum,
wið VIII āttrum 7 wið nygon onflognum:
wið ðȳ rēadan āttre, wið ðā runlan āttre,
wið ðȳ hwītan āttre, wið ðȳ wēdenan āttre,²⁸
wið ðȳ geolwan āttre wið ðȳ grēnan āttre,
- 50 wið ðȳ wonnan āttre wið ðȳ wēdenan āttre,
wið ðȳ br[ūn]an āttre wið ðȳ basewan āttre,
wið wȳrmgeblæd, wið wætergeblæd,
wið þorngeblæd, wið þys[te]lgeblæd,
wið ȳsgeblæd, wið āttorgeblæd,
- 55 gif ænig āttor cume ēastan flēogan,
oððe ænig norðan cume,²⁹
oððe ænig westan ofer werðēode.

²⁶ Pettit does not emend MS *hrygc*. See Chapter 3.

²⁷ See Chapter 3 for discussion of this emendation.

²⁸ The MS reads *wedenan* [blue], but Meaney (“Causes”, 16), Grattan and Singer (154), and Storms (188-9) emend to *hæwenan* [blue-grey] to avoid repetition of *wedenan*. Pettit (II, 154) argues that *wedenan* should not be emended, because the list would then contain ten poisons. Dobbie (211) suggests both possibilities. I have followed the MS.

²⁹ Dobbie notes a lacuna (211); Pettit (II, 158) adds *oððe ænig suðan*, while Grattan and Singer (157) add *genægan cume*.

Crīst stōd ofer alde (*or adle*)³⁰ ængancundes.
 Ic āna wāt ēa rinnende,
 60 7 þā nygon nǣdran behealdað;
 mōtan ealle weoda nū wyrtu(m) āspringan,
 sæs tōslūpan, eal sealt wæter,
 ðon(ne) ic þis āttor of ðē geblāwe.

Mucgwyr̥t, wegbrade þe eastan open sy, lombes cyrse, attorlaðan, magedan, netelan, wudusuræppel, fille 7 finul, ealde sapan; gewyrc ða wyrta to duste; mængc wiþ þa sapan 7 wiþ þæs æpples gor. Wyr̥c slypan of wætere 7 of axsan; genim finol, wyl on þære slyppan, 7 beþe mid [ð]a[n] gemo[n]gc[e] þon(ne) he þa sealfe on de, ge ær ge æfter. Sing þ(æt) galdor on ælcra þara wyrta, III ær he hy wyrce, 7 on þone æppel ealswa; ond singe þon men in þone muð 7 in þa earan buta 7 on ða wunde þ(æt) ilce gealdor ær he þa sealfe on de.

[Remember, Mugwort,³¹ what you declared,
 what you arranged at the Great Proclamation.
 You are called *Una* (One), oldest (*or chief*) of plants,
 you have might against three and against thirty,
 5 you have might against poison and against an on-flier,
 you have might against the loathsome one that travels throughout the land.
 And you, Waybread (greater plantain), mother of plants,
 open from the east, mighty within;
 over you carts creaked, over you queens rode,
 10 over you brides cried out (*or trampled*), over you bulls snorted;
 you withstood and dashed against all then.
 Just so may you withstand poison and an on-flier
 and the loathsome one that travels throughout the land.
 This plant is called Resounding (*or Dashing, Crashing*), it grew on stone,
 15 it stands against poison, it crashes against pain.
 It is called Sturdy (*or Unrelenting*), it dashes against poison,
 it drives out the cruel one, throws out poison.
 This is the plant that fought against the worm;
 this has power against poison, it has power against an on-flier,
 20 it has power against the loathsome one that travels throughout the land.
 Put to flight now, Poison-loather, the lesser (herb) the greater (poison),
 the greater (herb) the lesser (poison), until there is a cure for him of both.³²
 Remember, Camomile, what you declared,
 what you brought about at Alder-ford,

³⁰ Grendon (228), Dobbie (211), and Storms (192) emend to *adle*; Grattan and Singer (157) and Pettit (II, 158) leave MS *alde*. *Alde* would be a plural accusative adjective with implied noun while *adle* would be a singular accusative or dative noun.

³¹ Translations of all plant names made in consultation with Bierbaumer, II.

³² My translation agrees with the one provided by Banham (“Herbs”, 189) and Pettit (I, 60); a similar translation was originally proposed by Skemp (300).

- 25 that life should never be lost because of a flying one,³³
 after camomile was prepared for it/him/them as food.
 This is the plant that is called Evil (*or* Cursed);
 a seal sent this over the surface of the sea,
 as a cure for the harm of another poison.
- 30 These nine shoots against nine poisons.
 A worm came crawling, it tore apart no one,
 then Woden took up nine glory-twigs,
 then struck the snake so that it flew apart into nine.
 There Apple and its poison brought it about
- 35 that it (the snake) never wanted to (*or* would never) enter a house.
 Chervil and fennel, two very mighty ones:
 the wise Lord created these plants,
 holy in the heavens, when he hung;
 he created and sent (them) into seven worlds
- 40 for the miserable and the fortunate, as a remedy for all.
 It stands against pain, it dashes against poison,
 it has power against three and against thirty,
 against the enemy's hand and against sudden treachery,³⁴
 against the Evil Eye of vile creatures.
- 45 Now these nine plants have power against nine glory-fleeing ones,
 against nine poisons and against nine on-fliers:
 against the red poison,³⁵ against the foul poison,³⁶
 against the white poison, against the blue poison,
 against the yellow poison, against the green poison,
- 50 against the dark poison, against the blue poison,
 against the brown poison, against the crimson poison,
 against the worm-blister, against the water-blister,
 against the thorn-blister, against the thistle-blister,
 against the ice-blister, against the poison-blister,
- 55 if any poison come flying from the east,
 or any come from the north,
 or any from the west over the nations of men.
 Christ stood over the ancient ones (*or* disease) of every kind (*or* in a unique way).
 I alone know running water,
 60 and the nine snakes behold it;

³³ Banham ("Herbs", 189) proposes 'that never gave life for what flies', but the phrase *feorh gesellan* [to lose life] appears elsewhere in the OE corpus, and the preposition *for* has the attested meaning 'on account of, because of' (*BT* s.v. "Gesellan"; *BT, DOE* s.v. "For".)

³⁴ Pettit's translation 'seizure' (II, 151) is not an attested meaning of the noun *bregd* (*DOE* s.v. "Bregd").

³⁵ Colour words are difficult to translate. Numerous interpretations of this list have been offered (e.g. Storms, 102; Banham, "Herbs", 190; Pettit, I, 67; Meaney, "Causes", 16; Bonser, *Background*, 217). I have relied on C. P. Biggam's authoritative work in Old English colour semantics (*Blue in Old English: An Interdisciplinary Semantic Study* [Amsterdam, 1997]) for all translations.

³⁶ The word *runlan* is a *hapax legomenon*. This translation is commonly accepted, based on a postulated connection with ON *hrunull* (Pettit, II, 155; Storms, 197; Banham, "Herbs", 190; Meaney, "Causes", 16; Biggam, 185; Grattan and Singer, 154). Cf. Pollington (217) and Grendon (228), who translate "running".

all weeds must now vanish (*or* perish, dwindle) from among plants,
 seas must part (*or* dissolve), all salt water,
 when I blow this poison from you.

Mugwort, greater plantain which is open from the east, lamb's cress,³⁷ poison-loather,³⁸ camomile, stinging nettle, crabapple, chervil and fennel, old soap; work the plants into a powder; mix with the soap and with the rotten part (*or* peel, pulp)³⁹ of the apple. Make a paste of water and of ashes; take fennel, boil in the paste, and foment with that mixture when he puts on the salve, both before and after. Sing the incantation on each of the plants, thrice before he uses them, and on the apple likewise; and sing the same incantation into the person's mouth and into both the ears and on the wounds before he applies the salve.]

CHARMS 6a-6c (Chapter 4)

(a) Se⁴⁰ wifman se hire cild afedan ne mæg: gange to gewitenes mannes birgenne 7 stæppe þon(ne) þriwa ofer þa byrgenne, 7 cweþe þon(ne) þriwa þas word:

þis mē tō bōte þære lāþan lætbyrde
 þis mē tō bōte þære swæran swærtbyrde⁴¹
 þis mē tō bōte þære lāðan lambyrde.

7 þon(ne) þ(æt) wif seo mid bearne 7 heo to hyre hlaforde on reste ga, þon(ne) cweþe heo:

Ūp ic gonge, ofer þē stæppe
 mid cwican cilde nālæs mid cwel[l]endum⁴²
 mid fulborenum, nālæs mid fægan.

7 þon(ne) seo modor gefele þ(æt) þ(æt) bearn si cwic, ga þon(ne) to cyrican, 7 þon(ne) heo toforan þan weofude cume cweþe þon(ne):

Crīste, ic sæde, þis gecyþed.

(b) Se wifmon se hyre bearn afedan ne mæge: genime heo sylf hyre agenes cildes gebyrgenne dæl, [w]ry æfter þon(ne) on blace wulle 7 bebicge to cepemannu(m) 7 cweþe þon(ne):

lc hit bebicge, gē hit bebicgan,
 þās sweartan wulle 7 þysse sorge corn.

(c) Se man se [n]e mæge bearn afedan: nime þon(ne) anes bleos cu meoluc on hyre handæ 7 gesupe þon(ne) mid hyre muþe, 7 gange þon(ne) to yrnendu(m) wætere 7 spiwe þærin þa meolc, 7 hlade þon(ne) mid þære ylcan hand þæs wæteres muð fulne 7 forswelge; cweþe þon(ne) þas word:

Gehwēr ferde ic mē þone mæran maga þihtan.
 Mid þysse mæran mete þihtan

³⁷ This plant could be *cardamine hirsuta*, *capsella bursa-pastoris*, or *thlaspi arvense* (Bierbaumer, II, 112).

³⁸ See note to *attorlæpe* in Charm 7 above.

³⁹ On this translation of *gor*, see Pettit, II, 162.

⁴⁰ Grattan and Singer (188-9), Abernethy (122) and Sandmann (96) assign the text a heading that belongs to another remedy. For arguments against reassigning the heading to Charm 6, see Brown, 45-51; Pettit, II, 316.

⁴¹ Dobbie emends to *swærbyrde* (214), but the emendation creates a tautology.

⁴² Cockayne (III, 67), Grendon (206), and Storms (197-8) retain MS *cwellendum*. Pettit (II, 324) and Grattan and Singer (188-9) emend to *cwelendum*.

þo[ne]⁴³ ic mē wille habban 7 hām gān.
 þon(ne) heo to þan broce ga, þon(ne) ne beseo heo no, ne eft þon(ne) heo þanan ga; 7 þon(ne)
 ga heo in oþer hus oþer heo ut ofeode, 7 þær gebyrge metes.

[(a) The woman who cannot nourish/sustain her child: let her go to a dead man's grave and then step three times over the grave, and then say these words three times:

This to me as a cure for the loathsome late (*or* slow) birth,
 this to me as a cure for the grievous dark-coloured birth,
 this to me as a cure for the loathsome disabled birth.

And when the woman is with child and she goes to her husband in his rest, then let her say:

Up I go, over you I step,
 with a living child, not with a killing (*or* dying) one,
 with a full-term one, not with a doomed one.

And when the mother feels that the child is alive, then let her go to the church, and when she comes before the altar then let her say:

To Christ, I said, this is made known.

(b) The woman who cannot nourish/sustain her child: let her herself take a piece of her own child's grave, then afterwards wrap it in dark wool and sell it to traders and then say:

I sell it, you sell it,
 this dark wool and seeds of this sorrow.

(c) The person who cannot nourish/sustain a child: let her then take milk of a cow of one colour in her hand and then sip it with her mouth, and then go to running water and spit the milk therein, and then scoop up with the same hand a mouthful of water and swallow it; then let her say these words:

Everywhere I have carried the famous, strong son.
 By means of this famous, strong food
 I will have that one for myself and go home.

When she goes to the brook, then let her not look back, nor again when she goes from there; and then let her go into a house other than the one she went out of, and there let her eat food.]

CHARM 8 (Chapter 4)

Wið ymbe nim eorþan, oferweorp mid þinre swiþran handa under þinum swiþran fet, and cwet:

Fō ic under fōt, funde ic hit.
 Hwæt, eorðe mæg wið ealra wihta gehwilce,
 and wið andan and wið æminde
 and wið þa micelan mannes tungan.

And wiððon⁴⁴ forweorp ofer gret þonne hi swirman, and cweð:

⁴³ Pettit (II, 330), Storms (199), and Grattan and Singer (191) emend as above; the MS has *þonne*.

⁴⁴ MS *wið on*. Dobbie's emendation to *wiððon* [against that] is most straightforward and mirrors the first set of prose instructions. Storms (136) and Abernethy (154) emend to *siððon* [after] and Sandmann (33) emends to *wið beon* [against bees]. Elsackers suggests that *wið-on* is an adverbial phrase meaning 'thereupon' ('Magic', 447-61).

5 Sitte gē, sigewīf, sīgað tō eorþan!
 Næfre gē wilde tō wuda flēogan.
 Bēo gē swā gemindige mīnes gōdes,
 swā bið manna gehwilec metes and ēþeles.

[For a swarm of bees, take earth, throw it down with your right hand under your right foot, and say:

I seize it under my foot; I found⁴⁵ it.
 Lo, earth has power against each and every creature
 and against malice and against jealousy
 and against the great tongue of a person.⁴⁶

And against that, cast dust over them when they swarm, and say:

5 Sit, victory-women,⁴⁷ sink to the earth!
 May you never fly wild to the woods.
 Be as mindful of my well-being
 as every person is of food and homeland.]

CHARM 5 (Chapter 5)

Þon(ne) þe mon ærest secge þ(æt) þin ceap sy losod, þon(ne) cweð þu ærest ær þu elles hwæt cweþe:

Bæðleem hātte sēo buruh þe Crīst on ācænned wæs.
 Sēo is gemærsod geond ealne middangeard;
 swā þyos dæd for monnum mære gewurþe.
 þurh þa haligan Cristes rode. Amen.

Gebide þe þo(ne) þriwa east 7 cweþ þon(ne) þriwa: Crux (Christi) ab oriente reducað; gebide þe þo(ne) þriwa west 7 cweþ þon(ne) þriwa: Crux (Christi) ab occidente reducat; gebide þe þo(ne) þriwa suð 7 cweþ þriwa: Crux (Christi) ab austro reducat; gebide þe þo(ne) þriwa norð 7 cweþ þriwa: Crux (Christi) ab aquilone reducað; Crux (Christi) abscondita est et inuenta est. Iudeas Crist ahengon, dydon dæda þa wyrrestan, hælton þ(æt) hy forhelan ne mihtan; swa þeos dæd nænige þinga f[o]rholen ne wurþe, þurh þa haligan Cristes rode. Amen.

[When someone first tells you that your cattle/property is lost (*or* perished, escaped, stolen),⁴⁸ then say first, before you say anything else:

The city is called Bethlehem where Christ was born.
 This is glorified throughout the whole world;
 so may this deed become famous for mankind,

⁴⁵ Hamp (340) suggests this verb is a form of *fundian* [to go after], but *funde* is only attested as the singular preterite of OE *findan* [to find]. See *DOE* s.v. “Findan”, “Fundian”; Dobbie, 214.

⁴⁶ If the adjective *micelan* belonged grammatically to *mannes*, as Sandmann (35) and R. Meissner (“Die Zunge des Grossen Mannes”, *Anglia* 40 [1916], 375-93) suggest, the pronoun should be *þæs* rather than the feminine *þa*, which must belong with *tungan* (Dobbie, 214; Abernethy, 153).

⁴⁷ In strong neuter declensions, nominative and accusative plural do not take an ending after a long syllable, so the use of plural pronouns suggests that *wif* is plural here (cf. Crawford, “Evidences”, 106; Abernethy, 155; Nelson, “Wordsige”, 57).

⁴⁸ The multiplicity of *losian* (*BT* s.v. “Losian”) suggests that the charm may also be used to retrieve stray or lost cattle (Pettit, II, 282).

through the holy cross of Christ. Amen.

Pray then thrice eastwards and then say thrice: May the Cross of Christ bring (it/them) back from the east; pray then thrice westwards and say thrice: May the Cross of Christ bring back from the west; pray then thrice southwards and say thrice: May the Cross of Christ bring back from the south; pray then thrice northwards and say thrice, May the Cross of Christ bring back from the north; the Cross of Christ is lost and is found. The Jews hanged Christ, did the worst of deeds, hid that which they could not conceal; so may this deed no be concealed by any means, through the holy Cross of Christ. Amen.]

CHARM 10 (Chapter 5)

Dis man sceal cweðon ðonne his ceapa hwilcne man forstolenne. Cyð⁴⁹ ær he ænyg oþer word cweðe:

Bethlem hättæ sēo burh ðe Crist on geboren wes,
sēo is gemærsod ofer ealne middangeard;
swā ðeos dæd wyrþe for mannum mære.

p(er) cruce(m) (Cristi).

7 gebide þe þonne þriwa east and cweð þriwa + (Cristi) ab oriente reducat; 7 in west 7 cweð Crux (Cristi) ab occidente reducat; 7 in suð 7 cweð Crux (Cristi) a meridie reducant; 7 in norð 7 cweð Crux (Cristi) abscondita sunt & inventa est. Iudeas Crist ahengon, gedidon him dæda þa wyrstan, hælton þ(æt) hi forhelan ne mihton; swa næfre ðeos dæd forholen ne wyrðe; per cruce(m) (Cristi).

[A person must say this when any of his cattle/property is stolen. He is to proclaim before he says any other word:

The city is called Bethlehem where Christ was born.
This is glorified over the whole world;
so may this deed become famous for mankind,
through the cross of Christ.

And pray then thrice eastwards and say thrice: May the Cross of Christ bring (it/them) back from the east; and to the west and say, May the Cross of Christ bring back from the west; and to the south and say, May the Cross of Christ bring back from the south; and to the north and say, the Cross of Christ is lost and is found. The Jews hanged Christ, did to him the worst of deeds, hid that which they could not conceal; so may this deed never be concealed; through the cross of Christ.]

CHARM 9 (Chapter 5)

Ne forstolen ne forholen nanuht þæs ðe ic age, þe ma ðe mihte Herod urne drihten. Ic gēpohte sancte Eadelenan⁵⁰ and ic gēpohte Crist on rode ahangen.

⁴⁹ Dobbie (126), Storms (210), and Cockayne (I, 390) emend to *cwyð* [say], but *cyðan* is an attested verb meaning ‘to proclaim’ (Pettit, II, 274-5; Abernethy, 165; *DOE* s.v. “Cyðan”).

⁵⁰ Potentially an abbreviation or error for *eadigu Elena* [blessed Helena] (Griffiths, 199) or simply an inexplicable and unusual prefix (Abernethy, 161; Dobbie, 215).

- Swa ic þence þis feoh to findanne,⁵¹ næs to oðfeorrganne,⁵²
 and to witanne, næs to oðwyrceanne,
 and to lufianne, næs to oðlædanne.
 Gārmund, godes ðegen
 5 find þæt feoh and fere þæt feoh
 and hafa þæt feoh and heald þæt feoh,
 and fere ham þæt feoh.
 Þæt hē nāfre næbbe landes þæt hē hit oðlæde,
 ne foldan, þæt hit oðferie,
 10 ne hūsa, þæt hē hit oðhealde.
 Gif hyt hwā gedō, ne gedīge hit him nāfre!
 Binnan þrym nihtum cunne ic his mihta,
 his mægen and his mihta and his mundcræftas.
 Eall hē weornige, swā syre⁵³ wudu weornie,
 15 swā brēðel seō⁵⁴ swā þystel
 se ðe ðis feoh oðfergean þence
 oððe ðis orf oðētian ðence. Amen.

[May nothing of what I own be stolen or concealed, any more than Herod could (conceal) our Lord. I thought of St Helena, and I thought of Christ hung on the cross.

- So I intend to find these cattle, not to (have them) carried off,
 and to know of them (their location), not to (have them) be harmed,
 and to love them, not to (have them) be led away.
 Garmund, retainer of God,
 5 find those cattle and lead those cattle,
 and take possession of those cattle and guard those cattle,
 and bring home those cattle.
 May he never have any land, because he leads it away,
 nor an extent of territory, because he carries it off,
 10 nor shelter, because he withholds it.
 If anyone should do so, may it never avail him!
 Within three nights, may I know his might,
 His power and his might and his protection-skills.
 May he entirely wither, as dry wood withers,
 15 may he be as fragile⁵⁵ as a thistle,
 he who intends to carry off these cattle,
 or intends to drive away this property. Amen.]

⁵¹ The arrangement of the first three verse lines is my own; Dobbie prints as prose.

⁵² This verb is either an error for *oðferian* or the lone occurrence of the verb *oðfeorrian*; their meanings are nearly identical (*BT s.v.* “Oðferian”, “Oðfeorrian”; Abernethy, 161).

⁵³ MS *syer*. Abernethy (165), Dobbie (215), and Fisher (56) have the likely emendation *syre*. Cockayne (I, 385), Grendon (183), Storms (216-17), and Hollis (“Cattle-Theft”, 145) emend to *fyer* [fire], but *weornian* is intransitive and active, so the translations ‘as fire withers wood’ or ‘as wood is withered by fire’ are not possible.

⁵⁴ MS *þeo*. Retained by Cockayne, I, 385; Grendon, 183.

⁵⁵ *DOE s.v.* “Brepel”; Dobbie, 215. Cf. Grendon, 183; Olsan, “Inscription”, 412; Cockayne, I, 385; Fisher, 56.

CHARM 1 (Chapter 6)

Her ys seo bot, hu ðu meahþ þine æceras betan gif hi nellap wel wexan oþþe þær hwilc ungedefe þing on gedon bið on dry oððe on lyblace. Genim þonne on niht, ær hyt dagige, feower tyrf on feower healfa þæs landes, and gemearca hu hy ær stodon. Nim þonne ele and hunig and beorman, and ælces feos meolc þe on þæm lande sy, and ælces treowcynnnes dæl þe on þæm lande sy gewexen, butan heardan beaman, and ælcra namcuþre wyrte dæl, butan glappan anon, and do þonne haligwæter ðær on, and drype þonne þriwa on þone staðol þara turfa, and cweþe ðonne ðas word: Crescite, wexe, et multiplicamini, and gemænigfealda, et replete, and gefylle, terre, þas eorðan. In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti sit benedicti. And Pater Noster swa oft swa þæt oðer. And bere siþþan ða turf to circean, and mæssepreost asinge feower mæssan ofer þan turf on, and wende man þæt grene to ðan weofode, and siþþan gebringe man þa turf þær hi ær wæron ær sunnan setlgange. And hæbbe him gæworht of cwicbeame feower Cristes mælo and awrite on ælcon ende: Matheus and Marcus, Lucas and Iohannes. Lege þæt Cristes mæl on þone pyt neoþewardne, cweðe ðonne: Crux Matheus, crux Marcus, crux Lucas, crux sanctus Iohannes. Nim ðonne þa turf and sete ðær ufon on and cweþe ðonne nigon siþon þas word, Crescite, and swa oft Pater Noster, and wende þe þonne eastward, and onlut nigon siðon eadmodlice, and cweð þonne þas word:

 Ēastward ic stande, ārena ic mē bidde,
 bidde ic þone mæran domine, bidde ðone miclan drihten,
 bidde ic ðone hāligan heofonrīces weard,
 eorðan ic bidde and upheofon
5 and ðā sōþan sancta Marian
 and heofones meahþ and heāhreced,
 þæt ic mōte þis gealdor mid gife drihtnes
 tōðum ontȳnan þurh trumne geþanc,
 āweccan þās wæstmas ūs tō woruldnytte,
10 gefyllan þās foldan mid fæste gelēafan,
 wlitigigan þās wancgturf, swā se wītega cwæð
 þæt se hæfde āre on eorþrīce, se þe ælmyssan⁵⁶
 dælde dōmlīce drihtnes þances.

Wende þe þonne III sunganges, astrece þonne on andlang and arim þær letanias and cweð þonne: Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus oþ ende. Sing þonne Benedicite aþenedon earmon and Magnificat and Pater Noster III, and bebeod hit Criste and sancta Marian and þære halgan rode to lofe and to weorþinga and to are þam þe þæt land age and eallon þam þe him underðeodde synt. ðonne þæt eall sie gedon, þonne nime man uncuþ sæd æt ælmesmannum and selle him twa swylc, swylce man æt him nime, and gegaderie ealle his sulhgeteogo togædere; borige þonne on þam beame stor and finol and gehalgode sapan and gehalgod sealt. Nim þonne þæt sæd, sete on þæs sules bodig, cweð þonne:

 Erce, Erce, Erce, eorþan mōdor,
15 geunne þē se alwalda, ēce drihten,
 æcera wexendra and wīdendra,
 eācniendra and elniendra,

⁵⁶ Bliss suggests this line should rather be a long line and an unpaired half-line (“Half-Lines”, 445).

sceafta hēhra,⁵⁷ scīrra wæstma,
 and þæra brādan berewæstma,
 20 and þæra hwītan hwætewæstma,
 and ealra eorþan wæstma.
 Geunne him ēce drihten
 and his hālige, þe on heofonum synt,
 þæt hys yrþ si gefriþod wið ealra feōnda gehwæne,
 25 and hēo si geborgen wið ealra bealwa gehwylc,
 þāra lyblāca geond land sāwen.
 Nū ic bidde ðone waldend, se ðe ðas woruld gesceōp,
 þæt ne sy nān tō þæs cwidol wīf ne tō þæs cræftig man
 þæt āwendan ne mæge word þus gecwedene.
 Þonne man þa sulh forð drife and þa forman furh onsceote, cweð þonne:
 30 Hāl wes þū, folde, fīra mōdor!
 Beō þū grōwende on godes fæþme,
 fōdre gefylled fīrum tō nytte.

Nim þonne ælces cynnes melo and abacæ man innerwerdre handa bradnæ hlaf and gecned hine mid meolce and mid haligwætere and lecge under þa forman furh. Cweþe þonne:

Fūl æcer fōdres fīra cinne,
 beorhtblōwende, þū gebletsod weorþ
 35 þæs hāligan noman þe ðās heofon gesceōp
 and ðās eorþan þe wē on līfiap;
 se god, se þās grundas geworhte, geunne ūs grōwende gife,
 þæt ūs corna gehwylc cume tō nytte.

Cweð þonne III Crescite in nomine patris, sit benedicti. Amen and Pater Noster þriwa.

[Here is the remedy, how you can restore your fields, if they will not grow well or if some troublesome thing has been done to them by magic or poisoning. Take then at night, before it dawns, four sods from four sides of the land, and mark how they stood before. Take then oil and honey and yeast, and milk from each of the livestock that is on the land, and a piece of each kind of tree that is growing on the land, except hard trees, and a piece of each plant known by name, except *glappan*⁵⁸ alone, and then put holy water on them, and drip then three times on the base of the sods, and say then these words: *Crescite*, grow, *et multiplicamini*, and multiply, *et replete*, and fill, *terre*, the earth. In the name of the father and the son and the holy ghost, be blessed. And (say) the Pater Noster as often as the other. And afterwards bear the sods to church, and have a mass-priest sing four masses over the sods, and let a person turn the green (side) towards the altar, and afterwards let a person bring the sods there to where they were before, before the setting of the sun. And have made for them out of *cwicbeam*⁵⁹ four of Christ's sign (crosses) and write on each end: Matthew and Mark, Luke and John. Lay that Christ's sign in the bottom of the pit, say then: Cross Matthew, cross

⁵⁷ MS *hen se*. Dobbie's emendation, followed here, is straightforward. Grendon's (174) emendation *herse* [millet] is unattested in Old English and requires transposition of words that removes cross-caesura alliteration.

⁵⁸ The meaning of this herb name is unrecoverable (Ward, 7). Most scholars suggest burdock (Storms, 181; Jolly, *Religion*, 7; Rosenberg, 433; Grendon, 173) but other words for burdock exist (*DOE* s.v. "Clate", "Clife", "Clife").

⁵⁹ Presumably mountain ash (*DOE* s.v. "Cwicbeam").

Mark, cross Luke, cross holy John. Take then the sods and set them down there on top and say then nine times these words, *Crescite*, and the Pater Noster as often, and turn yourself then to the east, and bow nine times humbly and say then these words:

Eastward I stand, for mercies I pray,
 I pray the famous Lord, I pray the great Lord,
 I pray the holy guardian of the kingdom of heaven,
 I pray the earth and high heaven
 5 and the true holy Mary,
 and heaven's might and splendid hall,
 that I might this incantation, with the Lord's gift,
 open with my teeth, through firm thought,
 to awaken these crops for our worldly use,
 10 to fill this earth with firm belief,
 to beautify this grassy land, as the wise one says,
 that he would have prosperity in the earthly kingdom, he who gave
 alms with honour, through the grace of the Lord.

Turn then three times with the course of the sun, stretch out then extended at full length, and recite there litanies and say then: Holy, holy, holy (i.e. the Tersanctus) to the end. Sing then the Benedicite with outstretched arms and the Magnificat and the Pater Noster three times, and commend it (the land) to Christ and holy Mary and the Holy Cross for praise and for worship and to the honour of the one who owns that land and all of those who are subordinate to him. When all that is done, then let a person take unknown seed from beggars and sell them twice as much as the person took from them, and have him gather all his plough-implements together. Then bore into the wood (of the plough), and (put in the hole) incense and fennel and hallowed soap and hallowed salt. Take then that seed, put it on the body of the plough, say then:

Erce, erce, erce (may you increase), mother of earth,
 15 may the all-ruler grant you, eternal Lord,
 fields growing and producing,
 flourishing and gaining strength,
 tall shafts, resplendent crops,
 and vast barley crops,
 20 and white wheat crops
 and all crops of the earth.
 May the eternal lord grant him,
 And his holy ones, who are in heaven,
 that his produce of arable land be protected against each and every enemy,
 25 and that it be protected against each and every attack,
 (against) those poisons sown throughout the land.
 Now I pray to the Ruler, he who shaped the world,
 that there be no speaking woman nor skilled man
 who is able to alter the words thus spoken.

Then have a person drive the plough forth and cut the first furrow, say then:

30 May you be whole, earth, mother of men!
 May you be growing in God's embrace,
 filled with food for the needs of men.

Take then every kind of flour and let someone bake a loaf as broad as the palm of one's hand and knead it with milk and with holy water and lay it under the first furrow. Say then:

Field full of food for mankind,
 bright-blooming, you are made blessed
 35 in the holy name of the creator of the heavens
 and the earth on which we live;
 God, the one who made cultivated lands, grant us the growing gift,
 that for us each grain may come to use.

Say then three times, Increase in the name of the father, be blessed. Amen and Pater Noster three times.]

CHARM 11 (Chapter 6)

Ic mē on þisse gyrde belūce and on godes helde bebeōde
 wið þane sāra s[t]ice, wið þane sāra slege,
 wið þane grymma gryre,
 5 wið ðane micela egða þe bið eghwām lāð,
 and wið eal þæt lāð þe in tō land fare.
 Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic mē wege,
 wordsige and worcsige. Se me dēge;
 ne mē mer[e]⁶⁰ ne gemyrre, ne mē maga ne geswence,
 ne mē nāfre mīnum fēore forht ne gewurþe,
 10 ac gehāle mē ælmihtig and sunu [and] frōfre gāst,
 ealles wuldres wyr[ð]ig dryhten,
 swā swā ic gehyrde heofna scyppende.
 Ābra[hā]me⁶¹ and Īsāce
 and swilce men, Mōyses and Īacob,
 15 and Dauīt and Īosep
 and Ēvan and Annan and Elizabet,
 Saharie and ec Marie, mōdur Cristes,
 and eāc þæ gebrōþru, Petrus and Pāulus,
 and eāc þūsend þī[n]ra engla
 20 clipige ic mē tō āre wið eallum feōndum.
 Hi mē ferion and friþion and mīne fōre nerion,
 eal mē gehealdon, mē gewealdon,
 worces stīrende; si mē wuldres hyht,
 hand ofer heāfod, hāligra rōf,
 25 sigerōfra sceolu, sōðfæstra engla.
 Biddu ealle blīðu mōde
 þæt mē beō Matheus helm, Marcus byrne,
 leōht, lifes rōf, Lūcos mīn swurd,
 sce[a]rp and scīrecg, scyld Īohannes,

⁶⁰ Dobbie's emendation from MS *mer* to *mere* may not be necessary because the former is a normal strong variation of the short-stemmed weak feminine noun (Hall, "Evidence", 301) and due to resolution the metre is not affected.

⁶¹ Dobbie does not emend MS *Abrame*, but the line does not scan without the full, correct form of the name.

30 wuldre gewlitedgod wega⁶² Seraffin.
 Forð ic gefare, frīnd ic gemēte,
 eall engla blæd, eādiges lāre.
 Bidde ic nu sigeres god godes miltse,
 sīðfæt gōdne, smylte and lihte
 35 windas on waroþum. Windas gefran,
 circinde wæter – simble gehælede
 wið eallum feōndum. Freōnd ic gemēte wið,
 þæt ic on þæs ælmihtigan frið wunian mōte,
 belocun wið þa[m] lāþan, se mē lȳfes eht,
 40 on engla blæd⁶³ gestaþelod,
 and innan hālre hand h[e]ofna rīces,
 þa hwile þe ic on þis līfe wunian mōte. Amen.

[I enclose myself in the power of this staff, and commend myself into God's protection
 against the grievous stabbing pain, against the grievous blow,
 against the savage horror,
 against the great terror that is loathsome to everyone,
 5 and against all that loathsomeness that travels into the land.
 A victory-incantation I sing, a victory-staff I bear,
 word-victory and deed-victory. May it avail me:
 may the *mære* not obstruct me, may the powerful one not afflict me,
 nor may I ever become fearful for my life,
 10 but may the Almighty and the Son and the Spirit of Comfort make me whole,
 the worthy Lord of all glory,
 just as I heard (i.e. obeyed) the shaper of the heavens.
 Abraham and Isaac
 and such men, Moses and Jacob,
 15 and David and Joseph,
 and Eve and Anna and Elizabeth,
 Zachariah⁶⁴ and also Mary, mother of Christ,
 and also those brothers, Peter and Paul,
 and also a thousand of Your angels,
 20 I call to myself for grace against all enemies.
 They guide and protect me, and save my life,
 entirely guard me, command me,
 inciting (my) deeds; may (this) be for me a hope of glory,

⁶² The line makes sense without Dobbie's emendation to *wælgar*.

⁶³ The MS reads *bla blæd*, most straightforwardly interpreted as an instance of dittography to be deleted; cf. Skemp's emendations to this line and surrounding lines, which require the addition and rearrangement of several words (296).

⁶⁴ For 'Zachariah' rather than 'Sarah', see the similar form *Sacharias* in *Descent into Hell* l. 46 and OE *Pastoral Care* ch. 43 (*DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Sachar-", "Sahar-"). 'Sarah' is generally rendered as *Sarra* in Old English (*DOE Corpus*, Simple Search, "Sarra", "Abraham"). Cf. Hill, "Rod", 148; Stuart, "Structure", 270.

a hand over (my) head, a host⁶⁵ of holy ones,
 25 a troop of the victory-valiant, of righteous angels.
 I pray to all with a joyous mind
 that Matthew be my helm, Mark my mail-coat,
 light, life's strength, Luke my sword,
 sharp and bright-edged, John (my) shield,
 30 Made beautiful by glory, the Seraphim of the paths.
 May I travel forth, may I meet friends,
 all the glory of angels, the teaching of the blessed one.
 I pray now to the God of victory (for) God's mercy,
 A good journey, tranquil and light,
 35 winds on the shores. I have heard of winds,
 roaring water — always made safe
 from all enemies. May I meet with friends,
 so that I may always dwell in the peace of the Almighty,
 enclosed against the loathsome one, the one who afflicts my life;
 40 established in the glory of angels,
 and in the healthy/holy hand of the kingdom of heaven,
 while I may dwell in this life. Amen.]

⁶⁵ The definition of the word *rof* is controversial, but it seems to mean 'valiant, stout, strong' as an adjective and 'a band, a number' as a noun (*BT s.v. "Rof"*). *Haligra rof* is thus best translated 'host of holy ones' while *sigerof* in the next line probably means 'valiant in victory'. *Rof* in l. 28 must be translated 'strength' or similar for the line to be meaningful in modern English.

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General Notes

I have followed the Chicago Manual of Style throughout. Journal titles, abbreviated by their initials in the footnotes, are here given in full. Icelanders are alphabetized by first name. Databases are listed at the end by the abbreviations used in the footnotes (*BT*, *DOE* etc.).

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